# Practical Application and Improvement of VEBER Online Questionnaire within VGTU e-Learning Environment

Arturas Kaklauskas, Rita Budzeviciene, Jurate Kaklauskiene
Department of Construction Economics and Property Management, Vilnius Gediminas
Technical University (email: artka@st.vgtu.lt)
Dilanthi Amaratunga, Kaushal Keraminiyage
Research Institute for the Built and Human Environment, University of Salford
(email: r.d.g.amaratunga@salford.ac.uk, K.P.Keraminiyage@salford.ac.uk)

## Abstract

Lately, distance studies, which are attempting at the best possible education for students and satisfaction of as many of their study needs as possible, are gaining wider popularity. Online questionnaires are increasingly used to get detailed opinions of distance learning students on various issues of studies. During the project EurAsia, it was identified that VEBER online questionnaire can be a useful tool for VGTU beyond the scope of the project EurAsia. An online questionnaire has been developed to facilitate the process of surveying related to implementation of the project EurAsia. The assessments helped to recognise that this tool helps VGTU to enhance its institutional system related to e-learning. Having identified the potential of this tool outside the scope of the EurAsia project, further experiments have been carried out to assess how this tool can be further developed to accommodate the requirements of the project EurAsia other institutional systems. The research showed that distance learning students not only want to express their opinion about the study process but to be active participants in shaping of strategic alternatives of the study process by electronic means, as well. In order to implement this idea, the authors proposed the Web-based Model of Multiple Criteria Ethical Decision-Making for Ethical Behaviour of Students and used as a basis to develop the Ethical Web-Based Decision Support System (E-DS). Using the features of the VEBER online questionnaire, the developed Model and the E-DS System the process of distance learning can be additionally humanized and adjusted to ethical norms, which would have a positive effect on the whole distance learning process. Thus the institutions participating in the project EurAsia or offering distance learning studies could use the features of VEBER online questionnaire, the developed Model and the E-DS System in their activities. It would stimulate more efficient application of moral norms in the distance learning process.

**Keywords:** Distance Learning, EurAsia project, Ethical Decision-Making Models, VEBER Online Questionnaire, Decision Support System.

# 1. Introduction

The e-learning Master degree studies "Real Estate Management" was introduced at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (VGTU) in 1999, Master degree studies "Construction Economics" from 2000, and Master degree studies "Internet Technologies and Real Estate Business" from 2003 (see **http://odl.vgtu.lt/**). There are currently 226 master students from all over Lithuania studying in these three e-learning master programs. In order to get the opinion of learners, traditional student surveys were frequent. The participation in the project EurAsia allowed to organise e-surveys. A survey of distance learning students on ethical issues of studies is reviewed in the article as an example.

The VEBER online questionnaire has been used within VGTU distance learning environment to administer student feedback questionnaires and surveys (see [16]). With the success of the VEBER online questionnaire being used in VGTU, the intention of join institutional systems development process within the EUARSIA project is to share the experience and the technology across all the partners and beyond. The practical application of VEBER Online Questionnaire (ethical behaviour of distance learning students at VGTU) within VGTU e-learning environment and proposals for join institutional systems development process within the EUARSIA project are briefly analyzed in the paper on the basis of ethical questions. The authors have developed the Web-based Model of Multiple Criteria Ethical Decision-Making for Ethical Behaviour of Students and the Ethical Web-Based Decision Support (E-DS) System, which are briefly analysed further in the article.

# 2. Web-based Model of Multiple Criteria Ethical Decision-Making for Ethical Behaviour of Students

Corey et al. [18] noted that because ethical codes cannot be applied in a rote manner and they are incomplete guidelines that reflect the values of the majority, practitioners are more likely to respond to a dilemma based on fundamental principles. The proposed Web-based Model of Multiple Criteria Ethical Decision-Making for Ethical Behaviour of Students is based on ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, and fidelity that are viewed as fundamentals of the stages that make up ethical decision-making. Also, the proposed Model is based on decision-making principles (i.e. principle of a life cycle's analysis, principle of the interrelation of various sciences, principle of multi-variant design and multiple criteria analysis of ethical alternatives and principle of close interrelation between the alternative's priority and the interested parties and their aims). The decision-maker' freedom of choice is stressed in the principle of autonomy. The stakeholder is encouraged to take responsibility for his/her actions and assess the effects of these actions on others. According to the principle of beneficence it is important to meet the integrated university stakeholders (students, student community, lecturers, professors, deans, the Rector's Office, etc.) needs, e.g. physical, economical, social, political, emotional, spiritual, etc. The principle of nonmaleficence is strongly linked to the principle of beneficence and means doing no harm to others.

