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Teaching computer ethics by focusing on discrimination and surveillance: takeaways from an online teaching experiment

We discuss our experiences teaching a computer ethics course focused on discrimination and surveillance. Our course's content includes algorithmic bias; how gender, racial, and sexual minorities are disproportionately impacted by technology; surveillance and privacy concerns; and methods technologists can use for ameliorating these concerns in the workplace and in society. We also discuss the results of an experiment in different formats of teaching this material: online versus in-person. Our analysis concentrated on the extent and contents of self-disclosure by both students and instructors. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, we observed a higher prevalence of self-disclosure by both students and instructors in the online section. Notably, an analysis of demographic data revealed that minority group members were particularly active in self-disclosure in both formats. Overall, our findings suggest that an online setting may be more effective for delivering computer ethics courses where a primary goal is increasing open discussion and self-disclosure among participants.