1 Message1

Welcome to CS492 the Social Implications of Computing. In previous years I would have said that you should walk away from this course believing that this is the best course you have ever taken at the University of Waterloo. It will be somewhat more challenging this term to hold to that claim with the online delivery. All the same, I am trying to emulate as much as possible the course that I would have offered in the classroom setting. We will lose the opportunity for face to face contact in a setting where you would have easily learned the names of all your classmates and felt a kind of social bond, but I will still endeavour to promote some of that same connection with the online discussion boards that we will be running. I will explain that more in a moment. Some of the other value-addeds of this course which are fairly easily retained are: the opportunity to write several essays and to get detailed feedback on your writing, towards learning how to communicate effectively; the rather rare opportunity to learn about a topic which I would claim is really vital for students in computer science (you all have a responsibility to be part of the discussion on the implications of computerization, as a group of people who has the technical expertise to judge what can and cannot be done with the systems that we build); a chance to work together in small groups on a few brainstorming exercises (our group assignment this year is in fact on the fascinating topic of digital misinformation and you will get to suggest what governments, organizations and individuals may all be able to do about this problem); and occasions as well to think on your feet, to reach to what others have said on the spot (a skill that I am sure your future employers will be very happy to know that you have aquired).

What is unique about our handling of the topic of social implications of computers is the fact that students all have expertise in computer science: this enables us to engage in discussions where our understanding of how the technology works is at play. Some of the assignments invite you to propose recommendations and at times these too may be coloured by your knowledge of what is actually feasible.

2 Message2

It is important for me to make a few things clear about the course, in order for you to decide whether you want to remain or not. If you are thinking of leaving, please do so quickly as the beginning of the term is when we need to sort ourselves into small teams for the role playing exercises. Knowing who is and is not in the course becomes very important, for us to organize. Some key points about the course include: there are no exams; twenty percent of your course grade is based on class participation (and this year that becomes participation on our newsgroup BUT that is run in a very specific way, that you need to understand and FOLLOW – basically we will be having Mon Wed and Fri "classes" (encouraging you to be online at certain times but allowing you to still contribute asynchronously but on THOSE days of the week, Eastern time zone – more in a moment); you have to write 4 essays individually, 1 in a group, and to fill in 1 answer-the-question sheet and these assignments make up 60 percent of your grade (but you get feedback in order to progressively improve with your writing); you are also put into teams for role playing exercises which require 1 position paper, 1 very brief joint-agreement document and demonstrated talent in answering questions from your classmates, for the final 20 percent of your grade.

3   Message3

We will be running the course online this year but trying to respect as much as possible the kind of system we used when face to face. For discussion, students who would like to speak can indicate this and each will be invited to speak, one by one. But we will not be using voice or video; students will type their comments. Even in the face-to-face setting, students had been encouraged to be brief. For class participation: simply being "in class" almost all the time is sufficient to get a respectable class participation grade. For the online version this means posting once during the period beginning at the start time of the section and ending at Midnight the same day, to at least indicate: I am here but do not have a comment. As was the case with the face-to-face version, it isn't quantity of participation which matters the most; the quality of what you say is also being judged. I also make an effort give the floor to those students who have not had a chance to speak, at various times.

While students have a chance to add a post after the class timeslot has ended, this is not a competition to say as much as you can nor it is a task requiring lots of extra attention from you. Mention something if your "hand wasn't taken" or if you were unable to be online during the timeslot, make it brief and then move on to the other course requirements.

4   Message4

As was the case in earlier years, a large part of your final grade is based on an evaluation of your written assignments (mostly essays of varying length). The grading scheme for assignments will be posted to the newsgroup but for most assignments we think in terms of a letter grade (e.g. B+ or A-) and then covert to a numeric value for the final calculation. A Piazza post in the Prof. Cohen Folder shows the conversion for each letter grade (e.g. A- is an 83 percent) and indicates that I also used some artificial intermediate letter grades to distinguish talent (i.e I add an A-borderline with a value of 80 and an Aborderline for a mark of 86, in addition to A- at 83, A at 89 and A+ at 95). I grade the first 4 assignments myself and try to give lots of feedback.