The principle of justice means the support of equal allocation of burdens and benefits among all university stakeholders. For example, universities must be the places where all of the campus, including the student community, lecturers and the Rector's Office, are actively cooperating to achieve their goals. Almost two decades ago, this fact was noted by Ernest Boyer [8], who claimed: "honesty cannot be divided. If high ethical norms are applicable to students, university staff must also have a perfect record."

Efforts are made to achieve a truthful, ethical and efficient solution, i.e. to optimize the life cycle of the ethical alternative (principle of life cycle's analysis). The problems of truthfulness, ethics and efficiency of the solution may be successfully solved only when the achievements of various sciences, such as philosophy, ethics, Law, psychology, management, administration, economics, etc. are used. The use of a principle of multi-variant design and multiple criteria analysis makes it possible to develop many ethical alternative versions and carry out their ethical and other kinds of optimizations throughout life cycle of the alternative.

| Determination of ethical alternatives that are under consideration and their description in a quantitative and qualitative form (VEBER online questionnaire, data bases of best practice, etc.) | |
| --- | --- |
| **Stage 1.** Obtaining objective and subjective information about ethical behaviour of stakeholders | **Stage 2.** Analysis of stakeholders (students, student community, lecturers, professors, deans, the Rector's Office, etc.) |

**Stage 3.** Definition of the problem and determination of the nature of the dilemma of ethical behaviour of students

**Stage 4.** Search for the description of analogous typical situations in the available literature and a development of the best practice database. Determination of the ethical ideal is made in concrete circumstances.

**Stage 5.** Determination of the philosophy theories according to which the alternatives will be evaluated and the decision made

**Stage 6.** Development of comparative tables of ethical behaviour of students

**Stage 7.** Evaluation of ethical alternatives of ethical behaviour of students

**Stage 8.** Implementation of a course of action

**Stage 9.** Monitoring of the action and its outcome

**Stage 10.** Rehabilitation of the external and ethically advantageous environment in order to avoid potentially conflicting situations or to diminish their negative impact
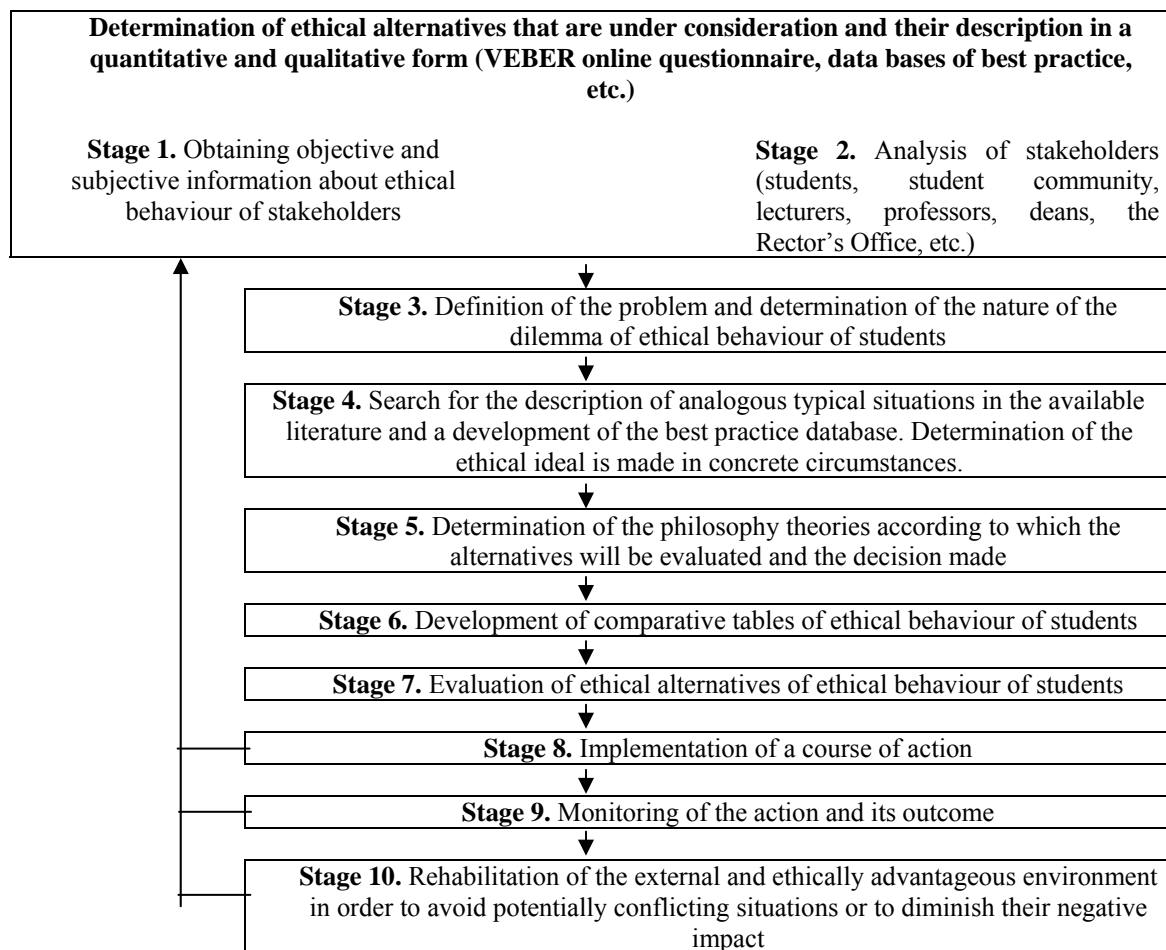
*Figure 1. Main stages of the developed Web-based Model of Multiple Criteria Ethical Decision-Making for Ethical Behaviour of Students and their relation with EDSS*

