COMP 492 Assignment 0: Leading a Discussion

Instructions

Each student is required to lead one class discussion.   This involves the following steps:

- **Choose a date for the discussion:** Use the Moodle choice feature labeled "Choose a date for leading a discussion" at the top of the course's Moodle page. This operates according to a first-come first-served system. Deadline: the end of the first week of classes.
- **Choose a topic for the discussion:** Submit your choice to the Moodle forum labelled "Choose a topic for your discussion." See the assignment web page for a list of possible topics, but you are also free to choose any other topic you think may be suitable. The topic must be approved by the instructor. You may not select a topic that is identical to, or (in the opinion of the instructor) too similar to, a topic already selected another student. Topic selections will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis, based on the order of posting to the Moodle forum. Deadline: three weeks before the discussion
- **Create a reading list for the discussion, and publish it on your web page:** The reading list must contain at least one scholarly source (taken from an academic journal article or published book) other than our textbook (Quinn). Obviously, the reading list must contain enough substance to sustain a two-hour discussion. There are no further restrictions: the reading list might consist of an excerpt from a single scholarly source, or it could consist of the scholarly source together with various other sources such as newspaper and magazine articles, blogs, excepts from Quinn, or additional scholarly sources. The readings must be made available to the class without violating copyright law, via links on your web page and/or posting scanned PDFs to Moodle (email such documents to the instructor, who will upload to Moodle for you). Deadline: the start of class, one week before the discussion.
- **Create a list of discussion questions, and publish it on your webpage:** a minimum of eight questions is required. The participants will bring written or typed answers to the questions to class. Deadline: the start of class, one week before the discussion.
- **Conduct some additional research:** to amplify the discussion, the leader should have knowledge of the topic beyond the assigned readings. Make some notes on additional sources or readings and plan to use them during the discussion somehow. Deadline: the discussion itself.
- **Plan the discussion:** decide what activities you will use to ensure a lively and educational discussion. Ideally, the discussion will not consist solely of working through the prepared questions, although this can be a significant component if you wish. If you need ideas for this, take a look at the article "The Dreaded Discussion: Ten Ways to Start" by Peter Frederick. This is available on Moodle. The article is addressed to college professors, but the advice in it will be just as useful for students planning discussions. Deadline: the discussion itself.

Grading

- **Reading list (20%):** Do the readings explain the topic well? If appropriate, do they represent different points of view of the topic? Is the length and level of difficulty appropriate for the class? Are they interesting?

- **Discussion questions (20%):** Do the discussion questions encourage the participants to consider a good range of issues relevant to the discussion topic? Do some of the questions ensure factual understanding, while others allow for debate and reflection?
- **Knowledge of topic (40%):** Does the discussion leader demonstrate excellent knowledge of the topic, including detailed and illuminating answers to all the discussion questions? Does the discussion leader demonstrate knowledge of the topic beyond the assigned readings?
- **Liveliness of the discussion (10%):** Is the discussion enjoyable, interesting, and lively, with reasonable levels of interaction by all participants?
- **Planning and time management (10%):** Does the discussion appear well-planned? Is the timing suitable? (It should last between 1.5 and 2 hours, with an optional 10-minute break.)

Note: late days cannot be used for any part of this assignment. Lateness penalties (up to 25% per day, as stated on the syllabus) apply to the entire assignment. For example, posting the readings or discussion questions two days late results in a penalty of up to 2x25=50% on the final grade for the assignment.

Possible topics

Some suggestions for possible discussion topics are as follows (but remember, you can also choose any topic not on this list, provided the instructor approves it):
- open source software
- privacy
- encryption
- electronic and online voting
- computer security
- computer reliability
- globalization in the IT industry
- cloud computing
- social networks
- the web search industry
- parallel computing
- quantum computing
- antitrust cases in the technology industry
- error correcting codes
- computer science education
- any aspect in the history of computing e.g. comparison of some early operating systems, or comparison of some early programming languages, or comparison of some early computer hardware, or some basic history of complexity theory (how and why P, NP and EXPTIME emerged as the most important complexity classes), . . .