

# Computers and Society

CPSC 430

Lecture 1 – Introduction

Kevin Leyton-Brown

<http://cs.ubc.ca/~kevinlb/teaching/cs430>

All the basics you need to know to get started

# **COURSE LOGISTICS**

# Course Organization

- This course has **two sections**
  - **101**: Tues, Thurs 3:30 – 4:50; IRC G4; 93 students
  - **102**: Tues, Thurs 5:00 – 6:20; IRC G4; 93 students
  - **Lead TA**: Raymond Liu
  - **TA team**: Roz Carr; Dorna Dehghani; Maziyar Dowlatabadibazaz; Pierre Lardet; Ekaterina Manskaia; Justice Sefas; Aishwarya Shenoy; Kevin Wang
- Office hours:
  - **Instructor**: immediately after lecture, or by appointment
  - **TAs**: various times throughout the week via Zoom, and depending on demand; TBA
- Can I **Attend A Different Section** Than The One I'm Registered In?
  - Please **stick to your registered section** until the add/drop deadline of September 12, because we expect the rooms to be *very* full
  - After this, you're **welcome to attend a different section** if it works better for you, and you'll get participation credit for doing so
  - If load balancing between sections becomes a problem, we **may revisit** this policy

# Let's Take a Minute to Log Into MTA



<http://cs.ubc.ca/~kevinlb/teaching/cs430>

Kevin Leyton-Brown   Research   Teaching   Publications   Software   Misc

## Computers and Society

(CPSC 430 Sections 101 and 102, Term 1, 2025-26)

### Overview

Course Description: This course explores the interplay between information technology and society, with an emphasis on ethical issues. Students will come away from the course with greater understanding of the social and ethical implications of computer use and abuse, an improved ability to think critically and defend their decisions logically, and a greater appreciation for alternate points of view. The focus of the course is on reading, writing and discussion; each week students will complete an assigned reading, write a mini-essay in response, and evaluate the written work of others.

Meeting Times: Tuesday, Thursday, 3:30 PM–4:50 PM (Section 101); 5:00 PM–6:20 PM (Section 102)  
First Class: Thursday, September 4, 2025  
Location: [P. A. Woodward Instructional Resources Centre: Floor 1, Room 4](#)  
Registration Information: Please consult [Workday](#)  
Kevin's Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 4:50–5:00 and 6:20–7:00 PM, or by appointment  
Lead TA:  
Raymond Liu ([raymliu@cs.ubc.ca](mailto:raymliu@cs.ubc.ca))  
TAs:  
Roz Carr ([rozcarr@student.ubc.ca](mailto:rozcarr@student.ubc.ca))  
Dorna Dehghani ([drna@cs.ubc.ca](mailto:drna@cs.ubc.ca))  
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Kevin Wang ([wskks@student.ubc.ca](mailto:wskks@student.ubc.ca))

Quick Links: [Piazza](#); [MTA](#) (Enrolment code: 999676. Login problems: email [Raymond Liu](mailto:Raymond Liu).)

# What if I'm on the wait list?

- Historically, most people on the wait list **get into the class**
  - but it's not up to me, up to undergrad advisors in the main office
- Main office will prioritize the wait list by **participation in the course**
  - only **highly active participants** will be considered
  - if still oversubscribed, ordered by standard waitlist priority
  - make sure you hand in each week's work!
    - this requires booking a slot in the CBTF
- **No reduction in required course elements** for having been on wait list
  - wait list registrants have access to MTA, CBTF, Piazza
  - if you have troubles, let us know!

