Assignment 4
Due Thursday, February 16 2006

Follow the link off the schedule page and read the ACM Code of Ethics.

Make three *distinct* critiques of the ACM Code. Back up each critique with strong and careful analysis in which you make and support at least two points that support your claim that you have identified a problem with the code. Propose a fix for each criticism that you make and argue that your fix will, in fact, address the problem you have identified. Use 2-3 pages.

For each critique, half of your grade depends on the quality of your critique and half on the quality of the fix you propose. Fixes must be concrete: spell out the text to delete from or to add to the code. Avoid vague and easy dodges such as "the code should not have this defect" or "the authors should do x and y to fix this problem", where x and y are not redactions.

Please format each critique as follows:

1. **Never Rest Objection**

   The "never rest objection" is <define>. It arises because of x and y in the text. Supporting argument follows.

   Fix: If the clause a in rule n on page q were dropped and rule b were changed to d and rule s were added, then the edited code would no longer be subject to this objection because of l.

If you cannot bring yourself to make three criticisms, fill your shortfall with a detailed explanation of an issue that you believe the code handles excellently. Your analysis must closely follow the text, as with the critiques, and point out how some particular rule, which you should name, or text, which you should quote, prevents some issue or achieves some worthy goal. Present your analysis using the above format, replacing "Fix" with "Explanation."

Writing a code of ethics, such as the ACM Code of Ethics, is a difficult task. One source of difficulty is that a code of ethics must walk a tightrope between generality and specificity: if it is either too general or too specific, it risks irrelevancy. Another source of difficulty is that a code of ethics must transcend ethical schools, while at the same time borrowing from their insights. If a code of ethics favors one school of ethics, it might alienate an important segment of the code's audience, since humankind has not yet and may never settle on one school. The point of these observations is to ask that you avoid critiques that fall right out of these two problems, such as arguing at a given rule is too general (and should be more specific) or too specific (and should be more general), or that the code should explicitly pick and apply an ethical framework: such critiques are just too easy.

Instead please try to focus on other problems that you may find. For example, can you find a topic or rule in the code is inconsistent or vague?

As usual, ethical relativistic arguments that boil down to asserting that international codes are impossible by definition or worse 3 pages of tedious elaboration to that effect will net you few points.