

FRS 129 Sex, Money, and Rock and Roll: Information Technology and Society [SA]
Freshman Seminar in Human Values
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At Princeton, 80 to 90 percent of the nighttime traffic on the campus network involves student use of KaZaA to "share" music and video files. Many of you probably use KaZaA also. You may or may not know that the music-sharing activity made possible by KaZaA, and similar programs like its predecessor Napster (now closed down under court injunction), is illegal because it violates copyright laws. KaZaA circumvents American law because the company is based on a South Pacific Island where the laws of copyright are different. What you almost certainly don't know is that when you install the KaZaA software, you consent -- by clicking through the fine-print licensing agreement -- to give KaZaA access to unused resources on your personal computer for KaZaA's purposes. (Although KaZaA doesn't currently use these resources, other similar sites do.)

The KaZaA example raises many of the questions we will address in this seminar as we study the technological advances that make software such as KaZaA possible, the legal questions raised by the globalization of the internet, and the evolving nature of copyright and the ownership of digitalized media such as music and movies. We will examine a series of public policy issues concerning the ways in which government and private interests can best develop, nurture, or regulate the new technologies that contribute to and are associated with the Internet. These issues include the "digital divide" -- whether, if, and how, the Internet should be accessible to all and contribute to equality of opportunity; the commercialization of the Internet and the tensions between private gain and public purpose; how to deal with demand for the restriction of potentially offensive material; the role of the Internet in the political process; and the future of privacy in a wired world.

We will first come up to speed with basic information about the technologies that constitute the Internet, and about the way that social scientists think about the difference that technologies make for families, communities, and societies. Then, we will discuss a series of case studies of social and policy dilemmas. What makes this seminar different from most courses on these topics is its thoroughly interdisciplinary character, which reflects the instructors' conviction that understanding these issues requires a strong grounding in both the relevant technological science and the relevant social science.

Seminar reading will be eclectic, including materials written by scholars in computer science, economics, engineering, information science, law, philosophy, political science, and sociology. Some assignments or laboratories will be technical exercises aimed at providing an understanding of concepts from computer science. Others will use social-scientific research techniques to understand a policy issue. The final work of the term will be a research paper, informed by your understanding of the technology, on a policy topic of your choice. (Tuesday 1:30 - 4:20 p.m.)