

BINF4920 Professional Issues and Ethics for Bioinformatics

3uoc course, 2 hours contact/week

The course is divided between ethics and professional issues and leverages heavily other courses for content.

The course is timetabled at the same time as SENG4921 and BIOT3071 (Commercial Biotechnology). This allows sending the students to attend a selection of lectures from these courses. Which lectures varies from year to year due to schedule variations in these courses but typically includes:

From SENG4921:

- Introduction to Ethics (Stephen Cohen)
- Cyberspace law issues (David Vaile)
- Open source software

From BIOT3071:

- The Australian Biotechnology Industry
- Intellectual property
- Regulatory issues in biotechnology, or business planning

The BINF4920-specific content includes the following, taught using highly interactive workshops rather than formal lectures:

- Bioethics (taught by Adrienne Torda from the medical faculty)
- Communication and presentation skills
- Diffusion of innovation (taught by Will Rifkin from the science communication unit)

Assessment is purely continuous (no exam) and is based on participation in online forum and discussion of the lectures, a “virtual stock market” assignment where students trade shares in the IT and biotech industries to familiarise themselves with the drivers in these industries, and student presentations on bioethics.

The teaching load is relatively light but coordination and marking are a significant load relative to the small number of students. This is why I would be in favour of a streamed course covering ethics and management that would be shared among multiple programs.

Bruno Gaëta, 29.10.2009