CS91 — General Information

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**Goals**

CS91 (Computers, Ethics, and Social Responsibility) has three main goals:

1. To encourage you to take ethics and social responsibility seriously—to regard these issues as integral aspects of your technical work and not as irrelevant concerns better relegated to those in nontechnical disciplines.
2. To provide you with analytical tools from classical and applied ethics that will help you understand ethical questions that arise in computer science.
3. To introduce central ethical and social policy questions raised by modern computing and give you a chance to hear—through various guest speakers—from the people who are most active in those policy debates.

**Lectures**

CS91 meets Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 10:30 A.M. in Kohlberg 116. In order to maintain as much flexibility in the scheduling of guest speaker, I will not circulate a day-by-day syllabus for the entire course. On a week-to-week basis, the outline looks like this:

- **Week 1** Course overview; scientific ethics and the Manhattan Project
- **Week 2** Risks of computing technology
- **Week 3** Overview of philosophical ethics; C. P. Snow’s “Two Cultures” essay
- **Week 4** Intellectual property
- **Week 5** Hacking and computer crime
- **Week 6** Economics and the computing industry; the Microsoft case
- **Week 7** History of the Internet; public policy issues surrounding networks
- **Week 8** Internet governance; online communities
- **Week 9** Civil liberties and privacy
- **Week 10** Computers in the workplace
- **Week 11** Computers: Gender, race, and class
- **Week 12** Utopian/dystopian visions
- **Week 13** Professional codes of ethics
- **Week 14** Reflections on computing ethics: Does computing make a difference?

A more detailed calendar handout, including reading assignments and descriptions of individual lectures, will be distributed each Friday for the following week.

**Texts**

All the readings for CS91 are contained in a course reader, which will be available in Wednesday’s class. Individual reading assignments will be listed on the weekly calendar handouts.
Partly because it was more convenient and partly because our bookstore takes care of researching and paying copyright fees, I put the readers together in California and had them shipped out here. I am selling them at cost, as broken out in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Permission</th>
<th>$32.90</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>$34.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipping</td>
<td>$2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California 8% sales tax</td>
<td>$5.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$74.50</strong></td>
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Please bring a check for $74.50 (payable to Eric Roberts) to the dinner on Tuesday night. In keeping with the spirit of Eugene Lang, please let me know if spending this much on a course reader represents a financial hardship, and I’ll cover the cost out of discretionary funds.

**Course requirements**

The required work for CS91 consists of the following:

**Paper #1**

The first paper required for the course focuses on the risk of computer failures in critical systems. The details of the paper assignment will be handed out on Monday, January 24, and will be due on Friday, February 4.

**Oral debate**

During the week of February 14, we will divide the class into several small groups to debate the issue of software patents. Every student in the class must take part in the debate, the format of which will be described in detail in a subsequent handout.

**Online forum**

From February 21 through March 3, we will supplement our in-class discussion of economic issues with an online discussion of the Department of Justice’s antitrust case against Microsoft. The online forum itself will not be graded, but each of you must follow the newsgroup discussion and post at least one article to complete the associated paper described in the following paragraph.

**Paper #2**

At the conclusion of the online forum, each of you must write a paper that defends a particular policy position growing out of the online debate. In your paper, you must cite at least one of your own postings, as well as those of other participants in the discussion. This paper is due on Friday, March 17.

**Paper #3**

The third paper consists of a report analyzing one of the issues raised by the course from either a philosophical or a public-policy perspective. Details about this paper will be distributed in class. Paper #3 is due on April 21.

**Final project**

The most important part of your work for the course is a group project in which you research and develop materials on some aspect of computer science that raises significant ethical issues. The final projects will be presented in a miniconference scheduled during the final exam slot for the class. The deliverables are as follows:

1. An abstract for the project, which is due on Monday, April 3
2. A 25-minute oral presentation during the final exam slot.
3. A web site that provides additional background material on the topic beyond what is given in the talk.
Late policy
Each of the papers is due in class on the day specified in the syllabus. Because each of you will probably come upon some time during the term where so much work piles up that you need a little extra time, every student begins the quarter with two free “late days.” To avoid ambiguity, a “day” is defined as a class day. Thus, if your paper is due on a Friday and you turn it in by class time the following Monday, that paper will be one day late. Because of your bank of late days, the first two late days you use are without penalty. After that, any paper that comes in late will be assessed a penalty of one full letter grade for each class day that it is late, so that an A– paper becomes a B– paper, and so on. All material for the final project web site must be submitted by the start of the miniconference.

In special circumstances (primarily extended medical problems or other emergencies), extensions may be granted beyond the late days. If you find yourself in such a situation, please send me an extension request by e-mail at least 24 hours before the original due date.

Section and course participation
Because so much of the class is based on discussion, you are expected to attend class regularly. Ten percent of your grade in this course will be based on your active participation in class. This component of your grade will not be based on the content of your ideas or the eloquence of your comments, but simply on whether you have pulled your weight in terms of keeping the ideas and discussions for the course flowing.

The course participation component of the grade also gives you an opportunity for extra credit, in the sense that I will allow this component of the grade to go over 100 percent. From time to time, I will suggest various projects in class that allow you to get extra points in your course participation score. For example, students in my Stanford course have conducted staged readings of plays (Kipphardt’s *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer* and Brecht’s *Galileo*) and have organized special programs for the class, such as a visit by Linux creator Linus Torvalds.

You don’t need to wait for me to suggest some opportunity for extra credit. If you have an idea for some special project related to the course—particularly if it involves working in a group and provides something that will benefit the rest of the class—just let me know. If I like the idea, you’ll have an opportunity for extra credit.

Grading
Final grades for the course will be determined using the following weights:

- 10% Paper #1
- 15% Oral debate
- 10% Paper #2
- 10% Paper #3
- 10% Course participation
- 5% Project abstract
- 15% Project presentation
- 25% Project web site