The above principles are landmarks of the proposed Model and as support to solving the dilema of ethical behaviour of students. In different situations a few ethical principles sometimes oppose each other, and grading them are difficult. According to Garfat and Ricks [17], ethics is

no longer about determining "right answers", but whether and how the decision maker decides what action to take. Ethical decision-making is a process governed by ethical principles. Also, when confronted with a complicated ethical dilemma that is not evidently analyzed in codes of ethics, the decision-maker should check with an ethical decision-making model.

Based on the analysis of the above ethical decision making models (Cottone et al. [4], Robson et al. [11], Doolittle et al. [5], Greene et al. [6], Tymchuk [13], Walden [14], Bombara [3], etc) a Web-based Model of Multiple Criteria Ethical Decision-Making for Ethical Behaviour of Students was developed by the authors of this paper. Some stages of the Model described in the paper (see Stages 1-3, 8, 9) are partly similar to the stages of the models proposed by some other authors. All other stages differ in principle, since the methods of multiple criteria analysis created by authors are applied and also, this Model is meant for the buildup of the Web-based decision support system. The proposed Web-based Model of Multiple Criteria Ethical Decision-Making for Ethical Behaviour of Students provides a logical system and gradually guides and helps the stakeholder in the creation of acting in a way that includes moral behavior. These stages are the main steps of action and can be shaped into the framework of particular circumstances.

*The ten stages of Web-based Model of Multiple Criteria Ethical Decision-Making for Ethical Behaviour of Students are as follows:*

**Stage 1.** <u>Obtaining as much objective and subjective information about ethical behaviour of students</u> (historical information, institutional, administration, legal, societal expectations and limitations, ethical principles involved, identified conflicts, etc.) as possible. Further, if possible, the decision-makers have to develop suitable arguments on diverse aspects of the dilemma so as to have a high-quality perception of the range of concerns and advantages for each position.

**Stage 2.** <u>Analysis of university stakeholders (students, student community, lecturers, professors, deans, the Rector's Office, etc.).</u> The university stakeholders are identified as the interested parties who are directly or indirectly influenced by the decision that is to be made. For a better understanding of the current situation, discussions among the various interested parties are often necessary. Also, some ethical dilemmas can be prevented through dialogue between university stakeholders. The discussion should engage all those who are the key university stakeholders, some of who may be the decision-maker and some of whom may be influenced by the decision. The reaction that results from such discussions clears personal values while determining value conflicts. University stakeholders have to act as a team in an effort to come to some commonly suitable decisions. All university stakeholders should accept some responsibility for the existing ethical behaviour of students and have to be a part of any proposed decision. The personal values, theoretical orientation, experience and other stakeholder features play a part in achieving ethical decisions. University stakeholders have to analyze their own value judgments, moral codes, experience with similar ethical behaviour of students, and decide how to avoid injecting personal biases into decisions. Also, the decision maker must examine the values of others university stakeholders. Compromises that may diminish harmful consequences should be

analyzed. On the ground of the Model offered, decisions may be made from the viewpoint of one, several or all the interested groups.

