

## IDIS 295 - Fall 2007

# 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.
- **Research Paper** – Throughout the semester, you will work with on a multi-part research project. All graded portions of this work will be completed individually, but you will have the opportunity to work with other students in the class on certain aspects. 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 4.
- **Participation** – In addition to preparing for class, it is important that you contribute during each class meeting. While half of your participation grade is based solely on attendance, the other half is based on participation. I expect you to visually engage in the material – participate in the activities in class and contribute on a regular basis.

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

## **Grade Determination**

Journal	40%
Research Project	
Prospectus	10%
Outline	10%
Annotated Bibliography	5%
Final Paper	15%
Midterm	10%
Participation	10%

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

## **Summary of Important Dates**

Prospectus Due	Tuesday, October 2
Meeting to Discuss Outline	by Thursday, October 25
Peer Review Submission Date	Thursday, November 15
Final Paper Due	Tuesday, December 4
Presentations	Tuesday, December 4 and Thursday, December 6
Midterm	Thursday, October 4

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.<sup>1</sup>

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 and to demonstrate that you are thinking seriously about the readings.

### 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 class session. Regardless of the use, you will gain much more from this course if you come with completed entries.

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. Not every journal will be collected and graded.

### Grading

Your journal will not be graded based on layout, structure, grammar, or spelling. Instead, I will look 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.

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<sup>1</sup>*Engaging Ideas* by John C. Bean, pp. 102

Grades on journal assignments will be assigned using a four-mark system:

- **Plus** means I saw something exceptional in your work. Examples of this include describing connections between the the current readings and previous material; demonstrating comprehension and/or application of complex topics from the articles; or making persuasive arguments against the articles. A plus is typically accompanied by comments stating what impressed me.
- **Check** means that you successfully completed the assignment. Frequently a grade of check will receive little or no additional comments.
- **Minus** indicates that there was a problem with your journal assignment. Typically this means that you either failed to complete part of the assignment or that I was fairly certain that you did not seriously approach the reading or assignment. I will always indicate why a grade of minus was assigned. If you disagree, please come speak with me.
- **Zero** is given if you fail to turn in your journal assignment.

Most people earn a check on most of their journal assignments. This is the level I expect – it means that you are prepared for class and will be able to contribute good comments and questions.

Everyone starts out “even” on their overall journal grade. Each plus raises your grade by one, and each minus lowers it by one. A check leaves your grade unchanged, and a zero reduces it by two. At the end of the semester, your journal grade will be computed as follows:

plus 8 or more	A
plus 5 - 7	A-
plus 2 - 4	B+
minus 1 to plus 1	B
minus 2 - 4	B-
minus 5 - 7	C+
minus 8 - 10	C
minus 11 - 13	C-
minus 14 - 16	D+
minus 17 - 19	D
minus 20 or more	F

## 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.

## Research Project

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

### Topics

Your first 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. Shortly after the add/drop period, I will distribute a list of potential topics.

### Prospectus

By Tuesday, October 2, 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 25, you 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 15, you will submit a working draft of your paper. Then, on Tuesday, November 20, we will use one class session to perform peer reviews of the papers.

### 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 will likely contain sources that are not ultimately used in the final document.

### Submission

On Tuesday, December 4, you will submit your paper and the following supporting material:

- Peer-review document and comments
- Final draft of the paper
- Annotated bibliography

## **Presentation**

Tuesday, December 4 and Thursday, December 6 are reserved for presentations. 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.

## **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.