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## Cyber-ethics joins college curriculum

By Lawrence Hardy  
USA TODAY

Colleges around the country are adding courses in computer ethics as fast as a new generation of students comes on-line.

Spurred by the worldwide growth of computing and Internet access, more faculty and students will return to campuses in a few weeks and ponder right and wrong in an electronically linked world.

"By 1996, there'll be 400" computer ethics courses offered at U.S. college, says Terry Bynum, director of the Research Center on Computing and Society at South Connecticut State University, New Haven. "By now, we're approaching the 300 point."

Leading the field are a handful of philosophy professors and a larger number of computer professionals — the academics most affected so far.

But increasingly, issues such as privacy, censorship and copyright will touch non-professionals as well. They straddle traditional disciplines, touching on fields as diverse as sociology and psychology.

"I'd say computer ethics is where bioethics was in the early '70s" — that is, in its adolescence, says Patrick Sullivan of the Computing Ethics Institute in Washington, D.C.

A few law professors are also pioneering courses on legal implications of cyberspace — and the number is expected to increase dramatically, says Trotter Hardy, editor of the new *Journal of Online Law*.

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► Computing quandaries, 6D

# Tapping into new ethical quandaries

By Lawrence Hardy  
USA TODAY

They laughed at Walter Maner in 1976 — the year he coined the phrase "computer ethics."

"I became a kind of evangelist," says Maner, who taught philosophy at Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Va., and is now a computer scientist at Bowling Green (Ohio) State University. To get people interested, he would pose ethical questions. An example: Since pirating software doesn't deprive the original owner of anything, is it really theft?

Now some of Maner's fears have been realized — and no one's laughing anymore. The field is studied by a growing number of computer science students and urged for others whose lives will be changed by the new technology.

Some scholars say existing ethical frameworks can be applied to cyberspace. Others maintain that the medium has so changed the nature of communications — creating international "communities" with only tenuous electronic ties — that nothing short of evolving ethics can contain it.

"The field is exploding so fast, I don't know if we can keep up with it," says Terry Bynum, who chairs the Ameri-



By Lori King, AP  
**AN UNKNOWN FRONTIER:** Foreseeing some of the dangers, Walter Maner coined the term 'computer ethics' in 1976.

can Philosophical Association's Committee on Philosophy and Computing.

Keeping up with the field has, in large part, meant keeping tabs on the Internet, the

electronic network of networks linking people around the globe.

New possibilities have spawned novel twists on old issues: What privacy rights do users have on the Internet? Is it ever right to access an individual's private file? A corporation's? A government's?

"There's a real pervasive notion that if something is not illegal, it's OK to do," says Patrick Sullivan, executive director of the Computer Ethics Institute, a Washington non-profit group.

Other questions concern limits on anonymous speech or coded material (encryption), both of which have been criticized for their potential to obstruct criminal investigations.

"Civil libertarians go into orbit over (the encryption issue)," says Trotter Hardy of William & Mary's Marshall-Wythe School of Law. They say, "I can speak in whatever language I want to, and if you can't read it, it's your tough luck."

Also unresolved are questions of intellectual property. When, for example, is it permissible to copy an author's work on the Internet without violating a copyright?

Scholars approach these issues from two sides. Some say traditional ethics still work.

"It's a new species of a go-

neric moral problem," says Deborah Johnson, a philosophy professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, who has helped other schools create computer ethics courses.

Others maintain the medium is so revolutionary that ethics will evolve with it.

"Computer technology is the most powerful and the most flexible technology ever developed," says Bynum, who teaches philosophy at Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven. "Even though it's called a technical revolution, at heart it's a social and ethical revolution because it changes everything we value."

It will also be a legal revolution, say law professors.

The legal questions spawned by computers and the Internet cross traditional legal boundaries, touching on everything from commerce to civil rights. But the issues are new; there is little case law, says Mark Lemley, a University of Texas at Austin law professor.

"It feels like we're on a frontier of the law," says Lemley, who runs an Internet discussion group on teaching computer law. "I think for a limited time everybody who's participating will have an opportunity to shape the future course of the law — and it's not all that often that happens."