**Stage 3.** <u>Definition of the problem (conflicting ethical principles, value conflicts) and determination of the nature of the dilemma of ethical behaviour of students</u>. According to Joseph (1982), an ethical dilemma is a conflict in which a person must make a choice between several correct and conflicting decisions, generally with some negative consequences. Traditionally, dilemma (ethical, legal/moral, etc.) involves a choice between competing goods with possible harmful consequences. Assessment of a dilemma involves the detection of different conflicting ethical principles. Typically, the ethical dilemmas are inherently problem ethical behaviour of students that do not lead to easy decisions and there is no right or wrong one that can be easily recognized. Therefore, conflict between values of the different university stakeholders leads to an ethical dilemma where there is no easy solution and no right or wrong answer to ethical behaviour of students.

**Stage 4.** <u>Determination of the philosophy theories</u> (e.g., utilitarianism, deontology, justice, etc.) according to which the ethical alternatives will be evaluated and the decision made. Determination of the ethical ideal is made in concrete circumstances.

**Stage 5.** <u>Search for the description of analogous typical situations of ethical behaviour of students</u> in the available literature and a development of the best practice database.

**Stage 6.** <u>Development of comparative tables of ethical behaviour of students</u>. The aim at this stage is to build options for the decision, in preparation for making the ethical decision and arguing for the choice. Results of the generation of all possible courses of action have been submitted in the table. By submission, such a display, of the multiple criteria comparisons can become more effectively supported. As in any problematic circumstances, the university stakeholders search for potential compromises by trying to find one that is most ethical and with the least negative consequences.

**Stage 7.** <u>Evaluation of ethical alternatives of ethical behaviour of students.</u> A decision maker must examine a large number of ethical alternatives, each of which is surrounded by a considerable amount of information. Ethical alternatives are analyzed along with the involved ethical principles and philosophical theories. The expectations and obligations of different university stakeholders are then considered. Ethical alternative solutions are compared in terms of the possible outcomes and according to the selected philosophical theories. Following on from gathering this information, the priority and utility degree of the ethical alternatives is then calculated. The utility degree is directly proportional to the relative effect of the values and weights of the criteria and is considered on the efficiency of the alternative. This helps a decision-maker to decide what ethical alternative best fit the ethical behaviour of students that is under evaluation (i.e. the best solution achievable given the available resources and the circumstances of the dilemma). Several decisions will have priority and the choice is according to the preferences of different university stakeholders and philosophy theories (e.g., utilitarianism, deontology, justice, etc.)

Priority of decisions depends a lot on whether one group or several interested groups make the decision, because different university stakeholders bring diverse experiences, beliefs, and moral codes into the decision-making process. The Ethical Web-Based Decision Support System (EDSS) developed on the basis of this model enables the analysis of ethical alternatives from the viewpoint of different interested groups. However, there is seldom an ideal decision to an ethical dilemma.

**Stage 8.** <u>Implementation of a course of action.</u> Implementing the decision may be the most difficult stage of the decision-making process. Ethical decisions are individual choices that may not be shared with other university stakeholders. The decision-maker may be in a solitary situation in implementing some decisions and willing to admit the consequences of a decision that is not supported by others.

**Stage 9.** <u>Monitoring of the action and its outcome.</u>

**Stage 10.** <u>Rehabilitation of the external and ethically advantageous environment</u> in order to avoid potentially conflicting ethical behaviour of students or to diminish their negative impact. Truthfulness, ethics and efficiency of the solution depend on the micro- and macro-levels of the external environment. Macro-level factors of the external environment such as religion, the existing cultural, social, ethical dimensions of the country, the executed university policy and the society influence the arising ethical problems and the ethical solution making. The micro-level factors (the university stakeholders, the applied formal code of ethics, rules, criteria of ethical behavior, ethical standards, codes of conduct) stipulate the ethical solution making to a significant degree as well. Therefore, on the grounds of cumulative experiences it is suggested that there be changes under these possibilities of the surrounding environment in order to decrease the possibility of a conflict situation arising in ethical behaviour of students or to diminish their negative impact. Developing an ethical environment also provides a background for ethical questioning, significant exchange, informed decision-making, and human consensus, in which all university stakeholders are satisfied. A few trends of rehabilitation of the external and ethically advantageous environment in order to avoid potentially conflicting ethical behaviour of students are following.