# Academic Honesty

- Students are expected to acknowledge ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions
- **Plagiarism is a serious offence** and will be dealt with harshly
  - Plagiarism is the **unattributed use** of any external source (e.g., another student, a web site, a book, generative AI) in work for which a student takes credit, or the **inappropriate use** of any external source whether or not attribution is made
  - You must **write in your own words**
  - Any text that you take verbatim from another source must be in **quotation marks** and followed by a citation
- Other violations of academic honesty:
  - using generative AI (or another person) to write your peer review
  - “Raising your hand” to participate in class while not physically present

# COVID-19: Staying Safe

- **Masks:** no longer required, but are **welcomed and encouraged**
- **Vaccination:** [free vaccines are available on campus](#)
  - higher rate of vaccination in our community overall = less transmission
- **If you're sick, please **stay home**, no matter what you think you've got (e.g., cold, flu, other)**
  - do not come to class if you have Covid symptoms, have recently tested positive, or are required to quarantine
  - in this class, the marking scheme provides flexibility so that you can prioritize your health and still succeed

Where will your grade come from? What will you need to do to succeed in the class?

# **ESSAYS, PEER REVIEW, AND PARTICIPATION**

# Course Description

- We'll explore the interplay between **information technology and society**, emphasizing ethical issues.
- You'll come away with an increased:
  - understanding of the **social and ethical implications** of computer use and abuse;
  - ability to **think critically and defend decisions** logically;
  - appreciation for **alternate points of view**.
- Our focus will be on **reading, writing and discussion**.
  - Each week students will complete an **assigned reading**, write a **mini-essay** in response, and **evaluate the work of others**.
  - Classes will emphasize discussion and debate.
  - The ability to speak, read and write fluently in English is **essential for success** in the class.

# Grading Scheme

Weekly Essay Questions	70 %
Weekly Peer Review	20%
In-class participation	10%

- No exams, but the essay questions are mini-exams that you'll write in the Computer Based Testing Facility
- The course emphasizes **making arguments and engaging with arguments made by your peers**
- We may change the exact percentage breakdowns shown here
- This is **not an easy course—something to hand in every class**
  - On the other hand, you'll learn a lot, and students who work hard throughout the term can expect to do well

# Essays in the CBTF

- First, you need to enroll for 430 in PrairieTest. (Some of you may already be enrolled; you'll find out when you try.)
- Each week, you will have to book a slot before you can use it. Slots are 50 minutes long. You can make these a few days in advance and can adjust your reservation time up to 30 mins before your reservation starts.
- You'll need to bring your student ID for each reservation. You're not permitted any electronic devices during your exam.
- If you have an accommodation through the Accessibility Center, you'll most likely receive your accommodation at the CBTF.
- You will get the essay prompt in advance. I recommend writing an outline and planning what you intend to write before heading to the CBTF.
- You're welcome to use ChatGPT (or a friend) to help you plan your essay, but you can't bring any materials with you into the CBTF, so you'll have to write in your own words.
- Surveys of students in past offerings of the course indicate that they found 50 minutes long enough to write their essays. If you need more time, you can book a second slot (restricted to Monday or Tuesday) and continue to edit (until the firm submission deadline). If this still isn't enough for you, please reach out to Raymond.



# Weekly Tempo

- **Between Thursday, 6:30 PM and Tuesday, 4:50 PM (sharp!)**
  - Do **assigned readings** of up to one chapter from the textbook  
Readings posted at <http://cs.ubc.ca/~kevinlb/teaching/cs430>
    - this week: materials on writing that are freely available online
  - Take a **multiple-choice quiz** online to test your comprehension
  - Write one **short essay** in the CBTF
    - You'll often be given multiple prompts from which to choose
    - You'll be allowed up to 2500 characters; that's less than one single-spaced page
    - You can bring 150 characters with you into the CBTF
  - At first: do some **calibrated peer review**
    - This is practice for the following; details in a minute
- **Between Tuesday, 6:30 PM and Thursday, 4:50 PM (sharp!)**
  - Perform between 3 and 7 **peer reviews** of others' essays
    - the number assigned to you will depend on previous week's class attendance; described shortly

