

**The University of Western Ontario  
Faculty of Information and Media Studies**

***FIMS 9137 –Information Ethics***  
**Mondays, 1:30 – 4:20, FNB 3220**

**Course Outline – Winter 2020**  
**12.16.20**

**Instructor Information**

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**Course Description**

This course investigates the ethical aspects of contemporary information technology and information practices. Through lectures, readings, in-class discussion, and group and independent projects, we will analyze and engage challenges ranging from privacy in big data, freedom of expression in social computing environments, platforms and politics, diversity and the digital divide, and the nature of disruption, innovation, property, access and collaboration in an increasingly networked world, as well as the role of various professional codes of ethics. The course draws on diverse cases from the fields of library and information science, media and communication studies, and organizational science as well as your experiences as a user, consumer, practitioner, and participant in the information world. In this course you'll learn key theories, methods, frameworks, laws, and institutions that govern, shape, and inform information technology. You'll develop and refine core analytic, writing and presentation skills, in individual and group contexts, central to success in virtually all organizational settings. You'll also critically and strategically engage with values trade-offs in the worlds of information and technology around you, enabling you to better choose what kind of information consumer, user, citizen, and professional you want to be.

**Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:**

1. Understand and critically assess key ethics-related principles, concepts, theories, and/or philosophies (historical and/or contemporary, Western and/or non-Western, derived from philosophy, law, etc.) (program-level learning outcome 1, 2, 3, 4, 5);
2. Cultivate leadership potential by recognizing, analyzing, and considering strategies to address the complex nature of ethical issues in the information field (program-level learning outcome 2, 3, 5, 7, 9);
3. Apply ethical frameworks across multiple scales (e.g. self, group) and diverse contexts (e.g. geographic, cultural, institutional, and governmental) (program-level learning outcome 1, 2, 3, 5, 8);
4. Understand how professional codes of ethics relate to ethical principles, concepts, issues, and/or philosophies underpinning the preservation and communication of information via emerging technologies (program-level learning outcome 1, 3, 5, 7);
5. Communicate ethical issues analysis clearly, concisely, and persuasively, using both written (e.g. case studies, briefs) and verbal (e.g. presentations) methods (program-level learning outcome 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9)

**Course website: <https://owl.uwo.ca>. The courses you're registered for should appear as soon as you log in.**

**Course Materials**

All required readings are available online [via OWL, Western Libraries or the World Wide Web] or are on reserve in GRC.

**Course Policies**

**Email correspondence:** Please include “Info Ethics” in the subject line for all emails related to this course! Barring unforeseen issues, I will try to respond to all emails within 48 hours.

**Respect and collegiality:** I am committed to the idea of the classroom as a place for respectful engagement across difference, and a chance to learn from colleagues from a variety of backgrounds and value systems. (This is especially important in a class built substantially around questions of ethics!) Students are expected to behave collegially and professionally at all times.

**Attendance & Participation:** Attendance at and timely arrival to all classes is required and will be monitored each class. See the MLIS Student Handbook for details. Students needing to negotiate legitimate absences need to inform the instructor in advance in order to arrange for make-up work. In case of emergency absences, students must contact the instructor as soon as possible afterwards. Students should expect absence or lateness without permission or legitimate explanation to be reflected in their participation grade. Each student is permitted one unexplained, unexcused absence. While using this “free pass” will not reduce your participation grade it might negatively impact your understanding of key concepts and expectations that were covered that day so please make arrangements with a colleague to get notes, etc. MLIS guidelines for participation are available at [http://intra.fims.uwo.ca/students/handbooks/mlis/mlis-handbook-04.htm#P251\\_25303](http://intra.fims.uwo.ca/students/handbooks/mlis/mlis-handbook-04.htm#P251_25303)

**Academic Integrity:** A clear sense of academic honesty and responsibility is fundamental to our scholarly community. You are expected to demonstrate honesty and integrity in all of your academic activities. I am committed to the principle of teaching and learning as activities that are collaborative at their core therefore I strongly encourage collaboration while working on some assignments. However, unless specified as a group assignment, all submitted work must be your own, original work. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and instructors are required to remind students that: “Students must write their assignments and essays in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.” The instructor may use anti-plagiarism software at her discretion and therefore students should understand that: “All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).” Students are directed to read the Scholastic Offences policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

**Assignment submission:** Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due at the beginning of class in the week they are due per the course syllabus. Please make sure that all written assignments are clearly labeled with the course name and number, assignment title, instructor’s name, your name and date. While there is no official style manual for this course, please make sure that you choose and consistently use a style that is appropriate to the assignments required in this course. Poor grammar, style or spelling will result in a lower grade. Except in cases of excused absences, late assignments will be reduced at the rate of 5% per day or part thereof. Assignments that are 7 or more days late will not be accepted.