On two occasions you fill out a sheet which counts towards your course grade. For Assignment 2, you answer two short questions in the space provided on the sheet (so brief responses) and there is not background reading required. For Assignment 5B, you will be provided with an essay written by a classmate and an evaluation form with blank spaces for comments and your completed sheet counts towards your class participation grade. We will manage the submission of all assignments in LEARN. More detail about the orchestration of Assignment 5B will be provided, later.

The final assessment towards your final grade comes from Role Playing Exercises. As in previous years, each student will be part of an RPE team (with a chance to specify preferences) and each team will be asked to post a written position statement, with the two (opposing) teams required to come together after the RPE to draft a very brief joint communique, which is also posted. Whereas in previous years each team did an oral presentation and replied to questions being asked, with the online version we will eliminate the oral presentation and judge RPE teams on how well they respond to questions; there will also be an opportunity for a brief synopsis and a brief conclusion, from each team. Skills of thinking on your feet will be in play. Students receive feedback on their RPEs about a week after this takes place, but grades for RPEs are not determined until the very last class of the term (so that TAs can judge the collection of RPEs as a whole). Note that TAs connect with me to discuss possible grades for RPEs before they are

decided in finality; I also give them some guidelines for grading.

Grades for Assignments 1 to 4 will be available a certain period of time after they have been completed, with a real effort to give feedback on A1 before A3 is to be submitted. Grades for Assignments 5 and 6 will only be decided after the term is over (a number of weeks after, to allow everyone time to grade). At that time Class Participation grades will be decided (as these incorporate evaluation of your skill in analyzing an essay submitted by a peer (A5B)).

5 Message5

For the groupwork that takes place in the course, at times you have control over who your groupmates are and at times you do not. For the RPEs, you are all invited to specify your preferences for groupmates and to indicate your top 3 choices for RPE team. Requests are handled by the TAs first come first served and you are urged to send these in very quickly. The RPE chart on the page begins to grow so that you can see which slots are already full. In order to split the class into two groups (one discussing topic of the week Mon and one on Wed) I form that group1 and group2 split. I try to keep RPE groupmates together in a group (at times this allows the day of the week not being used for discussion to be a time when the RPE team can connect online). For Assignment 4, I also form the groups and here I try to be somewhat careful to spread out some of the more absent or less talented students in the class amongst the groups, for fairness. I tend to grade groupwork very leniently. The main purpose of our Assignment 4 is to allow students some free reign in their thinking. We set aside one date when groupmates are to be collaborating, to move forward and during that time period I will be available to answer questions; I will also post some general advice about strategies for organizing a group.

While most of our weeks have a topic of the week and readings, on some occasions we are all together to handle a particular discussion. This happens for our guest lecturer (whose video will be stored and made viewable before class and who will be online during class time to respond to questions), for our discussion of video games, for an early brainstorming exercise ("solve a problem") and for the final class where we have a chance to reflect on the entire experience. On this last day there are typically a few "awards" and commendations for certain classmates as well. The idea is that this should be a social experience, even if we are not face to face.

6 Message6

I will urge you to read all of the website contents carefully. In several places I explain the process this year with online in a lot of detail, maybe more than you really need to know. In this way, just about all of your questions will be answered.

The reality is that for this course, because I grade the first four assignments, there are periods where I am not very reachable via email. This is why I always have you cc Andreas astoecke@uwaterloo.ca regardless if you are in Sec1 or Sec2. The RPEs are managed totally by the TAs; I am not involved while they are running. I do oversight at the end with TAs however before grades are decided.