McCabe [9] propose to involve the whole campus community (students, faculty, and administrators) to effectively educate a student. If university only goal is to reduce cheating, there are far simpler strategies university can employ. But if university have the courage to set our sights higher, and strive to achieve the goals of a liberal education, the challenge is much greater. Among other things, it is a challenge to develop students who accept responsibility for the ethical consequences of their ideas and actions. University goal should not simply be to reduce cheating; rather, university goal should be to find innovative and creative ways to use academic integrity as a building block in university efforts to develop more responsible students and, ultimately, more responsible citizens. University campuses must become places where the entire "village" - the community of students, faculty, and administrators - actively works together to achieve this goal. As Ernest Boyer observed almost two decades ago – [1, 2], "integrity cannot be divided. If high standards of conduct are expected of students, colleges

must have impeccable integrity themselves. Otherwise the lessons of the 'hidden curriculum' will shape the undergraduate experience. Colleges teach values to students by the standards they set for themselves."

Students claimed that while they see numerous cases of cheating in higher education institutions and in the society, the role of disciplinary actions is important striving to reduce the amount of cheating in university.

The above-described Web-based Model of Multiple Criteria Ethical Decision-Making for Ethical Behaviour of Students can provide decision-makers with quite a secure means of making difficult ethical decisions. This model can also help university stakeholders to make the best feasible decision in certain given circumstances. The proposed Model does not make ethical decisions, but explains the process for investigating a ethical behaviour of students. Based on the proposed Model of Multiple Criteria Ethical Decision-making an Ethical Multiple Criteria Decision Support Web-Based System (http://dss.vgtu.lt/ethic/index_eng.htm) was developed by the authors. In order to demonstrate practical application of the Model, a survey was carried out in Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (VGTU). The survey gives a more detailed explanation of Stages 1 and 2 of the Model.

## 3. Ethical Behaviour of Distance Learning Students at VGTU

The form of a survey was selected for the research of ethical issues related to behaviour of distance learning students in the Faculty of Civil Engineering at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University. The VEBER online questionnaire of 24 questions has been used within VGTU distance learning environment to administer student feedback questionnaires and surveys (see [16]). The experience of many analogical surveys [1, 2, 9] carried out in the world shows that when students think that organisers of surveys will find out the authorship of a questionnaire, then such surveys give the results which distort the real situation greatly. None of students wants to reveal his/her confidential information to the staff of the university.

Therefore all distance learning students could answer all questions anonymously by using the VEBER online questionnaire. The survey consisted of two steps. One step when a student selects the most appropriate answer to the question. The other step when the student specifies the theory of ethics on which he/she based the answer. Theories of ethics were introduced to students before the survey, i.e. the students were briefed on the main points of different theories of ethics. The questionnaire included four main theories of ethics: deontology, utilitarianism, justice and teleology. For example, when carrying out an analysis of university stakeholders, it is expedient to apply the utilitarianism theory. In such an analysis the objectives and needs of university stakeholders can be analyzed, various decision ethical alternatives worked out and positive and negative consequences of these ethical alternatives on university stakeholders that are under consideration can be determined. According to the utilitarianism theory, whether a certain action is considered bad or good depends on its consequences and not on intentions. Utilitarianism says that what is morally right is whatever produces the greatest overall amount

of pleasure, happiness, ideal values (freedom, knowledge, justice, and beauty) and preference satisfaction to as many university stakeholders as possible. The criterion of a moral action consists of those rules of conduct, which give most utility to all the university stakeholders. Actions that meet the needs of university stakeholders are considered to be good. However, when conducting such an analysis of the stakeholder's requirements various problems occur. For example, what is of the greatest good for the greatest number of university stakeholders without violating individual rights in different situations? Is it goodness, efficiency, profitability and/or pleasure? Which needs of which university stakeholders are to be given priority? How can one take into consideration the qualitative parameters (health, security, public benefit)? By using experts and multiple criteria analysis methods one can solve these problems, to some extent.

