Possible topics for talks in CS 225 (Summer 2006)

Privacy

1. Some stores specialize in maternity clothes for pregnant women. Is the fact that a woman is pregnant considered personal information? Should these types of stores be allowed to sell customer information to other companies that sell products to pregnant women?

2. Politicians are public figures, what if a newspaper got access the list of pay-per-view movies a politician watched? Should it be able to publish that list?

3. Is the image of your face considered private property? (Or, is the image of President Bush's face private property?) What if a computer generated porn movie used your face on one of the characters? Should you be able to sue the company that made the film?

4. Under what circumstances is data mining of personal data appropriate? Consider Amazon.com suggesting books, NSA data mining phone records looking for terrorists, advertisers examining your credit card records for shopping habits.

Security

5. Would you be willing to pay a small fee for a nationally or internationally regulated email system that used digital signatures to be able to identify the sender of each and every email and be able to eliminate spam? Would we lose anything by giving up the free, open and mostly unregulated system we have now?

6. Can we build and safe and effective system for online voting? Would it be worth the cost? Why are so many computer scientists against such a system?

7. Should Microsoft be liable for problems caused by the lack of security in their software? If yes, how do you address the fact that all software is buggy? If no, how do you address malicious acts (e.g. intentional back doors) or gross negligence?

Privacy and Security

8. Should (will) a National ID card system be implemented in the United States? If so, what conditions or controls should be applied?

9. The location and movement of people carrying cell phones can be tracked. How long should cell phone companies keep that information before it is destroyed? Should the government be able to collect and store it for future use? Can this information be used for commercial purposes, for example, how much do you travel or what stores do you visit?

10. Should state governments be allowed to outsource software projects to countries like India and China? Why not use US based companies?

11. Discuss the theft of the Veteran's Administration laptop, resulting in the possible exposure of personal information for tens of millions of veterans and active duty
military personnel. Was this the employee's problem? the VA's problem? What should be done to avoid this kind of incident in the future?

Software: Licensing, Warranties, etc.

12. Should we have a law in the US about outlawing “no return” software after the box has been opened. What if the software will not even install? Should the law take the price into account?

13. Laws have been proposed that would allow software makers to remotely disable software because of licensing violations, would this benefit consumers or hurt them in the long run?

14. Should “non transferable” software licenses be legal?

15. Is the ESRP rating system effective? How could it be improved or should we get rid of it?

Intellectual Property and Digital Rights Management

16. The US has a very liberal software patent system. Canada does not allow software patents. Which system is better? Does a third system need to be developed?

17. Media companies want to make hardware and software standards preventing you from skipping commercials when you view the show. Is this an ethical treatment of the consumer? (Remember that media companies make most of their income from advertising.)

18. The Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) makes circumvention of "technical means of protection" illegal, except in certain circumstances. What are the trade-offs? Should the exceptions be decreased or increased? Are fewer stronger controls needed? What are the costs to copyright holders and to society at large?

19. Explain the Sony "root kit" fiasco. Should this sort of thing be illegal? Why? If it is legal, under what conditions (e.g. notification, …)?

Social Issues

20. Network Neutrality. What are the issues? What is Google's position? What is Verizon's position? What do you think should be done?

21. Do software engineer’s at large companies like Microsoft and EA need unions? What are the benefits and costs to the employees, to the companies, and to consumers at large?

22. Do software engineers need to be licensed like other engineering professions?

23. Should child porn be legal if the images of children in the film are computer generated?