

CS 33006: Social and Ethical Issues in Computing (Writing Intensive) Fall 2010

Instructor

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Office hours = TR 2-4pm, or by appointment
Drop-ins also welcome; call / email first if you like

Course Overview

This course has several goals, including a study of the social and ethical issues of computing, professional writing in computer science, and some common practices of the discipline.

First, this course is **a study of social and ethical issues of computing**, covering the content recommended for the *CS 280T Social and Professional Issues* course in the ACM/IEEE Computing Curriculum 2001 guidelines. Rather than focusing solely on technical content, this course focuses on the study of various moral systems and their application to a variety of topics (e.g., SPAM, censorship, copyright, file sharing, privacy, electronic surveillance).

Critical thinking is an important part of this study. It will not be sufficient to simply state that something is right or wrong, but you must explain *why* it is right or wrong according to a particularly moral system. A well-reasoned, rational argument will be crucial to this explanation — think in terms of duty, obligation, rights, benefit, or harm. To develop and practice this critical thinking, class participation will be important, and part of your grade will be based on that participation.

Second, this course is **designated as a “writing-intensive course”**, and may be used to satisfy Kent State University’s Writing Intensive Requirement. Every major must have an upper-division writing-intensive course to assist students in becoming effective writers in their discipline. A writing intensive course must involve a substantial amount of writing, and must base 50% or more of the class grade on writing assignments.

By “writing in the discipline”, we mean professional writing common to a computer scientist, which differs in many aspects from the writing of professionals in other fields (e.g., fiction writers). While basic elements such as spelling, punctuation, grammar, and composition are common to all fields, and knowledge of these basic elements will be assumed, this course will concentrate on technical writing and related artifacts (e.g., presentations) common in the field of computer science.

In this course, you will have roughly one assignment per week, most of which will have a writing component to the grade. In some cases, the assignment will be a short essay on some topic in ethics (requiring the critical thinking and well-reasoned arguments mentioned above), while in other cases the assignment will be oriented more toward scientific writing or professional practice (e.g., writing a resume or a short technical abstract).

If you would like to know more about writing-intensive courses, see:
<http://www.kent.edu/catalog/2010/policies/wic.cfm>

Finally, this course will explore some **common professional practices of computer science**. Your writing assignments will include writing a resume and cover letter, writing a technical abstract, and giving a short technical presentation using PowerPoint slides.

Course Prerequisites

The *Undergraduate Catalog* lists the prerequisites for this course as a grade of “C” or better in CS 33001 *Computer Science II: Data Structures and Abstraction*. An equivalent course taken elsewhere is also acceptable. Students who do not have this prerequisite should talk to the course instructor, else they risk being deregistered from the class.

Registration Requirement

The official registration deadline to add this course is 12 September 2010. University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Each student must confirm enrollment by checking his/her class schedule (using Student Tools in FlashLine) prior to the deadline indicated. Registration errors must be corrected prior to the deadline.

The last day to withdraw from this course is 7 November 2010.

Required Textbook

The required textbook for this course is:

Ethics for the Information Age, Fourth Edition
Michael J. Quinn, Pearson / Addison Wesley, 2011
ISBN-13: 978-0-13-213387-6
ISBN-10: 0-13-213387-3

If you would like to “rent” the textbook for 180 days in electronic form under the publisher’s CourseSmart system, see <http://www.coursesmart.com/9780132133913>. If you were intending to sell the textbook back after the end of the semester, you might find this a very cost-effective alternative to a traditional textbook. Note that there are two options — Online Format and Downloadable Format. There is also an iPad version available through the CourseSmart eTextbooks app.

You should skim each chapter in this textbook in advance of the lecture, and then read the chapter in detail afterward. I will use the author’s PowerPoint slides in class, but they are usually missing important detail and are not sufficient on their own.

Class Web Page

The web page for this class is <http://www.cs.kent.edu/~walker/classes/eth.f10> (a link to this page is available on my home page).

The class web page will contain links to the current class syllabus and schedule, lecture notes, homework assignments, exams and solutions, etc. You might want to check the web page on a regular basis, in particular when a homework assignment is outstanding or an exam is eminent. A few materials are password protected; to access those materials use your CS login and password so that our web server can authenticate you.

Lectures

You are expected to attend each lecture, and to actively participate in class discussions. A portion of your grade will come from class participation, and you are expected to actively participate in class discussions during every class. Repeated class absences or reading web pages on your laptop during class are unlikely to result in a very good class participation grade.