Thirty-nine distance learning students participated in the survey anonymously: 26 male (67%) and 13 female (33%) respondents of ages from 20 to 60. Most students were from 20 to 30 years old (27 people; 69%), a smaller number of respondents formed the group of ages between 30 and 40 (8 people; 21%), and the least number of people were of ages from 40 to 50 and from 50 to 60 (2 people in each group; 5% each).

Given the question whether they would cheat during an examination, 12 students (31%) answered that they would if they knew nothing. Slightly smaller amount of students answered that they would cheat if they were sure that they would not get caught (9 students; 23%). Two students (5%) would cheat during an examination. Seven students (18%) would not cheat during an examination. Six people (15%) would not cheat even if they knew nothing. Three students (8%) would not cheat even if they were sure that they would not get caught. Students based their answers to the question about cheating in an examination on the following theories of ethics: deontology (6 students; 15%), justice (23 students; 60%), teleology (4 students; 10%) and utilitarianism (6 students; 15%).

Similar results have been obtained in other countries too. For example, in 1993 McCabe [9] surveyed nine medium to large most USA competitive colleges and universities, thirty years earlier, had participated in the landmark study of college cheating conducted by William Bowers [2]. Bowers's [2] project surveyed over five thousand students on ninety-nine campuses across the USA and provided considerable insight on how often students were cheating and why. Two outcomes of McCabe [9] 1993 project are particularly noteworthy in comparison to Bowers's results. First, there were substantial increases in self-reported test and exam cheating at these nine schools. For example, 39 percent of students completing the 1963 survey acknowledged one or more incidents of serious test or exam cheating; by 1993, this had grown to 64 percent. In 1993, many students simply did not see cheating as a big deal, so it was easier to acknowledge - especially in an anonymous survey. Second, there was no change in the incidence of serious cheating on written work; 65 percent of students in 1963 acknowledged such behavior, and 66 percent did so in 1993. However, student comments in the 1993 survey suggested that this younger generation of students was more lenient in defining what constitutes plagiarism [9].

Lecturers have the most important role in exercise of ethical standards, because students consult both their contemporaries and their lecturers about their studies process. In order to foster a proper attitude of a student, lecturers must acknowledge and validate academic honesty as the most important value. Without such acknowledgement of values, many students may find cheating meaningful, because they can revert to the secondary school strategies, i.e. cheating to get a better mark and blaming excessive loads, lack of time and providing other similar reasons, i.e. students presume that if lecturers fail to act in cases of obvious cheating they sort of invite cheating. This stimulates dissatisfaction of students who learn honestly. They feel deceived because of lecturer inactivity.

Most students, 28 people (72%), do not consider a peek at notes as cheating, whereas other 11 (28%) claim that a peek at notes may be equal to cheating. Students based their answers to the question whether a peek at notes is equal to cheating on the following theories of ethics: deontology (7 students; 18%), justice (16 students; 41%), teleology (7 students; 18%) and utilitarianism (9 students; 23%).

Three students (8%) would copy a course project or homework of another person, 5 people (13%) possibly would copy, 9 people (23%) possibly would not copy and 22 people (56%) would not copy. Students based their answers to the question about copying a course project or homework of another person on the following theories of ethics: deontology (6 students; 15%), justice (19 students; 49%), teleology (6 students; 15%) and utilitarianism (8 students; 21%).

One (3%) probably would inform against a cheating student, two (5%) probably would not inform against a cheating student and 36 (92%) would not inform against a cheating student. Students based their answers to the question whether they would inform against a cheating student on the following theories of ethics: deontology (6 students; 15%), justice (13 students; 34%), teleology (9 students; 23%) and utilitarianism (11 students; 28%).

Most students (18 people; 46%) probably would allow another student to copy from them during an examination, 16 (41%) people would allow to copy, three people (8%) probably would not allow to copy and two people (5%) would not allow to copy. Students based their answers to the question whether they would allow another student to copy from them on the following theories of ethics: deontology (7 students; 18%), justice (13 students; 34%), teleology (6 students; 15%) and utilitarianism (13 students; 33%).

