

CSE 260: Contemporary Issues in Computer Science and Engineering
Spring 2008 W 11-11:50 Koons 202

Professor: Robert McCartney
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office hours: By appointment

Purpose of course: ○ Look at the broader implications of computer science
 ○ Consider the ethical aspects of computing
 ○ Discuss the responsibilities of computing professionals
 and the role of professional societies.

Catalog description: *The global and societal impact of computer science and engineering decisions, professional and ethical responsibility.*

This is the second offering of a course that will be a required course for most computing majors in the future. Since, at this point, we are a small group, we have the luxury of being able to be relatively flexible. The dominant part of the courses will be small-group discussions. The primary goal is that you be able to critically evaluate and discuss issues related to the non-technological aspects of computing.

The major parts of the course are the following.

Short readings and discussion

Each participant will prepare a small set of readings to be discussed in one class. This will generally be 2 or 3 articles that address an issue that hits upon ethical or societal concerns related to technology. Both technical and “popular” articles are acceptable. As a rule-of-thumb for length, think one hour to read. The papers (links to articles are fine) should be available to the class at least 1 week in advance.

At that class, the person who chose the readings will the discussion of those papers in class. He or she may assume that all of the participants will have read those papers.

All participants will read the other participants’ papers, and contribute to the discussions.

Topics

Here is a (non-exhaustive) set of possible discussion topics:

1. Research ethics
2. Open-source and proprietary software
3. Privacy and Civil Liberties
4. Risk and Liability
5. Copyright and DRM
6. Voting
7. Machine Ethics
8. Computer Accessibility

9. Access to technology
10. Global workplace
11. Plagiarism and online content

Written work

There will be a small number of written assignments (about 3), including the “warm-up” given on the first day. These will be brief essays, and will generally involve your analysis of a particular computing issue. These will be submitted electronically via email to Robert, by sending to robert@engr.uconn.edu with “CSE 260: Assignment submission” in the subject line.

Evaluation of course

Near the end of the semester, we will have a discussion session that critically evaluates this course and make recommendations for how the course should be offered in the future. There will be more details later in the semester, but it is expected that the class will address issues of how the class is structured, how large the class should be, what topics should be discussed, and how topics are chosen. Recommendations will be made based on this semester’s experience, examination of materials from similar courses on the web, and in-class discussions.

Attendance and grading

Attendance and participation is expected of all participants. If you attend all of the classes, actively participate in discussions (including the one you moderate), and submit the written assignments, you will receive an A.