

# Incorporating Social Issues of Computing in a Small, Liberal Arts College: A Case Study

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# Why include social issues?

- Widespread support
  - CC2001, 2008
  - LACS model curriculum
- It's the right thing to do.

# Could do a separate course

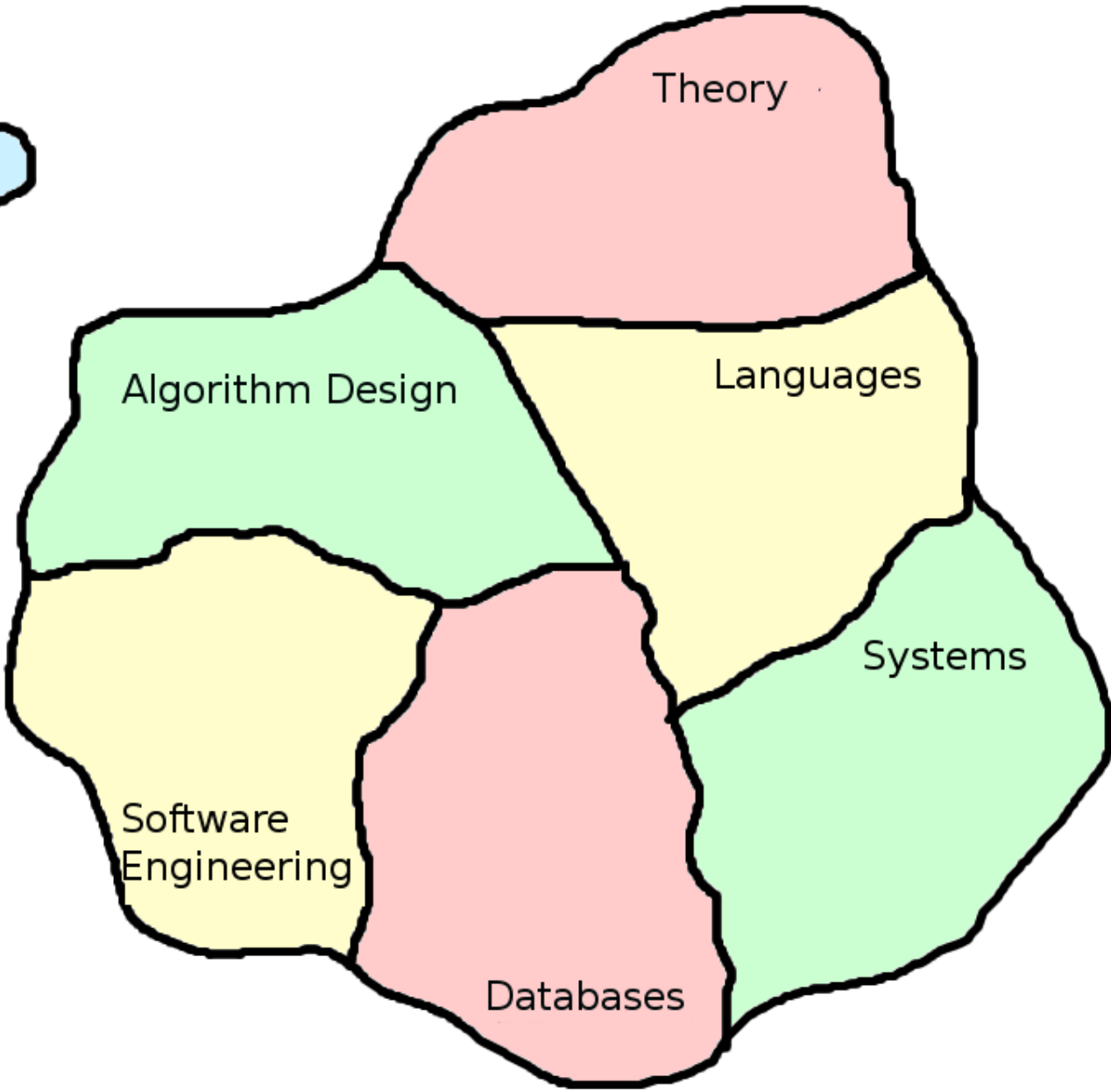
- Great textbooks (e.g., Baase, Quinn)
- Lots of discussion & experience
  - SIGCSE workshops
  - ITiCSE 2010 working group