Eleven (28%) of the respondents would ask help from another student during an examination, 20 (51%) probably would ask for help, five (13%) probably would not ask for help and three (8%) would not ask for help. Students based their answers to the question whether they would ask help from another student during an examination on the following theories of ethics: deontology (10 students; 26%), justice (11 students; 28%), teleology (3 students; 8%) and utilitarianism (15 students; 38%).

Among the actions that are considered the least ethical for students, 24 students (62%) selected informing against another student for cheating or copying of course project/homework, 13

respondents (33%) selected copying of homework or a course project and only two people (5%) selected cheating during an examination.

Analysis of Codes of Ethics of students from other universities showed that such examples of inappropriate student's behaviour as denunciation of another student for cheating or copying of course projects or homework were absent. Thus, according to the Students' Code of Ethics, such behaviour would be ethical; however, the majority of students not only would never inform against another cheating student (97%) but also consider it to be the least ethical student's behaviour (62%).

Students based their answers to the question about the least ethical acts of students on the following theories of ethics: deontology (4 students; 10%), justice (18 students; 46%), teleology (8 students; 21%) and utilitarianism (9 students; 23%). Analysis of Codes of Ethics of students from other universities showed that such examples of inappropriate student's behaviour as denunciation of another student for cheating or copying of papers or homework were absent. Thus, according to the Students' Code of Ethics, such behaviour would be ethical according to all or the majority of theories of ethics.

Two (5%) students would bribe a lecturer to pass an examination, four (10%) probably would bribe, eight (21%) probably would not bribe and 25 (64%) would not bribe. To summarise, six students (15%) would bribe a lecturer in certain circumstances and 33 students (85%) would not bribe.

In December 2003, Group for Social Analysis surveyed students from Lithuanian higher education institutions on corruption. The sample of the survey included 14 universities and 25 colleges. 33% of students who participated in the survey admitted to giving a bribe to a lecturer and 6% bribed staff of higher education establishments. First and second year students are the most bound to bribe a lecturer [10]. Students based their answers to the question about bribing a lecturer on the following theories of ethics: deontology (8 students; 21%), justice (20 students; 51%), teleology (6 students; 15%) and utilitarianism (5 students; 13%).

Six distance learning students (15%) would agree to pay for preparation of homework, a course project or a graduation thesis, 10 (26%) probably would agree, eight (20%) probably would not agree and 15 (39%) would not agree. To summarise, 16 students (41%) would agree to pay for preparation of homework, a course project or a graduation thesis in certain circumstances and 23 students (59%) would not agree. Students based their answers to the question whether they would agree to pay for homework, a course project or a graduation thesis on the following theories of ethics: deontology (5 students; 13%), justice (19 students; 49%), teleology (6 students; 15%) and utilitarianism (9 students; 23%).

We see the following inviting offer in the website of the company "Auksinė Plunksna" which offers graduation theses for sale: "Our country's situation makes students work while studying in order to earn living and to pay for education, which becomes more and more expensive each year. Therefore, the studies suffer, and it becomes more difficult to find a balance in life. What

are the choices? To postpone the graduation thesis to the next year or to complete the studies nevertheless?". Without a context, we could think that this company does not suggest ordering a graduation thesis but offers consulting services on specific studying issues instead. In fact, a student who uses services of this or other companies is not a passive observer. He/she must submit exact information about his/her faculty to the company and specify the requests and remarks of his lecturer, the academic adviser, in the course of preparation of the thesis: "The thesis will be written gradually, its parts will be corrected by your academic adviser, thus we grant quality and high evaluation. Practically, the academic adviser is the guarantee of quality: his/her pieces of advice will determine the contents of the thesis".

These increasingly spreading phenomena cause obvious concerns. Not because of the cheating on lecturers and administrations of higher education institutions but mostly because such acquisition of diplomas is based on a peculiar "clear conscience". Advertisements of such service companies do not hint on the fact that those who use their services would not be able to get such or even a better diploma with own efforts. The students who earn their grades through efforts of other people probably do not encounter any moral dilemma. Hardly ever they doubt their ability to complete higher education independently, "if they would study", "if they had time to learn", "if they were not forced to earn their living". Thus the circumstances, the general situation of studies and other problems as if not subjected to the student's conscience are the biggest culprit in this case. The process of studies becomes a most primitive relationship of product exchange based on laws of time saving. Graduation theses are written by those who have time and are acquired by those who can pay for them. Moral issues are usually disregarded in a market [12].

