

## Online Forum on Intellectual Property Policy

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**Dates:**

- Online forum begins Monday, April 25**
- Online forum ends Sunday, May 1**
- Online forum paper due Thursday, May 5 (note change from original calendar)**
- Online forum paper returned by Wednesday, May 18**
- Online forum paper rewrites due Wednesday, May 25**

As I outlined in the calendar handout for this week, I've decided to offer two different topics for this year's online forum:

1. What changes should Congress make in copyright law to ensure that writers and artists in the age of digital media have incentives to spur their creativity while preserving the traditional concepts of fair use?
2. How should Congress restructure patent protection so that it supports rather than hinders innovation in the software industry?

When faced with questions of this sort, Congressional committees and government agencies often try to develop policy by convening expert panels to discuss the question in detail. Typically, the expert panel meets initially in a face-to-face session to frame the issues, but then conducts most of its actual work through electronic mail before meeting for a final time to discuss recommendations. Beginning today and continuing through the end of Sunday, May 1, we will simulate this process using the discussion software on the CS 181 CourseWork page.

Imagine that you have just been appointed as a member of such an expert panel. Your job is to discuss the issues raised by the case with the other experts on the panel and then to write a briefing report outlining your findings.

When a policy panel first seeks to confront an issue, the best thing to do is to begin in an information-gathering mode. There is a great deal of background material on this subject stretching back at least to the 1980s, most of which is available on the web. As a starting point, I've included a reference list at the end of this handout composed from what I thought were the best suggestions you supplied in response to the extra-credit challenge.

Your next step is to begin throwing out ideas in brainstorming mode. What are your first reactions to the topic? What are the problems that need to be addressed? What are the competing interests? What might potential solutions look like?

Particularly in the later phases of the discussion, I encourage each of you to think carefully about the tone of your postings and to avoid the temptation—which is somehow extremely strong in cyberspace—to resort to flames. There will certainly be enough ideas to critique that it won't be necessary to attack individuals. Too often, online debate

is dominated by the loudest participants, who have a tendency to drive out everyone else. We are members of an educational community here at Stanford and need to respect the importance of ideas.

### **Requirements for the paper**

The evaluation of the online forum will be based on a short (5–7 pages) paper, in which you use the online forum as a resource from which you articulate your own response to the question of what specific actions the federal government should take in response to one of the two topics for this year.

Your paper should not be a summary of the online discussion, but should instead present a particular policy position and your own defense of it. As always, you need to keep your audience in mind. Remember that the scenario here is that your panel is preparing briefing papers for policymakers who do not understand computing technology well but are aware that the level of concern among particular interest groups is high for both of these topics. Moreover, given that your audience is a group of busy people who may not have a chance to read your report in full, it is strategically important to make sure that your main ideas are easy to find. Starting off with a concise executive summary is essential, but section headings and bullet points can also be useful in this regard.

Your paper must include the following:

- An executive summary that outlines the central elements of your proposal. This summary must fit on a single page of the report.
- At least one quotation from your own postings to the online forum. Along with the quotation, the paper should include a few paragraphs that refine your points in light of the overall discussion.
- At least one quotation from someone else on the forum that you found particularly provocative, along with a discussion of why you either support or disagree with that point of view. Citations should include the author and date of the posting.
- A list of additional references that you have used to develop your position.

As with the first paper, you should format this submission using double-spaced text set in Times New Roman 12 with the default margins in Microsoft Word® (1.25" on the sides, 1" at the top and bottom).

### **Submission**

You should submit your paper electronically to your section leader by 11:59 P.M. on Thursday, May 5. If you are in CS 181W and are having this paper read by the writing tutors (those of you with last names starting with the letters A–L), you must also

1. Sign up for a tutorial session by following the instructions that will be posted on the course web site.
2. Drop off a hardcopy version of your paper at the Technical Writing Program in the basement of the Huang Engineering Center (Room 049) before noon Friday, May 6.