

Syllabus for Computer Ethics (v1.2)

Fall 2006

CCNY, CUNY

Instructor: Mark Zelcer

Course: CCNY. Phil 34902 - sec C - Computer Ethics

Meetings: 11:00-12:15 Mondays and Wednesdays

Instructor: Mark Zelcer

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Office Hours: I will generally be available in my office in 5/203A NAC after class.

Text: *A Gift of Fire* (2nd edition) by Sara Baase. Published by Prentice Hall, 2003. The book may be obtained from the CCNY Bookstore or from many online book vendors. I will also supplement the class with a few scattered handouts as necessary.

Requirements: You will be required to participate in class discussions; there will be a two short papers and one final paper. The first short paper will be due by the third week of the semester. There will also be a number of very short Homework assignments. **YOU MUST DO ALL THE READING FOR THE COURSE.** You must attend each class. You must also not arrive late.

Grading: Your grade will be a function of your grades on the writing assignments (30% each), and your class participation (10%). Excessive absences will lower your grade. There will be a limited number of extra credit assignments. They will be given out on a limited, first-come-first-serve basis. They all require some real knowledge of computer science. You must email me if you want to do such an assignment.

Paper format: All papers should be typewritten. Neatness, grammar, and good organization count. Poorly written papers are the equivalent of poor documentation or sloppy code. They will reflect poorly on your work.

Papers should be about six pages long and be well written. Use appropriate margins and a reasonable font.

Your paper should have a clear, well-defined position and either a new argument to defend the position or an argument critiquing the position. Your paper must be original. **DO NOT USE WORK WHICH IS NOT YOUR OWN** without giving proper credit. Using other people's work will lead to sanctions by the university, there is a zero-tolerance policy about this. If you are using any one else's work, make sure you use appropriate citations. While we will discuss the merits and problems with open source, any paper taken from open source material without attribution is unacceptable.

Your paper should be submitted on paper **and also** emailed to me. No late papers will be accepted.

As per the school regulations, you are required to attend each session of this course. Attendance will be taken.

Should you feel that your grade was incommensurate with the quality that your actual work demonstrated, please see me. Should you feel that the paper (and its grade) did not reflect the quality-level of the work that you would like to present, I may, at my discretion, allow you to revise and resubmit the work. You must speak with me about any such situation.

Prerequisites: It is expected that all students in this course have some basic familiarity with computer technology. If you are not sure whether you meet this requirement, please see me.

This course is an introduction to computer ethics. There are a number of questions which we will be dealing with. We will begin the semester with a brief overview of philosophy and theories of ethics. We want to know how philosophers have dealt with ethics in general. Then we will ask if computers generate new questions that are not easily accommodated under classical ethical theories. Then we will try to ask some of the new questions that come up and talk about why they are unique, and how we might approach them from an ethical perspective. We will look to the frontier of the technological landscape for problems. We will look to the new issues generated by the new software paradigms, and the new abilities that humans have thanks to technological innovation. We will also cover some standard ethical questions that get asked about the professional world in which computer programmers tend to work, and philosophical issues about computing and society in general.

Issue 1

Introduction. Philosophy. Philosophical Ethics. Computer ethics. Are the issues unique? Why this course will and will not be obsolete by the time you get a job. Read chapter 1., and chapter 10.1-10.2.

Issue 2

Privacy and encryption. Read Chapters 2 and 3.

(There will be 2 class presentations here, Email me if you want to do one.)

Issue 3

Intellectual Property. Read Chapter 6. The nature of software. We will begin with an analysis of the philosophical questions about property and property rights. We will also address copyrights, copylefts, patents, freeware, shareware, scratchware, P2P networks, pirating, and more. (1 class presentation here.)

Issue 4

Trusting computers. Read chapter 4.

Issue 5

Cyberspace and censorship. Read chapter 5.

Issue 6

Computer crime. Hacking. Hacktivism. Read Chapter 7.

Issue 7

The computer and work, and the computer in the workplace. Read Chapter 8. Here we will address issues pertaining to workplace environments in general.