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Ethics Paper

Copyright, licensing, and ethical morals are all standing points all programmers will come across at some point during their coding career. What this means for software development is that someone could do hours or days' worth of work for some code, post it online, and someone take the code and call it their own for some website or job. According to a Stack overflow blog, they found that "as much as 7 – 23% of code is cloned from somewhere else"[1]. First, copyright infringement is a serious offense that applies to everything from code to software that individuals may copy. Furthermore, there are license agreements that two people can agree on that allow them to stay out of legal trouble. Finally, if you or someone else uses code from someone else that is not yours in any way shape or form, there are certain obligations that you must make sure you aren't getting yourself into any unnecessary trouble.

In the United States, copyright is a fundamental concept that is used to safeguard the intellectual property of programmers. Thankfully for programmers automatically extends to software code once it is expressed in a tangible form. Then, once you realize that your code is not entirely protected, you can register your code or software through the US copyright office to fully secure your code. If someone uses your code before you do this, then it is a lot harder to sue

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[1] https://stackoverflow.blog/2020/05/20/good-coders-borrow-great-coders-steal/

them over something that you did not register in the first place. Rich Stim, and attorney at Law, stated that while it may just cost you $45-$55 to register your code, it can cost up to $50,000 in legal fees to sue somebody with your code without registering it that you will only get a fraction of back in the end[2].

The MIT License is often regarded as the standard for fair use due to its permissiveness. According to the license, others can "without restriction, including without limitation the rights to use, copy, modify, merge, publish, distribute, sublicense, and/or sell copies of the Software[3]". I believe this to be a fair license agreement so long as the person giving away the code knows what they are doing. I picked this one because of its simplicity, clarity, and compatibility with a very wide range of code and software. However, like I said, there are circumstances that may effect it, such as working on the product with a partner or making sure that the code is registered in the first place. Regardless, is it essential for there to be a balance between open use with safeguarding property.

In educational and class settings, students have ethical obligations when it comes to reusing code from not just the internet, but from other people in the class as well. It is always necessary, even when not sure if you should or not, to avoid plagiarism and properly reference and give recognition to the author or wherever you got it from. IT Briefcase has 8 steps and an entire page dedicated on how not to plagiarize code for students, some examples include "Consult with your instructor", "Look for programming plagiarism checker tools online", and "Learn the limitations of using outside code"[4]. This is all good practice where these ethical

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[2] https://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/faqs/software/

[3] https://opensource.org/license/mit/
[4] https://www.itbriefcase.net/how-to-code-without-plagiarizing

behaviors will extend to the workplace, where respecting licensing terms and providing proper attribution remains paramount. Furthermore, if you copy code from the internet and then proceed to make money from it without crediting the original author, it can lead to thousands of dollars of damage, losing your project, and even jailtime or other criminal punishments.

In the ever-growing world of computer science, copyright, licensing, and ethical responsibilities are intertwined aspects that all demand special and careful consideration. Copyright allows programmers to create code and software and ensure that they have control over their code's use. Choosing an appropriate fair use license agreement promotes collaboration between developers while also respecting property rights to prevent problems from brewing later on. Additionally, programmers must uphold ethical obligations when reusing code that is not theirs at all times everywhere they code, including work, school, or even by yourself for commercial use. By following these principles, programmers all contribute to a healthy culture of being responsible with code while also respecting one another from basic learning levels to professional use in the field of computer science.

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