The first page you should look at carefully is the Timetable. It outlines which topics we are going to focus on this year, for Readings and Discussion, and for Assignments and RPEs. At several times, the assignment being written relates to a recently handled discussion topic. Often, the RPE of the week aligns in some way with the discussion topic as well. We will be covering:

Overview of Social Implications (where your A1 asks you reflect on what you think is the Biggest Problem – feel free to do personal reflection and research is not being asked for (though if you are claiming a statistic or hard fact, then you do need to cite). A1 comes up pretty soon into the course; it is due 10am Waterloo time on Thu May 21. It is a very short assignment and is worth about 5 marks. All assignment grades are shown in terms of multiples of 5s – but when the assignment total is determined that grade out of 50 gets converted to one out of 60. (So... technically A1 is worth 6 marks but that is harder to wrap your head around).

Once we get through Week1, we are in a shorter week due to Victoria Day and we are discussing The Internet. I will ask you to view a video for one of the classes: this will give you a good perspective on the origins of the Internet and will let you keep this in the back of your minds for the rest of term. There are a fair number of readings that week. You are always welcome to just skim some; most are fairly short. A lot of the time the readings are there as food for thought for future assignments, such as A5. By the time we get to our May 22 class a few important announcements are on the go: A2 is made visible on the website. It is a short answer one page sheet for you to complete, thinking just from the top of your head (no research required – want to see your thinking processes). If we were meeting face to face, it would have been done during classtime. You have a longer stretch for it, but the time to complete it is not intended to be long. It is handed in May 28. Also by May 22 we will reveal a) all the RPE groups for the course (shown on a webpage) and b) whether you are in Group1 or Group2 for your section. Your section shows which newsgroup you are in, who can be possible groupmates for RPEs and Assignments. The Groups is an artificial split of the section to enable our discussions to involve fewer people. We reserve the right to dissolve the groups if the turnout at each class is too light for good discussion. This is another reason for you to be encouraged to be online during the designated classtime (if you are able – no one is penalized for not making it, due to all the extenuating circumstances this year). Knowing your Group is important because for all dates in the Timetable that have a group in parens, you attend that day if this is Your group and do not, if it is the other group. In a typical week, Group 1 participates in the newsgroup on Mondays and the RPE on Friday but skips Wednesdays, for instance.

Week 3 onwards proceeds with the smaller groups for discussion. The earlier discussions are a bit more crowded but it is difficult to split the class until the phase when people stop being added/subtracted ends. We have core topics following of Privacy, Work (two classes, one focused on productivity and nature of work; one focused on e-commerce and changing workplace), Ethics, Computer-Mediated Communication, Gender Equity).

Around this time, we end the Group 1 and Group 2 split and come together for a discussion on the pros and cons of video games, view an interesting guest lecture on computers and mental health, and then have two ending classes: Jul 27 has its timeslot set aside for you to complete course evaluations (after hearing a speech) and for you to be handed a peer's A5 to evaluate, with a form provided where you should be able to do all that in class time (more or less). Again, those unable to be online still have more time to finish this task (say by the last class, Jul 29). Our discussion board on Jul 27 will merely have a few announcements and instructions for you. On Jul 29, we will say a few words about the grading of RPEs in advance of grades being revealed on LEARN. We will get into a final discussion of the course and its topics and maybe award a few prizes for outstanding students.

Apart from Topics of the Week, RPEs consume 10 of our classes so I need to say a few words about them, and about the Assignments that you complete. I will do that next.

7   Message7

Let me continue by clarifying what RPEs are and saying a few words about the calculation of your overall grade. Role Playing Exercises are supposed to be like Town Hall discusions on a topic where there may be two diverging opions. It is not a debate, however because teams are not supposed to be spewing venom at the opposite side. When we were face to face there was an oral presentation component during class time but I am replacing this with simply asking teams to show up to class (at least one teammember and hopefully more) so that during the classtime, there is a synposis of position, teams answering questions from classmates and a closing statement. Everything is timed and moderated by the TAs. Those who cannot participate during the timeslot can ask very brief questions later that day. RPE teams will view the collection of additional questions and offer a general response. Teams will get a score for their in-class performance, as well as a grade for a written position paper handed in, in advance of the RPE date and a joint communique brief document, assembled after both sides talk to each other to see common ground. TAs give feedback on RPEs not long after they take place but actual grades are not distributed until Jul 29, the last class (with oversight from me, with comparisons between RPEs made). VERY important: those who go first will be graded more leniently, and your requests come in right after class time, first come first served. So go for it! When you indicate a preference you email NOT ME but your TA in charge. Read the instructions. Indicate multiple choices. A chart will grow for you to see what is still open to choose. Teams are 2 or 3. We put stragglers into open spots at the end and reserve the right to cancel an RPE if numbers dictate and to move around the last people in. TAs will make sure everyone knows emails of teammates. I have corresponded with everyone in the same section in one email that reveals all emails of classmates so feel free to search for someone you may know, to see if they want to be your teammate. If you have no preference, still email us to let us know. You can arrive as singleton for your favourite RPE or can simply request to be put "wherever needed".

