CSSE 394, Research Lab 1, Fall 2026, Ethical Dilemma Homework

Case: “Eyes on the Quad”

The scenario

Daniel is a senior computer science major whose thesis develops a computer vision system that estimates crowd density and flags unusual movement patterns, such as a sudden dispersal or a person lying on the ground, using the university’s existing camera network. Over five years, campus security has expanded that network from roughly 200 cameras to over 1,000, following a series of high-profile incidents. The security office offered Daniel access to eight months of archived footage and a small stipend. In exchange, they want a working prototype for a pilot next spring.

Daniel’s IRB determination came back quickly: “not human subjects research,” because he is analyzing existing institutional footage and will not interact with anyone. As he works, several things trouble him:

- The footage includes dorm entrances, the health center waiting area, the multifaith center, and a large student protest on the quad last spring.
- His system works by tracking individuals across frames. With little modification, it could re-identify the same person across cameras, and the camera vendor already sells an optional facial recognition add-on.
- A draft of the pilot plan mentions “sharing analytics with city police partners” and extending retention from 30 days to one year. Daniel was not told this directly. He saw it in a shared document.
- The student government was never consulted, and most students don’t know how many cameras exist or what the footage can be used for.
- Daniel believes the anomaly-detection feature could genuinely help. A fall, a medical emergency, or a dangerous crowd surge might be caught faster. But he can’t guarantee the tool will stay limited to that purpose.

A dilemma, by definition, has no correct answer and therefore is a dilemma! Hence, a dilemma provides a starting point for discussion and analysis. The ethical dilemma is written as if you are an actor because I want you to bring your values and your thinking to the conversation. As you read the dilemma, imagine yourself having the conversation or feeling the emotions of the situation. Then, decide what you would do, not just think or feel.

Successful completion of this Dilemma requires a "good faith effort". Specifically, "good faith effort" means that

- Your response acknowledges the conflict.
- Your response identifies the value you are bringing to the discussion.
- Your response states the action you would take.

Respond to this dilemma through the lenses of all three ethical frameworks we covered in class.