

# Inside FOSS Licensing

COMP8440: FOSSD  
Lecture 5



# The Early Days ...

- In the early days of free software, many projects used very simplistic licenses
  - An example is the original license for Samba
  - Why was this such a poor choice for a license?

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# What does a license do?

- A copyright license gives permissions
  - Copyright defaults would prevent free software
    - e.g. prevent distribution of the software
- Key permissions needed
  - Permission to use the software
  - Permission to study the software
  - Permission to modify the software
  - Permission to distribute modified or unmodified copies
- It can also set conditions
  - Force derived works to be under the same license
  - Advertising or marketing restrictions
  - Disclaim warranty or other guarantees
  - ... and lots of others ...

# Lots of licenses

- A wide range of FOSS licenses
  - OSI lists 63 approved licenses, 9 as 'widely used'
  - GNU lists 81 free software licenses plus 28 non-free licenses
- Key licenses
  - GNU GPL (and variants, including LGPL)
  - BSD Licenses (original or modified)
  - MIT/X11 License
  - Apache License

# X11 License

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**(excerpt from GNU GPL version 3)**

# GPL vs LGPL

- **Strong copyleft versus weak copyleft**
  - GPL copyleft covers work as a whole
  - LGPL copyleft covers only LGPL portion
- **Use for software libraries**
  - Allows linking with proprietary programs
  - Widely used for library code
  - Also used to avoid inter-project licensing problems
- **Use discouraged**
  - 'L' changed from Library to Lesser in 1999
  - Loses much of the GPL leverage effect that encourages free software



# GNU GPLv3

- A recent evolution of the GPL (June 2007)
  - Public discussion process, over 18 months
  - Much debate on adoption among existing GPL projects
- Main changes
  - Internationalisation and clarification of legal language
  - Stronger patent provisions
  - Prevention of hardware restrictions (“tivoisation”)
  - Optional clauses to aid license interoperability
  - DMCA avoidance (“effective technological measure”)

# Multiple Licensing

- Can offer multiple licenses on one program
  - Allows recipients to choose the license
  - A common solution to inter-project license problems
- The 'or-later' clause
  - A form of multiple licensing
  - Allows for license evolution
  - Involves a high degree of trust of license originator

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