





# Computer Science (COMP) 607

## Ethical, Legal, and Social Issues in Information Technology (Revision 3)

**Status:** Replaced with new revision, see the [course listing](#)  for the current revision 

**Delivery mode:** [Grouped study](#) 

**Credits:** 3

**Area of study:** Information Systems

**Prerequisites:** [COMP 505](#), [COMP 506](#), and [COMP 601](#)  recommended but not required.

**Precluded:** None

**Faculty:** [Faculty of Science and Technology](#) 

**Notes:**

This is a graduate level course and students need to apply and be approved to one of the graduate programs or as a non-program **School of Computing and Information Systems** [↗](#) graduate student in order to take this course. Minimum admission requirements must be met. Undergraduate students who do not meet admission requirements will not normally be permitted to take this course.

**Instructor:**Terry Taylor [↗](#)

## Overview

This course aims to equip the student with the intellectual tools to make effective, reasoned and justifiable moral decisions relating to the IT domain within appropriate legal and social frameworks. With a strong requirement for reading, research, reflection and debate, it is structured around formal discussions within the subject area and makes extensive use of social technologies to enable sharing and interaction.

## Outline

Note that, though the general timing and format is fixed, the subject of the activities and questions addressed may vary significantly from this plan. This course makes extensive use of current news and events so, if major or interesting stories happen to be breaking at the time it is running, we will be making use of those as objects of discussion.

Week	personal activity	public activity (may be adapted to cater for current news events)
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1	background reading: ethics	FORUM AND PROFILE: update profiles, introductions
2	background reading: privacy	OPEN FORUM: statement and discussion of personal interests and beliefs
3	background reading: privacy	TEAM DEBATE: privacy is dead and it's a good thing.
4	background reading: Intellectual property	OXFORD DEBATE: The house proposes that strong encryption should be illegal
5	background reading: Intellectual property	PYRAMID DISCUSSION: under what circumstances would it be right to violate a software licence agreement?
6	background reading: Computer crime	WIKI CO-CREATION: pros and cons of software patents
7	background reading: Computer crime	WIKI BRAINSTORM: how should we deal with crimes committed in other countries that are not crimes in those countries?
8	background reading: Computing in the workplace	BOOKMARK SHARING: current news stories relating to computer crime, its effects, its policing, its prevention
9	background reading: Globalisation	FISHBOWL: employers should be allowed to use social network sites to vet or discipline employees
10	background reading: Social systems	TEAM DEBATE: online courses should be tailored to ethnic or national audiences

11	Personal research	SMALL GROUP DEBATE WITH PLENARY SUMMARIES: is a person who has an 'affair' in Second Life being unfaithful to their partner?
12	Personal research	ACTION LEARNING: discussing personal research and process in small groups, seeking and offering advice
13	collation and commentary	PRESENTATIONS: research results and comments

## Objectives

This course is designed to:

1. explore the nature and principles of ethics-- including personal, professional, and corporate ethics -- in a computing context.
2. address the interplay between ethics on the one hand; and law, society, politics, economy, justice, responsibility, honesty on the other.
3. explore specific ethical issues raised by the ubiquity of computer and information technology in today's society.

## Learning outcomes

Upon completion of COMP 607, you should be able to:

- demonstrate an elevated consciousness of the nature and principles of ethics, including personal, professional and corporate ethics
- explain and analyze the interplay between ethics on the one hand and law, society, politics, economy, justice, responsibility and honesty on the other
- explore specific ethical issues raised by the ubiquity of computer and information technology in today's society
- research, discuss, reflect on and debate the above themes

## Evaluation

In order to receive credit for COMP 607, you must achieve a cumulative course grade of "B-" (70 percent) or better, and must achieve a grade of at least 60 percent on each course components. Your cumulative course grade will be based on the following assessment.

50%: Collated portfolio of reflections and contributions, with associated mind map/concept map, presented as headings of objectives and links to/pasted supporting evidence. 50%: Research essay: 2000 words and audio/video presentation.

## Materials

Course content is entirely from primary and secondary online resources and will usually aim to use current and topical news stories and research papers, often discovered by students themselves. Wikipedia will frequently provide background and a jumping-off point for further research (though must not be used directly to provide references for the research study except when it is the focus of primary research).

## Special Instructional Features

While there is a great deal of reading and research required, the key two learning approaches used in this course are based on conversation and reflection: knowledge is socially constructed through dialogue with others, supported through a wide variety of different formal forms of debate and sharing.

Students of this course are required to share work with others in the course, later iterations of the course and, potentially, other courses that are derived from it. In some cases, such as in the cooperative generation of wiki pages or discussion postings, it is essential that they should leave work done for the benefit of others on this and later cohorts.

Additional supporting materials of interests to students of Computer Science 607 will be made available through a link guide on the course Web site.

## Course Workload

Expected time spent on this course would, very roughly and very variably, on average be:

- Reading and primary research: 6-7 hours/week
- Discussion and debate: 2-3 hours/week

- Reflection and artefact construction: 2-4 hours/week

## Special Course Features

COMP607 will be offered in paced electronic mode in fall or winter. Electronic paced study is facilitated through a variety of computer-mediated communication options, and can be completed at the student's workplace or home.

## Special Note

Students registered in this course will NOT be allowed to take an extension due to the nature of the course activities.

## Important links

- › [Future Course Offerings](#) 
- › [Important Dates and Deadlines](#) 
- › [MSc IS Contact Information](#) 

Athabasca University reserves the right to amend course outlines occasionally and without notice. Courses offered by other delivery methods may vary from their individualized study counterparts.

*Opened in Revision 3, May 11, 2011*

*Updated January 27, 2025*