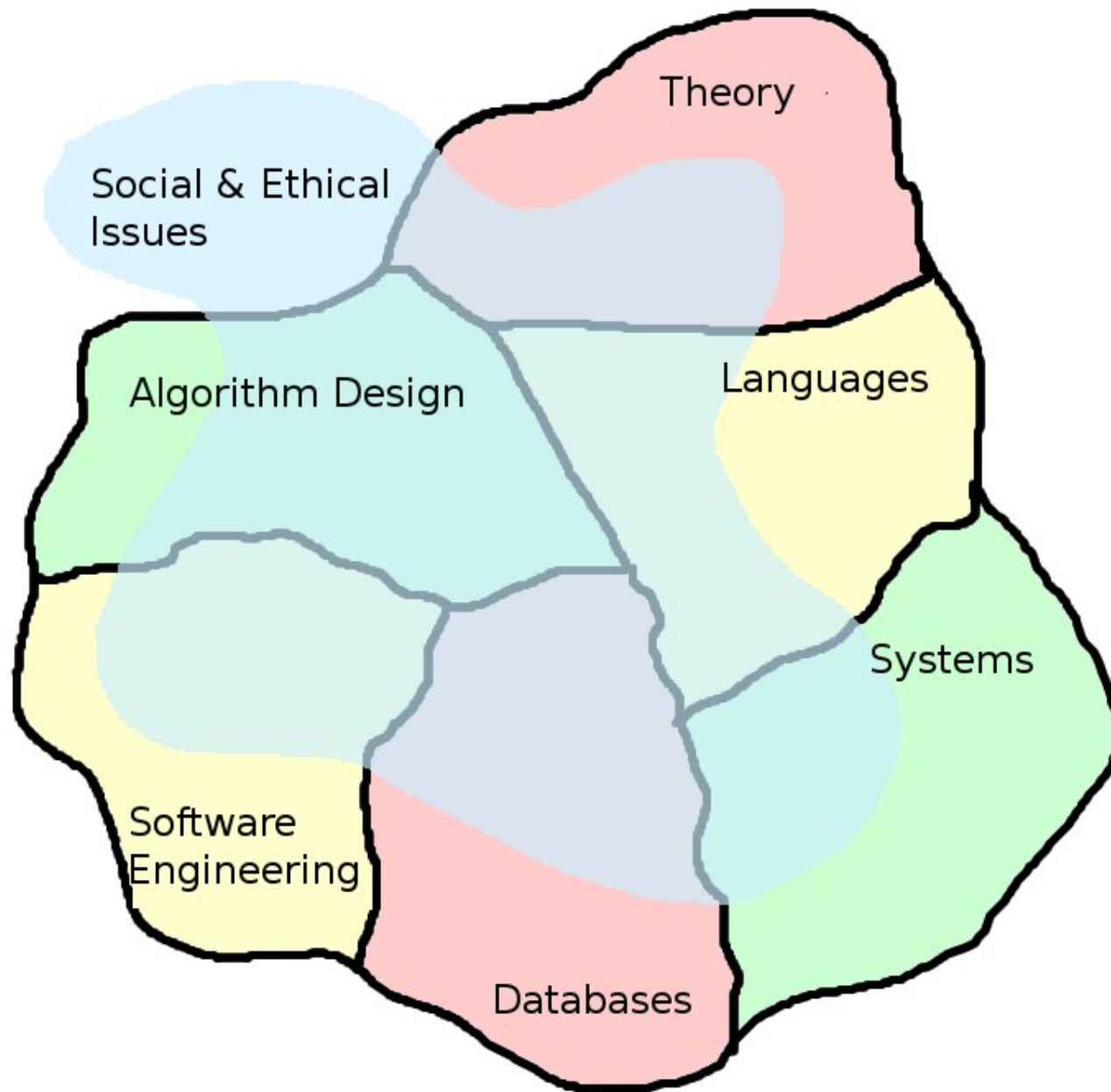
But...

# Institutional context makes a dedicated course impractical.

- Faculties are small.
- Required courses must be offered regularly.
- Majors can require only a limited number of courses.

Social & Ethical  
Issues





# Our Approach

Infuse social & ethical issues throughout the computer science curriculum.

# Examples

- Courses for CS majors
  - Artificial intelligence
  - Databases & Web applications
  - Theory
  - Networks
- CS Table
- Courses for non-majors



# Example: Artificial Intelligence

- Techniques use statistics, heuristics
- Should an application fail safe?
- What if predictions are wrong?
  - procedures
  - legal responsibilities
  - social impacts
  - policy implications

# Example: Databases & Web

- Why gather data?
- Who is affected and how?
- Who can access data?
- How to store data safely?
- What if data are accidentally released?

# Example: Theory

- Some problems are unsolvable
- Some problems are infeasible to solve
- Consequences
  - Approximation algorithms
  - Government policies
  - Managerial decision making
  - Security implications (e.g., RSA)

# Example: Networks

- Task: Forge email using telnet
  - Social implications?
  - Why was SMTP designed this way?
- Topic: Internet architecture
  - Design goals vs. actual uses?
  - Implications of that mismatch?
- Research motivated by social issues:
  - e.g., anonymity, access

# CS Table

- Weekly, informal lunchtime discussion group
- Regular participants
  - 1<sup>st</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> year students
  - Most/all faculty
- Read articles of faculty or student interest
  - May focus on social issues
  - Social issues may arise in discussion

# CS Table as special topic

- Occasional special topics:
  - Women and Computing
  - Socio-Technical Issues in Computer Networks
  - Computing and Health Care
- Registered students lead discussion (1 credit)
- Non-registered students are welcome
- Experiment:  
independent study to plan special topic

# Courses for Non-Majors

- Some common themes
  - Computer fluency
  - Problem solving, CS principles
  - Prepare future citizens
- Examples: Tutorial, The Digital Age
  - Highlight applications, technology basis
  - Consider consequences of technology

# Assessment

- Challenging
- Generally holistic rather than targeted
- Non-majors: papers, talks, discussions
- Majors: exams typically focus on technical topics; social issues assessed informally, e.g., through exit interviews
- Examine issues raised in projects



# Conclusions

- Many opportunities to connect technical topics with social/ethical issues
- Each discussion may be short, but
- Repeated discussion can cover many themes
- Assessing courses is challenging
- Exit interviews, alumni surveys suggest long-term impact

# Questions (1)

- Models considered:
  - separate course
  - integration with existing courses
- Do others follow similar practices in other settings?
- Are there other models?

# Questions (2)

- How to assess learning of social & ethical issues?
  - Need to recognize ethical issues
  - Need perspective, not just facts