Professional Ethics

- In many professions, especially professions where professionals hold the power to harm people, holding them to a high ethical standard is important
- Examples of ethical standards in different professions:
  - Journalism: Code of ethics
  - Doctors: “do no harm” Hippocratic Oath, American Medical Association
  - Police: follow the law, code of ethics
  - Lawyers: bar association in state that they practice e.g. Oregon State Bar’s Rules of professional conduct
  - Military: code of military justice
  - Realtor: code of ethics
  - Civil Engineers: code of ethics from American society of civil engineers
  - Politicians:
    - US office of government ethics: executive
    - US House of Representatives and Senate also have their own bodies for enforcing ethical conduct
- What happens if you violate these codes (especially for doctors and lawyers)?
  - Loss of a license, criminal prosecution, other disciplinary action
- What are the benefits/drawbacks to these approaches to professional ethics?
  - Benefits: states expected behavior, justifiable reason to fire offender, keeps everyone at the same standard, some sense of protection, economic – business works better with clarity and trust
Drawbacks: enforceable?, inefficient if you need to follow all the rules, slow innovation?, selective enforcement of rules, updating the code of ethics is challenging

Technology-related professional ethics

- Examples: ACM Code of Ethics, IEEE Code of Ethics
- Unlike medicine and law, the ACM and IEEE codes of ethics are voluntary (no significant way to hold these professionals accountable to these codes of ethics)
- How important is this difference?
  - Without enforceability, it could be a lower bar to entry, allows for a more diverse workforce
  - Breadth of topics in Computer Science is very wide, hard to enforce
  - Downstream consequences shape the rules and how enforceable they are
  - Newer field – open questions
  - Hard to assign blame – accidental vs intentional?
  - What if lots of people write the code? Do you blame the developers or the testers?
- How can you hold computing professionals accountable to their code of ethics?
  - Public shaming (?)
  - Put it into an employee contract
  - Government oversight
  - External checks on quality
  - Disclosure of problems
- Is this really an effective way to make computing professionals behave ethically?
  - If yes: makes it explicit in a code
  - If no: enforceable?