Among the top penalties for cheating students, one student (2.6%) selected a lower grade, three students (7.7%) selected increased tuition fees, seven students (17.9%) selected public announcement of names of cheaters, 14 students (35.9%) selected warning and 14 students (35.9%) selected elimination from the university. Students based their answers to the question about the top penalties for cheating students on the following theories of ethics: deontology (7 students; 18%), justice (19 students; 49%), teleology (7 students; 18%) and utilitarianism (6 students; 15%).

# 4. Conclusions

In order to humanize VGTU distance studies and to strengthen their ethical nature, the VEBER online questionnaire was implemented and the Web-based Model of Multiple Criteria Ethical Decision-Making for Ethical Behaviour of Students developed within the project EurAsia; the latter was used as a basis for the development of E-DS System. Besides, the performed research allows to make different conclusions. For example, today's students are more concerned about the reaction of their contemporaries and the university administration to the norms of honest behaviour promoted by staff and administration than about the norms themselves. Indeed, students expect the university administration's to declare how they should become honest, non-cheating and respectful towards teaching and learning. Even when students hear the statements but watch other students cheating and lecturers being tolerant by ignoring, students will take

cheating as a means to pass an exam with a better possible mark. Many students ask: "If lecturers are not concerned about cheating, why should I be?"

# References

[1] Boyer, E. L. (1987) *College: The undergraduate experience in America.* New York: Harper & Row.

[2] Bowers, W. J. (1964) *Student dishonesty and its control in college*. New York: Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University.

[3] Bombara, M. J. (2002) Relationships among school counselors' level of moral reasoning, demographic characteristics, and their use of ethical decision-making resources. Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities & Social Sciences. Vol 62(11-A).

[4] Cottone, R. R., Claus, R. E. (2000) Ethical decision-making models: a review of the literature. Journal of Counseling and Development, 78:3, 275-83.

[5] Doolittle, N. O., Herrick, C. A. (1992) Ethics in aging: a decision-making paradigm. Educational Gerontology, 18:4, 395-408.

[6] Greene, R. R., Kropf, N. P. (1993) Ethical decision-making with the aged: a teaching model. Gerontology and Geriatrics Education, 13:4, 37-52.

[7] Kaklauskas, A., Zavadskas, E., Kaklauskiene, J. & Trinkunas, V. (2003) Ethical multiple criteria decision support web-based system. *Proceedings of the Human Centered Processes Conference*, Luxemburg, May 2003.

[8] J.R. Kicklighter (1999) Use of a Course Portfolio for Assessment of Teaching and Learning Journal of the American Dietetic Association, Volume 99, Issue 9.

[9] McCabe, D. L., L. K. Trevino (1996). What we know about cheating in college: Longitudinal trends and recent developments. *Change* 28, 28-33.

[10] Pateikti korupcijos reiškinio aukštosiose mokyklose tyrimo rezultatai. http://www.vilnensis.vu.lt/nr-38/korupcija.html

[11] Robson, M., Cook, P., Hunt, K., Alred, G., Robson D. (2000) Towards ethical decision-making in counseling research. British Journal of Guidance & Counseling. 28:4, 533-547.

[12] Šešėliniai universitetai. http://www.lksb.lt/straipsniai/straipsnis-352.htm.

[13]Tymchuk, A. J. (1986). Guidelines for ethical decision-making. Canadian Psychology, 27, 36–43.

[14] Walden T., Wolock, I. & Demone, H. J. 1990. 'Ethical Decision-making in Human Services: A Comparative Study.' Families in Society, 71:2, 67-75.

[15] Zavadskas, E., Kaklauskas, A., Kaklauskiene, J., Trinkunas, V., Krutinis, M. (2004) Web-based multiple criteria analysis of ethical and trust problems. Journal of Foundations of Civil Engineering and Environmental Engineering, 6:1, 57-72

[16]http://odl.vgtu.lt/index.php?lang=lt&menuitem=tr_apklausos&TR77ACKID=fb899ed9745c e60931c9d86d65b59f51

[17] Garfat, T., Ricks, F. (1995) Self-Driven Ethical Decision Making: A Model for Child and Youth Care, Child and Youth Care Forum, 24(6), 393-403.

[18] Corey, G., Corey, M.S., Callanan, P. (1998). Issues and ethics in the helping professions (5th). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.