Syllabus

CS 301: Computers and Society

Fall 2013

Instructor
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Office hours via email and by appointment

You can send me an e-mail anytime. Make sure any emails are sent to cchie@rohan.sdsu.edu (do not use any other email account listed for me). During the week I generally check emails early in the morning (before 6:30 am) and in the evening (between 4:00 pm and 9:30 pm). I also try to check my email at least a few times on Saturday and Sunday.

Text
Sara Baase, A Gift of Fire (Fourth Edition)

Handouts, Discussions, and Exams
Blackboard: http://blackboard.sdsu.edu

Overview
This course deals with the impact of computers on us as individuals and on our society. The widespread use of computing technology has changed the way we work, play and interact with people. These changes have created a flood of new social and legal issues that demand critical examination.

Here are a few examples of the issues we will be talking about:

- There is a great deal of information about all of us recorded in computer databases. What rules should govern how this information is used? (We all get privacy notices in fine print from our banks, credit card companies, etc. -- what do they really mean?) Hacking, identify theft and credit card fraud has increased in recent years. What are reponses to these types of fraud and what precautions can we take to prevent this from happening?
- New encryption methods make it possible to keep e-mail and phone conversations secret from others. How should our desire for privacy be balanced with the need of law-enforcement agencies to intercept communications of suspected criminals or terrorists?
- How serious are the problems created by Web sites that contain pornography, 'hate' material directed at various groups, bomb-making
information, etc? Should there be any restrictions on material that is put on the Web?

- Computers are increasingly used to control medical devices, airplanes and other safety-critical systems. How safe are such systems? How safe is 'safe enough'? What can we do to manage the risks involved?

- It is easy to use computers to copy music, software, books, etc., in violation of copyright law. What is the extent of this problem? What can or should be done about it? What is free software? Should all software be free?

There are (at least) two sides to almost all of the questions we will consider in this course. We will spend much of our class time discussing the issues and exploring different points of view.

Course Objectives
After successfully completing this course, you will:

- understand how computing and information systems give rise to social issues and ethical dilemmas
- be familiar with some of the issues you may face as a member of a complex technological society
- be able to discuss the benefits offered by computing technology in many different areas and the risks and problems associated with these technologies
- understand some social, legal, philosophical, political, constitutional and economical issues related to computers and the historical background of these issues
- be able to explore the arguments on all sides of a controversial issue, and argue convincingly for the position you select
- have an increased awareness of current social and legal developments related to computers

Course Requirements
Most of the issues discussed in this course do not have simple or 'pat' answers that everyone will agree with. An important part of the course will be discussing the issues and debating various points of view. These discussions will take place online using Blackboard. The course also has a component dealing with current events related to the course material.

Each student will work with a group to write a paper on a controversial topic related to the course. This paper will focus on a social impact of computing technology or on a computer-related public policy or legal issue. The paper will include background research, a discussion of pro and con arguments and counter arguments and conclusions by the group. Group members will rate their own and other member participation and contribution to the project.
There will be one midterm exam and a final exam. Exams may cover anything from the text and supplemental material. Much of this information will **not** be repeated in class or in the assignments. Be sure to keep up with the assigned reading. (You may want to check your understanding using the questions at the end of chapters in the text -- some of these same questions may appear on an exam.)

**Grading**

Your course grade will be calculated as follows:

- **Discussion forum assignments**
  - (7 discussion assignments and 3 current events: 155 pts total) **30%**
- **Research Paper:** (100 pts) **19%**
- **Weekly topic participation**
  - (14 Weekly topic posts: 70 pts total) **13%**
- **Midterm and Final Exams**
  - (multiple choice, short answer and essay: 200 pts total) **38%**

Total points possible: 525

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

\[
\frac{(\text{total discussion points}) + (\text{group project points}) + (\text{weekly topic points}) + (\text{total midterm points}) + (\text{total final exam points})}{525} \times 100
\]

This will calculate a grade between 0 and 100. I use +/- grading:

- 100-93 **A**
- 92-90 **A-**
- 89-87 **B+**
- 86-83 **B**
- 82-80 **B-**
- 79-77 **C+**
- 76-73 **C**
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