# Grading Your Essays

- You'll **receive at least 3 peer reviews** of your work, each week
  - These reviews will be **double-blind** (you won't know who reviewed you)
  - You'll be graded on a five-point scale on four dimensions:
    - Was the essay **well structured**, stating a thesis, supporting it with argument(s) that are clearly related to this point and (if relevant) distinct from one another, and linking these arguments in a logical way?
    - Did the essay **do a good job of making its case**, choosing relevant arguments, backing them up with evidence and examples at an appropriate level of detail, and responding to contrary views as appropriate?
    - Did the essay demonstrate a **good understanding of the course's subject matter**, including both the topic and the wider context?
    - Was the essay presented **clearly and in correct English**?
  - Non-linear scale (0; 25; 50; 65; 80; 100); elements unevenly weighted (English counts only 1/5 as much)
  - You'll also get comments on each item, and an outline of your essay
- When you also **receive a review by a TA**: only the TA evaluation matters for your grade
- When you are evaluated **only by peers**: each of your peer grades will be weighted in proportion to our estimates of your peers' **dependability** as graders
  - If you disagree with your grade **you can appeal**, and a TA will re-grade your essay
- Essays are worth **increasing amounts** as the term goes on
  - your first 4 essay grades will be scaled by 0.6;
  - your next 4 essay grades will be scaled by 0.8;
  - your final 4 essays will be scaled by 1.0.

# Peer Review

## 1. Calibrated peer review

*Grading essays from previous years that we've graded already*

- Confirms that we all **understand the grading scheme** in the same way, and shows you examples of weak and strong essays

## 2. Supervised peer review

*Grading essays from this year when you haven't yet demonstrated proficiency at peer review*

- A **TA will grade the same essays**, and only the TA grade will count
- The TA will also assess whether you made **thoughtful comments**

## 3. Unsupervised peer review

*Grading essays from this year once you've demonstrated proficiency*

- Your review may be **spot checked or appealed**: checked by TA
  - Spot checks: very positive ratings; severe disagreements; random
- We'll update your dependability score based on your degree of agreement with peers (taking their own dependability into account) and, when available, degree of agreement with TAs

# Estimating Dependability

- We maintain estimates of each peer grader's "**dependability**" via [Bayesian inference](#)
  - The key idea is that calibrations and assignments graded by TAs give us information about which **graders are more reliable**
  - we then bootstrap this knowledge to decide how much to trust each grader on assignments that were **not graded by a TA**
- Your dependability score is our estimate of ***sensitivity* \* (1/*variance*)**
  - ***sensitivity*** is (1 – prob that you assign some value near the class average without considering the essay)
  - ***variance*** is your tendency to differ from true grades
- The system starts out with the assumption that all students have **low dependability scores** (specifically, low sensitivity and high variance)
- As you grade assignments/calibrations, we **update these beliefs**
  - doing **more calibrations** both helps you get better at grading and gives us evidence to counteract the system's pessimistic initial belief
  - if you always assign values close to **the class average**, we'll conclude that you have low sensitivity
    - you need to properly identify both strong and weak assignments in order to achieve a high dependability score
  - if you grade **too harshly or too generously**, we'll conclude that you have high variance

# Peer Review: Reviewer Perspective

- Do **at least 3 calibrated reviews** (more the first week; can always do more) before 4:50 PM every Tuesday that you're required to do so
  - Week 1: this means everyone!
  - Week 2+: only if required
- Do **assigned reviews of others' essays** before 4:50 PM Thursday
- How we'll calculate **your peer review grade** (20% of the course):
  - **Scaled dependability scores**, snapshotted each week
  - We'll scale your peer review grades like your essay grades:
    - your first 4 peer review grades will be scaled by 0.6;
    - your next 4 peer review grades will be scaled by 0.8;
    - your final 4 peer review grades will be scaled by 1.0.
  - If you don't do all required reviews (peer reviews; calibrations when required) your dependability-based grade will be **scaled down**; see web page for formulas

