

IDIS 295 - Fall 2006

Piracy, Privacy, and Properties Rights: Ethical Dilemmas in Computing

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Course Description

This course considers how society has changed as a result of increased accessibility to information through computer technology. Topics include property rights issues related to Kazaa, Napster and other file-sharing programs, online privacy in the world of email and Spam, and liability issues related to computer technology such as electronic voting.

Goals

- Explain how technology has changed the value and uses of information
- Find sources of information and determine their appropriateness
- Critically read and evaluate news stories, articles, and other sources of information
- Use multiple sources to develop a position on a controversial computing-related topic

Texts

The reading for this course will come from sources including online news services and academic databases of articles. I will distribute some of the articles in class, but in general I will provide information for you to locate the articles on the web or in the library.

Graded Material

- **Journal** – In preparation for each class you will have one or more readings to complete plus an activity. For most class sessions, this activity will include writing in your journal. See pages 3-4 for more details.
- **Group Research Paper** – Throughout the semester, you will work with your group on a multi-part research project. I will assign you into groups of three people, but you will have the opportunity to select the topic for research. See pages 5-6 for more details and due dates.
- **Midterm** – One midterm will be given during the semester. The *tentative* date for this test is Thursday, October 19.
- **Participation** – In addition to preparing for class, it is important that you contribute during each class meeting. Half of your participation grade will be based on attendance and the other half will be based on my assessment of your level of engagement during class.

If you have a disability that may affect your participation in this course, please contact me immediately to discuss academic accommodations.

Grade Determination

Journal	30%
Group Project	
Prospectus	15%
Outline and Annotated Bibliography	15%
Final Paper	20%
Midterm	10%
Participation	10%

Grades will be calculated on the standard scale using pluses and minuses.

Summary of Important Dates

Topic Selection	by Thursday, September 14
Prospectus Due	Thursday, October 5
Meeting to Discuss Outline	by Thursday, October 26
Peer Review Submission Date	Thursday, November 16
Abstract and Title Due	Tuesday, November 28
Final Paper Due	Tuesday, December 5
Group Presentations	Tuesday, December 5 and Thursday, December 7
Midterm	Thursday, October 19

The dates and percentages on this syllabus are subject to change.

Journals

The purpose of the journal is to give you a partially structured place to explore the material in this course. You will be given activities and questions to complete between class sessions. The activities will vary, but they will all contain a written component. The type of writing required is not the formal essay-like writing with which you are familiar. Instead, you will use informal writing techniques such as exploratory or expressive writing where you “think out loud on paper.” The following quote from a psychology professor who also uses journal writing summarizes the benefits:

Journal writing can help many students become more productive and more focused thinkers. Research has shown that the regular habit of journal writing can deepen students’ thinking about their course subjects by helping them see that an academic field is an arena for wonder, inquiry, and controversy rather than simply a new body of information. This way of looking at an academic field can make college more interesting, even exciting. The more you see yourself in this course asking questions and questioning answers, the more you will be thinking like a psychologist.¹

In this style of writing, spelling, grammar, and structure are not important, and you should not be concerned whether the writing is effective for another reader. You are writing primarily for yourself.

Journal Tasks

The writing tasks in your journal will vary in the amount of structure. In some cases, I will ask you to use a “stream-of-consciousness” approach where you write continuously and simply follow your train of thought. Alternatively, I may give you a sequence of questions that you answer in your journal to help guide you through a difficult reading. A more structured example would be asking you to write about a difficult concept as though you were explaining it to a roommate.

In many cases, we will use the entries in the next class session. For example, I may ask you to share your entry with the class or with a small group (always with an option to pass). Alternatively, the entry may have a more implied connection where I simply assume that you gained some preliminary knowledge for a lecture. Regardless of the use, you will gain much more from this course if you come with completed entries.

Grading

Your journal will be graded based on the number of entries you complete and the quality of a random sampling of the entries. I will not be looking at layout, structure, grammar, or spelling, but rather for evidence that you were seriously thinking about the questions or problems posed. This also means that you don’t always have to use the right terms, show mastery of material, or be an encyclopedia of knowledge. Instead, I will be looking to see that you made connections between the readings and in-class content, and that you thought about how the content of the course relates to your day-to-day life.

Your journal assignment will be collected at the end of the class period in which it is used and (hopefully) returned the next class session.

¹*Engaging Ideas* by John C. Bean, pp. 102

Procedures

You are welcome to hand-write or type your journal, whichever is more comfortable. However, because most students can type faster than they can write by hand, maintaining your journal electronically may be more comfortable and efficient. If you choose this option, you should print your responses and bring them to class because I will frequently have you refer to them in class.

Regardless of your chosen medium, please put the date and number/title at the beginning of each entry.

Group Project

This is an overview of the process your group will follow. Further details will be discussed in class as we begin each task.

Group Formation

Soon after the add/drop period ends, I will form groups of three people. In forming groups, I will aim for a diversity. Groups may not “divorce.” That is, you are required to stay with the group in which you are assigned.

Topics

Your first group task will be to select a topic related to the use of computers or technology and to pose a research question. Topics related to spam and intellectual property (file sharing) are not allowed because they will be discussed extensively in class. The course web page has links to sources of topics.

I will not allow two groups to select the same topic, and requests will be granted in a first come, first serve order. That is, if two groups request the same topic, the second group will be asked to select another topic.

Once your topic has been approved, your group should schedule a meeting with me to discuss how you will proceed. This meeting must occur before Thursday, September 14.

Prospectus

By Thursday, October 5, you will submit a prospectus that answers the following questions:

- What research question do you intend to address?
- Why is this an interesting question? Why is it significant?
- What are the primary arguments related to your question? By whom?
- How far along are you in your thinking and research?
- Are you ready to formulate a position (thesis)? If so, what is it?
- What sources have you used so far? Include a short annotation for each.

Outline

Some time before Thursday, October 26, your group should schedule a meeting with me where we discuss the outline for your paper. The purpose of this meeting is for you to demonstrate that you have considered all your sources and synthesized them into a coherent argument.

Peer Review

On Thursday, November 16, you will submit a working draft of your paper to the reviewing group. Then, on Tuesday, November 21, we will use one class session to perform peer reviews of the papers. You should consider the comments carefully and incorporate any changes you deem appropriate.

Title and Abstract

On Tuesday, November 28, you will submit a title and abstract for your paper. I will comment on both and return them within 24 hours.

Annotated Bibliography

As you acquire sources, you will maintain an annotated bibliography including a summary of the source and its significance, as well as an evaluation of the quality in a scholarly sense. This document may contain sources that are not ultimately used in the final document.

Submission

On Tuesday, December 5, you will submit your paper and the following supporting material:

- Original prospectus and my comments
- Peer-review document and comments
- Abstract and Title with comments
- Final draft of the paper
- Annotated bibliography

Presentation

On Tuesday, December 5 and Thursday, December 7, each group will give a presentation of their research. This presentation will not be simply a summary of your paper, but rather your opportunity to share with the rest of the class the process that occurred as you developed your paper. In effect, you should present an interesting and well-organized version of your group diary along with a summary of your paper.

The class will read each other's papers and prepare questions.

Grading

This project will span nearly the entire semester, and you will receive feedback from me and other students at various points. Consequently, I will have high standards when grading the final paper.

As an activity in class, we will collectively develop a grading standard for the projects.

If you believe the workload is not being evenly distributed within the group, it is your responsibility to discuss the issue with your group. If this meeting does not resolve the problem, come see me.