

Calendar and Readings (July 14)

Lecture 1

I've titled this talk "Digital Divides." In many ways, the term Digital Divides conjures up differences in computer access, perhaps considering those poor rural or urban students who don't have access to technology. This is certainly going to be the case in rural areas of China. But in focusing on the developed world, and while China is not completely developed, the large cities certainly are, there is certainly as much of a digital divide among the creators of technology, who tend to primarily be Caucasian and/or Asian males. Thus, I'd like to explore the under-representation of women and certain minority groups among computer science majors and indeed in the tech world.

Lecture 2

We're going to spend much of the class exploring the case of Aaron Swartz. Aaron was a bright computer scientist who helped to create RSS and was one of the founders of Reddit. He committed the crime of violating the terms of service and downloading a huge quantity of copyrighted material. The case came to national attention both because Aaron was well connected to leading IP lawyers (Larry Lessig was a good friend) as well as his suicide in response to a vigorous offensive campaign by the Federal prosecutor "going viral". There are many issues raised by this case, not least of which are what are computer crimes, and what should be appropriate punishment for those crimes.

Reaction paper assignment

Neither Kerr's condemnation of Swartz's actions nor Boyle's defense of his actions fully addresses the fundamental underlying issues as to how to appropriately punish computer crime. Does it make sense to estimate the maximal impact (financially) of a computer crime? According to whose interpretation of the impact? (By means of comparison, you might wish to consider those who illegally download music, and how they are and/or should be treated?) How should theft of IP or of copyrighted materials be treated? Is violation of "terms of service" an appropriate "catch-all"? There are of course many other questions we could ask regarding both the severity of these sorts of crimes and how society should appropriately punish the perpetrators. In this reaction paper, I'd like you to propose a policy that attempts to address either the sort of crime Swartz committed and/or computer crimes related to theft of IP or copyrighted materials. Defend your policy from a utilitarian and/or a deontological perspective. Also suggest how a utilitarian and/or deontological argument could be made against your proposed policy.