# In Class Attendance and Participation

- **Active participation** in the class is a key element of this course
  - “**Flipped classroom**”: lectures don’t focus on transmitting information
  - Instead, they focus on **interaction, discussion and critical analysis**
- Participating in **class discussions** contributes to your participation grade and reduces your peer grading workload:
  - We’ll use **Mechanical TA** to adjudicate in-class discussions
    - starting next week, basis of participation grades
  - If you want to contribute to a discussion, you click a button to **raise your hand**
  - Every time I call on someone
    - **one student** with a raised hand will be randomly selected to respond
    - **every student** who had a hand raised will be recorded for participation purposes
  - Every class you raise your hand at least once will reduce your following week’s peer grading quota by 2
  - If you attend every class and raise your hand exactly once per class, you'll have to peer grade 3 essays per week instead of 7

# Calculating Your 10% Participation Grade

- **Raising your hand** (even if you are not called to speak) counts as participating
- If you're **chosen to speak**
  - you will probably **not be chosen** to speak again during the same class
    - unless the only hands raised are from students who have already spoken
  - you'll be **counted as having raised your hand** for the remainder of the class

Raise your hand this many times	Get this many points
0	0
1	5
2	6
3	6.5
4	7
The median among students who participated at least once	8
The maximum among students who participated at least once	10

*Linear interpolation*  
(see website)

# How participation affects your grade

- Severe **consequences** for trying to game the system
  - If you clearly just raised your hand for points rather than to contribute to the discussion, you'll get **zero points for the entire day**
    - regardless of how many other points you might have been awarded earlier that day
  - If you use MTA to raise your hand while **not physically present in the class**, this will be treated as a case of **academic misconduct** and serious penalties will apply
    - TAs will always be able to see a real-time list of which students have put their hands up
    - The instructor has access to UBC Card photos via Workday
    - We reserve the right to verify physical attendance even for students who are not called upon.

# “What if something goes wrong, and I can’t submit an essay/review?”

- We’ll **drop your worst 2 essay and peer review grades**, allowing for cases where:
  - you miss the (firm) deadline
  - you’re sick, out of town, have a conflict with another course, ...
  - you face hardships due to the pandemic
  - you register for the course late
  - you get a poor grade on one essay

(We’ll renormalize your grades accordingly)

- We’ll also **drop the 4 classes in which you have the lowest participation grades**
- Other extensions or waivers will be granted only in **truly exceptional circumstances**
  - Unless you have an exceptional excuse, you’ll simply get a grade of zero
  - (Brief) illness isn’t an exceptional excuse, see above
  - Registering in the course late isn’t an exceptional excuse
    - If you’re on the waitlist, start actively participating now!