The overall class grade splits up as: 20 for RPEs, 20 for class participation (judged on how clever your comments are more so than how often you post but we take attendance on each class day (during timeslot or later that same day until midnight (Eastern)) and good attendance (I am here, no coments) still earns you a respectable grade. Assignments are worth 60 marks. One is a sheet of short answers (A2). The other are essays. A4 is done in groups of 5 where we form the groups and let you know in advance. There is one day in the schedule devoted to allowing teams to meet, with my endeavouring to answer any questions that arise (and giving some general advice at the outset). A1 and A6 are short pieces of 750 words. A3 and A5 are longer 2000 word essays with required research and citation. Feedback on the earlier assignments may help you to improve on the later one. A4 is 2500 words but has several required elements and multiple people writing. A5 is worth 15 marks because there is some open-ended choice. A3 and A4 are worth 10 marks and I grade groupwork very leniently. There is a form to report groupmates who fail to contribute, dramatically and if any of these cases arise I reserve the right to zero their grade. A1 and A6 are worth 5 marks. A6 asks you to reflect on the RPEs. You need to pay special attention during one RPE where you are not a "presenter" and report on it. Pick a date to pay attention. You can get most of A6 done early in the term. You also add a chart with a one line comment on all RPEs attended. A2 is worth 5 marks too. As mentioned before the grade out of 50 for assignments is converted to one out of 60. Many of your grades are revealed in LEARN before the end of term. A5, A6 and Class Paricipation do not show up until about the 3rd week of August. Class participation is affected by the exercise called A5B, which takes place the same day that A5

is due, Jul 27.

I think this hits the highlights. Unfortunately a few more pages for you to read than in previous years. Let me conclude with a few more words about course delivery through discussion boards and expectations.

8   Message8

At this point I am just going to urge all students to carefully read the messages posted on our website about Online Delivery. The first message appears as part of our Structure webpage, towards the end. It highlights the fact that you need to participate in the Piazza newsgroup of your section only and that the newsgroups are being used for the Online Delivery. The second message appears on a webpage pointed to on the main page of our site, towards the bottom, at the spot where you are invited to join your Piazza newsgroup. It is a page of important notes, making clear that you do not discuss assignments on Piazza. Piazza is used for specific purposes only. There is also a Class Tech for Online page, with a few links. One page clearly explains out use of website, Piazza, email and LEARN. LEARN has ONE use only: to submit your assignments (and for us to provide feedback and eventually grades, for assignments). The other pages go into more detail on use of Piazza for Discussion. The primary messages are: do not post during class time unless invited to do so; respond quickly to polls that tell us whether you are there and whether you have a comment to make; keep all posts brief; use the Folder for the class in question; put First Name, Last Initial into Summary field when posting; refresh often.

You are all registered in either Section1 or Section2 of the course. The timeslot used for synchronous discussion in Section1 is 830am MWF; the timeslot for Section2 is 930am. For RPE classes, TAs are online during these timeslots; for the remaining classes I am online and moderate. If you cannot be online during classtime you can still obtain class participation credit; it is just that your posts will be viewed en masse at the end of the day (midnight) and there won't be any interaction. We urge you to be online during classtime, if possible, for a more valued experience. At least this is our expectation!