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CSC 300

Homework 3

After reviewing the ACM’s Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, three items stood out to me that I wanted to discuss and analyze further. These included ensuring that the public good is the central concern during all professional computing work, performing work only in areas of competence, and respecting privacy.

The first item that I chose to further analyze was ensuring that the public good is the central concern during all professional computing work. For the most part, I agree that the public good should be one of the most important considerations when developing software. However, the reality is that not all software is designed for the public, and I can think of scenarios where it may not be important to make the public good the *central concern*. Take vim, for example. As far as text-editing software’s that are to be used by the public, the average person would probably become easily annoyed by vims non-intuitive design features. However, from a computer programmer perspective it is an extremely powerful interface that can make problems easier in the long run. In this case, is it better for the “public good” to create an easy to use text-editing software that can be used by the “public”, or to create a text-editing software that can be used by programmers to write programs that can benefit the “public”? Furthermore, who is to say what is “good” for the public? As an example, let’s say an app was designed that gave information on your favorite football teams and players. The designers of this said app made it extremely user friendly so that you can easily navigate and customize it to your needs. One could make the claim that this is designed for the “public good” as it easily connects users to their desired information. However, at the same time, isn’t the app contributing to romanticizing a violent sport which is causing injuries and unknown head trauma? Is it really for the “public good” to promote this? Obviously, there is no clear answer here, it falls into a grey area. This is why in my opinion, it becomes problematic to say, “make the public good a central concern”, as the “public good” can be hard to define and is certainly ambiguous in many cases.

The second item that I chose to analyze was performing work only in areas of competence. I agree with this statement in almost all situations. Sometimes the hardest thing for a professional to do can be to put their ego aside and admit they do not know how to do something. It is almost always problematic to try and achieve a task that is outside of one’s expertise, as it can lead to low quality and can tarnish reputation. However, I believe that there is merit to venturing outside of one’s expertise as a means of education. I view it similarly to the “learn by doing” philosophy that Cal Poly embodies. For example, say I wanted to design a website even though I have no prior experience. What I would do is start messing around with creating a website, and eventually figure out the knowledge and tools that I need to translate it into part of my line of work. Obviously, there is a very big difference between experimenting on my own time in low stakes situations and taking a job or assignment that I do not have expertise in.

The item that I agreed with the most was to respect privacy. In the field of computing, this is one of the most important ethical responsibilities. Many people keep things on the internet and on their personal computers which is meant to be private. As computer professionals there will probably be scenarios where we have the means and knowledge to access these private files. It is very important to only use information for what it was needed for, and to not access, exploit, analyze, or reveal information that is not meant to be seen or distributed. Most people do not realize what is happening in their computers, and who actually has access to it. Therefore, there is an inherent sense of trust between computer users (the general public) and computing professionals. There is a certain power in our hands, and it comes with a great responsibility. What comes to my mind when I think about this ethical cornerstone is a popular saying on integrity; “Integrity is what you do when no one is watching”. And in computing, almost no one is ever watching.

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