# This all starts right away!

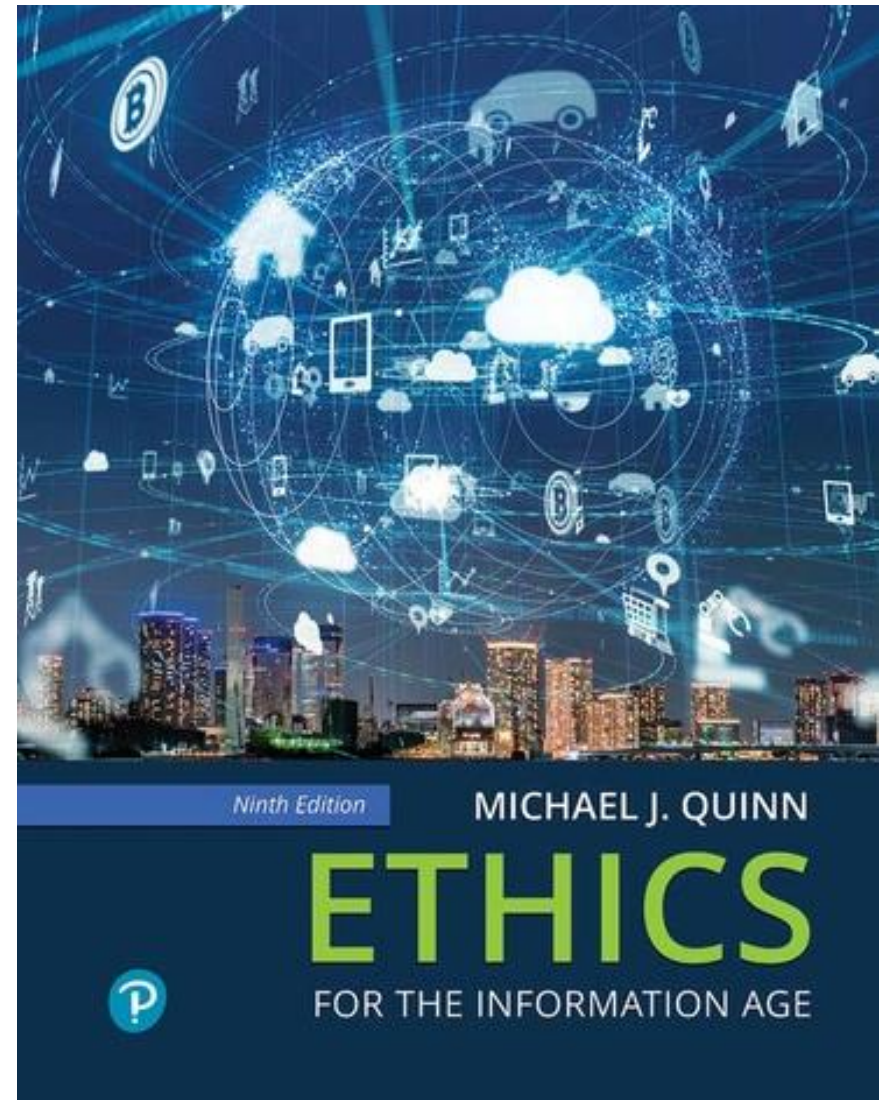
- Before **next Tuesday at 4:50 PM**:
  - ☑ **read the assigned readings on essay writing** (Additional resources 1-7)
  - ☑ **log in** to “Mechanical TA” and:
    - ☑ perform **calibrated peer reviews**; try to get into the independent pool
    - ☑ complete a **quiz** (or you can’t do peer reviews later)
    - ☑ write an outline for your **short essay** of up to 150 characters
  - ☑ Write your essay in the CBTF; you have to book an appointment first
  - ☑ Come to class with a laptop or phone so you can use MTA to “raise your hand”
  - ☑ Join **Piazza**: <https://piazza.com/ubc.ca/winterterm12025/cpsc430>
- Don’t leave this to the last minute!
  - It might take you a bit of time to get your accounts set up, etc.
  - Not everyone can have a CBTF slot immediately before next class
  - Raymond will have (Zoom) office hours to help out with such issues
- For everything else, check the website

OK, I get where the room is and how you'll compute my grade. What will we be learning?

# **COURSE CONTENT**

# Textbook

- We will be using the textbook *Ethics for the Information Age, 9<sup>th</sup> Ed*, by Michael J. Quinn.
- It's important that you have a copy, because we'll be reading the whole thing—starting next week!
- Old editions exist, but you're responsible for all material in the 9<sup>th</sup> edition.



# Topics (pretty cool stuff, actually 😊)

- Writing and argumentation, History of computing, storage, networking (next 3 classes)
- Ethics & Argumentation (5 classes)
- Social issues (1 week each):
  - Networked communications
  - Intellectual Property
  - Information Privacy
  - Privacy and the Government
  - Artificial Intelligence
  - Computer & Network Security
  - Computer Reliability
  - Professional Ethics
  - Work & Wealth
- Next class:
  - break into 18 groups
  - get assigned a statement and a position for or against
  - develop arguments for your assigned position
  - present your arguments to the class; we'll discuss briefly
  - everyone votes on the issue (you vote freely)
  - we'll revisit these questions throughout the course. You'll get to see if your opinions change.

# If Time Permits...

- Break into small groups
- What topic at the interface of computers and society concerns you most?
- How should we go about evaluating arguments about what should be done to address this issue?