IDIS 295 - Fall 2008

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

Ben Coleman
coleman@cs.moravian.edu
214 PPHAC

Office Hours: MWF 9:00 - 10:00
or by appointment
Office Phone: 610-625-7781

Course Description

This course considers how society has changed as a result of increased accessibility to information through computer technology. The two main themes are dealing with "information overload" through information literacy and regulating decentralized systems such as the Internet. Topics include Internet regulation in a global society, property rights issues related to file-sharing programs, and issues related to the regulation of Spam.

Goals

- Explain how technology has changed the value and uses of information

- Find sources of information and determine their appropriateness for a given situation

- Critically read and evaluate news stories, articles, and other sources of information

- Describe how decentralized regulation governs the Internet.

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 Tuesday, October 28) and your final argument paper (due Thursday, December 9), but we will also use class time throughout the semester to work on various aspects of this project. Possible topics for this project will be covered in class between Tuesday, September 23 and Thursday, October 9. Further details of this project will be distributed in class on Tuesday, September 16.

- **Midterm** – The midterm will be given in class on Thursday, October 16. You may only re-schedule this test for college-approved absences or documented illness. In either case, you must contact me before the beginning of the test.

- **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.

Daily Schedule

T Aug 26	Introduction		T Oct 21	Copyright
R Aug 28	Information Overload		R Oct 23	Fair-Use
T Sept 2	Wikipedia		T Oct 28	Google Print (Prospectus Due)
R Sept 4	Sources of News		R Oct 30	Copyright Reform
T Sept 9	Internet Regulation		T Nov 4	Intellectual Property
R Sept 11	Regulation Through Law		R Nov 6	MP3s
T Sept 16	Project Overview		T Nov 11	CD Sales
R Sept 18	ICANN		R Nov 13	Privacy
T Sept 23	Workplace Monitoring		T Nov 18	Consumer Privacy
R Sept 25	Out-Sourcing		R Nov 20	Spam
T Sept 30	Cyber-Bullying		T Nov 25	Spam Solutions
R Oct 2	Internet Gambling		R Nov 27	Thanksgiving Break
T Oct 7	Fall Break		T Dec 2	On-Campus Spam
R Oct 9	Electronic Voting		R Dec 4	Peer-Review
T Oct 14	Research Question Development		T Dec 9	Course Wrap-Up (Final Paper Due)
R Oct 16	Midterm			

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 describe how you have experienced one of the topics discussed in a reading. Alternatively, I may give you a sequence of questions that you answer in your journal to help guide you through a difficult reading.

Each journal assignment will contain two parts. All students must complete the first, or basic part of the assignment, and interested students will complete the advanced portion. As described below, a student who completes every basic journal assignment will earn a "B" for his/her journal.

In many cases, we will use the entries in the next class session. For example, I may ask you to share you 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.

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 three-point system:

- **Three** means that you successfully completed both the basic and advanced portions of the journal assignment.

- **Two** means that you successfully completed the basic portion of the assignment. Most basic journal assignments will require one and a half to two pages of writing.

- **One** 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 (e.g. much too short). I will always indicate why a grade of one was assigned. If you disagree, please come speak with me.

- **Zero** is given if you fail to turn in your journal assignment.

At the end of the semester, your average journal score will translate into an actual letter grade as follows:

≥ 2.5	A
≥ 2	B
≥ 1.5	C
≥ 1	D
< 1	F

Essentially, this scale means that you must earn threes on at least half of the journal assignments to earn an A (with the remainder of your scores being twos).

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, please print your responses and bring them to class.