In my lectures, I will use both the “official” slides provided by the textbook authors, as well as some slides of my own. The required text provides most of the material that I will be presenting, although some material may be drawn from other books on social and ethical issues or online resources.

Homework Assignments

There will be approximately one homework assignment per week, usually assigned on Wednesday and due on Monday. In some cases, particularly for writing assignments, you will have more than 5 days to work on a particular assignment, and in those cases the assignment will generally count more than other assignments.

For each assignment, you will be told how much of the grade will be based on social and ethical issues, writing, or professional practice.

No late homework submissions will be accepted unless you make *prior* arrangements with me, or have a *documented* illness (e.g., a signed note from a doctor). In the latter case, I expect you to contact me as soon as possible afterward, ideally not waiting for the next class.

Exams

There will be one midterm exam (held during class) and a final exam (held during finals week). The midterm exam date will be announced as the semester progresses. According to the final schedule (<http://www.registrars.kent.edu/home/FALL/exams.htm>), the final exam for this class will be on Tuesday 14 December from 10:15am – 12:30pm.

All exams are closed book and closed notes, and must be individual work. It is expected that you take each exam at the scheduled time, unless you make *prior* arrangements with me or have a *documented* illness (e.g., a signed note from a doctor). In the latter case, I expect you to contact me as soon as possible afterward, ideally not waiting until the next class.

Grades

Your course grade will be based approximately 35% on social and ethical issues, 50% on writing, 10% on professional practice, and 5% on class participation. Homework assignments will comprise the bulk of your grade, though the midterm exam and final exam will each count 10%.

This course will be graded under the Plus / Minus Grading System, which at Kent State does not support grades of A+ or D–.

A grade $\geq 93 = A$, $\geq 90 = A-$, $\geq 87 = B+$, $\geq 83 = B$, $\geq 80 = B-$,
 $\geq 77 = C+$, $\geq 73 = C$, $\geq 70 = C-$, $\geq 67 = D+$, $\geq 60 = D$, $< 60 = F$.

Note also that the guidelines for writing-intensive courses state that each student must compete at least one writing intensive course with a minimum grade of C (2.00) before graduation.

Student Accessibility Policy

University Policy 3342-3-01.3 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. **Please note that you must first verify your eligibility for these through Student Accessibility Services** (contact 330-672-3391 or visit <http://www.kent.edu/sas> for more information on registration procedures).

Instructor Absences

Over the course of the semester, I will have to miss a few classes to attend a conference or other professional meeting. This is a normal occurrence at research-oriented university with a flourishing graduate program, where professors are expected to regularly attend conferences and professional meetings to remain current in their fields. Presumably, they bring their insights from those events into the classroom, which benefits you as a student. Further, by attending those meetings, they make other professionals aware of Kent State, which increases your visibility and the value of your degree.

I will make every effort to minimize these absences, or to arrange for my class to be covered during my absence in such a way as to avoid disrupting the flow of the class. When this is not possible, it may occasionally be necessary for me to cancel a class, or to schedule a makeup class at some other time, but such occurrences are usually rare.

Respectful Student Conduct

Kent State University's Code of Student Conduct, described in the Digest of Rules and Regulations at <http://www.kent.edu/about/administration/EMSA/judicial/upload/Code-of-Student-Conduct-8-23-10.docx>, requires students to behave in a respectful manner to their instructors as well as their classmates. In a course on social and ethical issues, where some topics may evoke deep emotions related to religious or cultural beliefs, it is especially important to be sensitive to the beliefs of others.

Some examples of disruptive behavior are rudeness toward the instructor or classmates, tardiness, inattention in class, and use of cell phones in class. Students will be expected to behave in a mature and professional manner at all times in the classroom.

Academic Integrity

Student-instructor relationships are built on trust. Students must trust that instructors have made appropriate decisions regarding the structure and content of the courses they teach, and instructors must trust that the materials that students turn in are their own. Acts that violate this trust undermine the educational process. In this course, the penalty for ***any*** act of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, is a final course grade of F.

University policy 3342-3-01.8 deals with the problem of academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism. None of these will be tolerated in this class. The sanctions provided in this policy will be used to deal with any violations. If you have any questions, please read the policy at http://www.kent.edu/policyreg/policydetails.cfm?customel_datapageid_1976529=2037779 and/or ask.