

Australian National University
Department of Computer Science
Networked Information Systems
COMP2410/6340

Assignment 1
Ethics and the IT Professional

1 Introduction

There are a number of professional societies in the IT field, and most of them publish Codes of Conduct and Professional Practice. In this assignment we will consider the codes of the Australian Computer Society (ACS) and explore a scenario in which they can be applied.

Lecture 9 (*Topic Analysis and Essay Writing* with Paul Preston) and Lecture 10 (*Ethics and the IT Professional* with Tom Worthington) are particularly relevant to this assignment.

This essay is worth 10% of your final mark.

Deadline: 6pm Friday 28 March 2008

2 Reading List

In preparation for writing your essay you should read all of the following documents.

- ACS Code of Ethics.
https://www.acs.org.au/about_acs/acs131.htm
- *Ethics: Why do we differ?*, Richard Lucas, Information Age.
<http://www.infoage.idg.com.au/index.php/id;699760108;fp;32768;fpid;362563240>
- *Codes of ethics: protecting whose interest?*, Karen Mather, Information Age.
<http://www.infoage.idg.com.au/index.php/id;1987514499;fp;4;fpid;675408222>
- *Protect Your Privacy on Social Networking Sites*, Karen Curtis.
http://www.privacy.gov.au/news/media/2007_23.html

The following list is required reading for COMP6340 students.

- ACS Code of Professional Conduct and Professional Practice. **Part A**
<https://www.acs.org.au/index.cfm?action=show&conID=copc2>
- *The accidental expert witness*, Tom Worthington, Information Age.
<http://www.infoage.idg.com.au/index.php/id;459444430;fp;4;fpid;675408222>
- *Practice Direction: Guidelines for Expert Witnesses in Proceedings in the Federal Court*.
http://www.fedcourt.gov.au/how/prac_direction.html

All students are strongly encouraged to find other sources. The more you read about the topic, the better informed your arguments will be.

3 Topics

There are two essay topics:

- COMP2410 students: address Question 1,
- COMP6340 students: address Questions 1 and 2.

4 Background

Social networking sites such as Myspace, Facebook and Friendster have increased dramatically in popularity over the last year. These sites enable users to build social networks by interacting with others using online services such as chat, email, messaging, blogs, file sharing etc. Most social networking sites allow significant customisation of privacy features, so that users can control who can view their profiles and contact them. For further background information, especially if you are unfamiliar with these sites, see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network_service, www.myspace.com and www.facebook.com.

Suppose that you are employed as a team member for the company RushInJobs, who perform code maintenance and feature support for 2410Friends, a social networking site. Your supervisor has asked you to look through the site's access logs to help determine which features of the site should be upgraded or retired, due to their relative popularity. While you are looking through the logs, you notice that some users are exploiting a bug in the 2410Friends code. These users are running a specially-designed script which allows them to view the entire web browsing history of anyone who has sent them a message using the 2410Friends site.

This means that, if Alice sends Bob a message on the 2410Friends site, Bob can then exploit the bug to view every page that Alice has accessed online. This includes her private account information page on 2410Friends, as well as sites she has accessed which are not associated with 2410Friends.

Because this bug is present in current code, fixing it will require the 2410Friends site to be brought down. That is, the site will be unavailable to users while the fix is being implemented. You estimate that the fix will take four days to write and implement. When you bring this situation to the attention of your team leader, he tells you that bringing the site down for four days will mean missing two important deadlines for adding other security features. He asks you for your suggestions on what the company should do.

5 Questions

5.1 Question 1

- What (if any) other information would you require before making your suggestions?
- Describe at least three possible courses of action for the RushInJobs company, and the effects of these courses of action on yourself and others. Describe the particular aspects of the ACS Code of Ethics (https://www.acs.org.au/about_acs/acs131.htm) which would be relevant if pursuing each course of action.
- Rank your suggestions, rating your ethical principles as described in the article *Ethics: Why do we differ?* from the above reading list.

5.2 Question 2

Some of the principles adopted in the *ACS Code of Professional Conduct and Professional Practice Part A*

(<https://www.acs.org.au/index.cfm?action=show&conID=copc>)

are “high-level” in that they are not specific to the IT discipline, but are generally applicable to human activities. Other principles relate to situations which are more likely to arise in an IT context.

- Identify the principles which are most specific to computer science, and provide an example of an IT situation in which they would be relevant.

- Identify those ethical principles which are likely to apply in a situation where you are working as an expert witness in IT, and explain your reasoning.

6 Requirements

You will be assessed on your understanding and application of the ACS codes, the construction and presentation of your arguments, and the validity and structure of your XHTML.

6.1 Length

A guideline for the length of both essays:

- The essay on Topic 1 should be 2500–3000 words ($\pm 10\%$).
- The essay on Topic 2 should be 1500 words ($\pm 10\%$).

While you will not be penalised for being outside of the recommended word count, you should be aware that other (assessable) aspects of your essay may suffer as a result of this.

6.2 Format

Your essay(s) should be written using XHTML Basic, in a single file called `assignment1.html`. Your file should comply with the XHTML Basic standard. Use the validator service provided by the World Wide Web Consortium to check your document for compliance. (See Lecture 7 and the instructions in the Lab Exercises for Week 4 for more details.)

6.3 Referencing

You must include a References section, making sure you appropriately cite any sources you use in your essay.

6.4 Declaration

Before submitting your assignment, you should make sure that you are familiar with the ANU *Code of Practice on Academic Honesty in Learning and Teaching* which can be found at:

http://info.anu.edu.au/policies/Codes_Of_Practice/Students/Other/Academic_Honesty.asp.

Your document must include your name, student number, and the following declaration:

I declare that I have read the ANU *Code of Practice on Academic Honesty in Learning and Teaching*, and that, except where appropriately attributed, the content of this document is entirely my own work. Furthermore, no part of this work has been submitted for assessment in another course in this or any other Faculty.

(signed) <your name> <your student number>

6.5 Submission

All students should submit their files using the `submit` command. It must be executed from the unix command line (on a host on the student network) and has the form:

```
submit <coursecode> <assignmentname> <filename>
```

Your <coursecode> is either `comp2410` or `comp6340`. The <assignmentname> is `assignment1`, and the <filename> must be `assignment1.html`. (Note that you can upload a style sheet called `assignment1.css` in the same way.)

You can check that your file has been submitted successfully by logging into StReaMS (<http://cs.anu.edu.au/streams>) and clicking on “show” under Assessments for COMP2410 or COMP6340. (See instructions in the Lab Exercise for Week 4 for more details.)

It is your responsibility to submit the correct file before the deadline.

Assignments may be submitted up to one week after the deadline, but a late penalty of 10% per day will be applied. If the assignment is submitted more than one week (seven days) late, no mark will be awarded.

Please see me *before* the deadline if you need to seek an extension due to illness.