

Syllabus

CS 301: Computers and Society

Spring 2013

Instructor

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You may send an e-mail anytime. Make sure any emails are sent to

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Be sure to place cs301 in the Subject-field of your email, else my email-filter will move your email to a folder I rarely check. Also, be sure to sign your email in the message-part with Last Name and First Name, as you are registered here at SDSU. Do not use any other email account listed for me. I generally check emails early in the morning (before 6:30 am) and sometimes again later in the day. First names are not enough information to identify you in this large, online class.

Text

Sara Baase, *A Gift of Fire* (Fourth Edition), Prentice-Hall

Handouts, Calendar, Assignments, Discussion Boards, and Exams

Blackboard: <http://blackboard.sdsu.edu>

Overview

This course deals with the impact of computers on us as individuals and on our society. The widespread use of computing technology has changed the way we work, play and interact with other people. These changes have created a flood of new social and legal issues that demand critical examination.

Here are a few examples of the issues we will be discussing:

- There is a great deal of information about all of us recorded in computer databases. What rules should govern how this information is used? (We all get privacy notices in fine print from our banks, credit card companies, etc. -- what do they really mean?) Hacking, identity theft and credit card fraud has increased in recent years. What are appropriate responses to these types of fraud and what precautions can we take to prevent this from happening?
- New encryption methods make it possible to keep e-mail and phone conversations secret from others. How should our desire for privacy be balanced with the need of law-enforcement agencies to intercept communications of suspected criminals or terrorists?
- How serious are the problems created by Web sites that contain pornography, 'hate' material directed at various groups, bomb-making information, etc? Should there be any restrictions on material that is put on the Web?

- Computers are increasingly used to control medical devices, airplanes and other safety-critical systems. How safe are such systems? How safe is 'safe enough'? What can we do to manage the risks involved?
- It is easy to use computers to copy music, software, books, etc., in violation of copyright law. What is the extent of this problem? What can or should be done about it? What is free software? Should all software be free?
- Sustainability concerns the design of our life activities to ensure that we will continue those that benefit the earth and its peoples and reduce those activities that do not have positive global benefit. How can you participate?

There are (at least) two sides to almost all of the questions we will consider in this course. We will spend much of our effort discussing the issues and exploring different points of view.

Course Objectives

After successfully completing this course, you will:

- understand how computing and information systems give rise to social issues and ethical dilemmas
- be familiar with some of the issues you may face as a member of a complex technological society
- be able to discuss the benefits offered by computing technology in many different areas and the risks and problems associated these technologies
- understand some social, legal, philosophical, political, constitutional and economical issues related to computers and the historical background of these issues
- be able to explore the arguments on all sides of a controversial issue, and argue convincingly for the position you select
- have an increased awareness of current social and legal developments related to computers
- understand how sustainability is key to daily life and how each person can contribute

Course Requirements

Most of the issues discussed in this course do not have simple or 'pat' answers that everyone will agree with. An important part of the course will be discussing the issues and debating various points of view. These discussions will take place online using Blackboard. The course will also have an online component dealing with current events related to the course material.

Each student will form a group of classmates to write a term paper on some topic related to the course. This paper will focus on a social impact of computing technology or on a computer-related public policy or legal issue. The paper will include background research using peer-reviewed resources, a discussion of related issues and critical evaluation by the students. The assignment will use **Blackboard TurnItIn** to ensure originality.

There will be one midterm exam and a final exam. Exams may cover anything from the text and supplemental material. Much of this information will **not** be repeated in the assignments. Be sure to keep up with the assigned reading. (You may want to check your understanding using the questions at the end of chapters in the text -- some of these same questions may appear on an exam.)

Grading

NOTE: Deadlines are important. Your class calendar lists textbook chapters to read and the corresponding assignments. All discussion board assignments are due by midnight (i.e. 12 noon past noon) of the assigned deadline day in the class calendar. Late assignments cost you – 10% per day, so try to complete assignments early. There are always panics/emergencies that can occur in a day and **these are NOT justification for late assignments.** Some Blackboard Discussion Assignments have the opportunity to earn extra points through additional effort. You are encouraged to earn extra credit to help offset some emergency that may happen during the semester. Exams must be completed within their one-week availability. **There are no exam makeups.**

Your course grade will be calculated (approximately) as follows:

Discussion forum assignments (7 discussion assignments and 3 current events: 155 pts total) NOTE: extra credit can help bring you up to this maximum for missed assignments, but max is 155	25%
Group project (proposal, paper and individual contribution statement: 130 pts total)	25%
Weekly topic participation (up to 9 Weekly topic posts: up to 45 pts total)	10%
Midterm exam (100 pts)	20%
Final exam (100 pts)	20%

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

$(\text{total discussion points}/155) \cdot .25 + (\text{group project points}/130) \cdot .25 + (\text{weekly topic points}/45) + (\text{total midterm points}/100) \cdot .20 + (\text{total final exam points}/100) \cdot .20 \cdot 100$

This will calculate a grade between 0 and 100. I use +/- grading:

100-93	A
92-90	A-
89-87	B+
86-83	B
82-80	B-

79-77 C+

76-73 C

72-70 C-

69-67 D+

66-63 D

62-60 D-

59- F

Credit/No Credit

100-73 Cr

72- N/Cr