

CS 1590

Professor Litman
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Course Objectives

- understand how computing and information systems give rise to social issues and ethical dilemmas (you as producer)
- be familiar with some of the issues you may face as a member of a complex technological society (you as consumer)
- 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

Example Course Topics: Privacy

- 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, identify theft and credit card fraud has increased in recent years. What are responses to these types of fraud and what precautions can we take to prevent this from happening?

On the other hand...

- 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?

Pros and Cons

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

Free Speech

- 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?

Errors, Failures, and Risk

- 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?

Intellectual Property

- 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?

Introductions

- Tell us your name
- What is your major and what do you hope to do after graduation?
- Mention some topic related to computers and technology that interests you and that has social, legal or ethical implications. (If you can't think of one, mention some application of computers or technology that is related to your major field.)

CourseWeb

- <https://courseweb.pitt.edu/webapps/login/>