Ethics Issue Paper – COMPSCI 590E

Overview:

This writing assignment asks you to examine a specific ethical issue within the field of computing, broadly conceived, and to explain its associated ethical concerns.

Specifications:

- Length = 5-7 pages, or 1250-1500 words. Longer submissions will not be penalized, but 1250 words is the minimum length.
- Sources = 3 academic sources at minimum. These can include journal articles, books or refereed conference proceedings. Additional non-peer reviewed sources, such as quality newspaper or web sources may be used beyond the 3.
- Citation = ACM documentation style is expected. Here is a link for style guidelines: http://www.acm.org/publications/authors/reference-formatting
- Topic = must relate to computing, broadly conceived, and should be current in its concerns, even if it has historical roots or antecedents.

Description:

This assignment asks you to select an issue of social or ethical concern within or related to computing. This issue can be very new, emerging, or it can be one that we have recognized in the past but is still ongoing. Your essay will be stronger if you try to be specific whenever possible. You do not have to take a stance in the sense of advocating for a specific solution or outcome, but you should be prepared to state and justify why you think there is an ethical concern and what you see as the primary reasons that the issue needs to be addressed. Some ways to do that include naming and describing various stakeholders, exploring future outcomes or logical trajectories based on existing well-founded assumptions, comparing your selected issue to one that was previously dealt with in the past, or discussing how different individuals have different degrees of vulnerability or advantage depending on their identity or nationality or distance from the issue.

Papers that attempt to extrapolate some kind of ethical thought process or approach are likely to be more successful than those that focus too heavily on simply identifying or assigning blame within an individual or isolated scenario. In other words, it is less important that you have a solution/cause for the problem and more important that you model a way of thinking about the issue that makes visible its components in order to facilitate decision making. Your introduction should clearly specify what issue you are examining, what tools or ways of thinking (theories) about the problem that you are using, and what relationship (if any) you have to the issue at hand. For example, if you worked in or would like to work in an industry connected to the topic or if you have engaged in previous research on the topic, then disclosing that would help the reader to better discern your perspective and your ethos as a writer.