

IDIS 295 - Spring 2008

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** – Journal activities give you an informal opportunity to think about the course material and respond to in-class activities. These assignments will be given approximately once per week. See pages 3-4 for more details.
- **Research Paper** – Throughout the semester, you will work on a multi-part research project. The two graded portions of this project will be a prospectus (due Thursday, March 13) and your final argument paper (due Thursday, April 17), but we will also use class time throughout the semester to work on various aspects of this project.
- **Midterm** – One midterm will be given during the semester. The *tentative* date for this test is Thursday, February 28.

- **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	15%
Final Paper	20%
Midterm	15%
Participation	10%

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

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

Journals

The purpose of journal assignments is to give you a partially structured place to explore the material in this course. 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 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. For example, I may 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.

¹*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 2 or more	A
minus 1 to plus 1	B
minus 2 - 4	C
minus 5 - 7	D
minus 8 or more	F

Essentially, this scale means that each plus raises your grade by a third of a letter grade, each minus lowers it by a third, and each zero drops your grade by two thirds of a letter grade.

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 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.