**MLIS Grade Guidelines:** For the grading guidelines, please see: [http://intra.fims.uwo.ca/students/handbooks/mlis/mlis-handbook-04.htm#P251\\_25303](http://intra.fims.uwo.ca/students/handbooks/mlis/mlis-handbook-04.htm#P251_25303)

### **Academic Accommodation**

If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know right away. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class and out-of-class activities, and the way I teach may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the appropriate campus support offices to determine appropriate accommodations. If serious problems arise during the semester (medical or family issues; serious stress or well-being issues; falling seriously behind; or other circumstances that compromise your ability to succeed in the course and your wider program of study) please let me know as soon as possible – I may be able to help. I will treat any information you provide in as confidential a manner as possible. Students with diverse learning styles and needs are

welcome in this course. If you have a disability or a health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me.

## **Western University and FIMS policies on accommodation are as follows:**

### **Medical Accommodation**

For Western University policy on accommodation for medical illness, see:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)

Student Medical Certificate (SMC): [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf)

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or **assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade** must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. It will be the Dean's Office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.

For **work worth less than 10% of the final grade**, the instructor will consider requests for academic accommodation on medical grounds made in a timely manner in writing or by appointment in office hours. Such requests need not be accompanied by documentation. The instructor may, however, decide to require documentation be submitted to the appropriate Academic Counselling office.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for accommodation on medical grounds, or for other reasons. All documentation must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's home Faculty.

### **Compassionate Accommodation**

Academic accommodation (extensions, makeup tests and exams, additional assignments etc.) may be given to students on compassionate grounds. The situations for which compassionate accommodation can be given must be serious, including significant events such as death in the immediate family, trauma (fire, robbery, harassment, muggings, car accidents, etc.), or emergency situations. Documentation is required.

### **Religious Accommodation**

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. <http://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>  
Further specific information is given in the Western Academic Calendar.

### **Support Services**

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwoom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Other support services on campus:

**Office of the Registrar:** [www.registrar.uwo.ca](http://www.registrar.uwo.ca)

**Student Development Centre:** [www.sdc.uwo.ca](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca)

**Psychological Services:** [www.sdc.uwo.ca/psych](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/psych)

**Services for Students with Disabilities:** [www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd)

**Accessibility Information:** [www.accessibility.uwo.ca/](http://www.accessibility.uwo.ca/)

**Writing Support Centre:** [www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing)

**Learning Skills Services:** [www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning)

**Indigenous Services:** [indigenous.uwo.ca/](http://indigenous.uwo.ca/)

**International and Exchange Student Centre:** [www.sdc.uwo.ca/int](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/int)

**Career Centre at Western:** [www.success.uwo.ca/careers/](http://www.success.uwo.ca/careers/)

## Methods of Evaluation

- Lead Class Discussion (sign-up) 15%
- Reflection Paper 15%
- Position Paper 15%
- Final Project 40%
- Participation 15%

### Lead Class Discussion – sign up ASAP! worth 15%

Working in small groups (roughly equal based on enrolment numbers), students will lead one class discussion. Lead discussants are expected to have done a close read of the assigned readings. Discussants will present summaries of the key findings and arguments of the readings to the class (slides and/or handouts optional), synthesize concepts between or among readings, and prepare discussion questions and/or an in-class activity exploring key themes for the week. Students sign up for their week in advance. I will post a sign-up sheet during the first class (and additional classes as needed). Topic selection is first-come, first-served. Aim for 1-1.25 hours (maximum including discussion and/or activity).

**Groups must email me their materials (e.g. notes, slides, questions, description of the in-class activity) by noon on the day before you are “on” so that I may review them.** *This assignment will be graded based upon: 1) how effectively, thoroughly, critically, and concisely the group presents summaries of the core concepts, findings, and arguments of the readings, 2) how well you are able to synthesize and emphasize core concepts across readings, 3) the engagement, creativity, and effectiveness of the discussion questions and/or in-class activity. The grade for this assignment is a group grade and all members receive the same score.*

### Reflection Paper – 15%

Students will complete one reflection paper (2 single spaced pages) tied to a key substantive ethical interest of the course. A specific prompt for the assignment will be provided as the date approaches. You should come to class prepared to discuss your reflections.

### Position Paper – 15%

Students will complete one position paper (2 single spaced pages) tied to a key substantive ethical interest of the course. A specific prompt for the assignment will be provided as the date approaches. You should come to class prepared to explain and defend your position.

### Final Project -- 40%

You have two options for the final project in this course. Each is described below. You must coordinate with the instructor prior to reading week and clearly indicate which option you are choosing and provide either: A) a one page description of your proposed group research project if option A (described below) is selected or B) a one page description of the information ethics book you plan to use if option B (described below) is selected.

#### Option A: Group Research Project – 40% [presentation is worth 10 points, report is worth 30 points]

Working in small groups of 2-3 students, you will conduct an original research project on an information ethics topic of your choosing. Ideally, your group should engage with a topic that is interesting and relevant to your experience and/or your current or future professional work. I encourage groups form early, brainstorm topics, and schedule a meeting(s) with me to discuss your chosen topic and research approach in advance. We will dedicate time in-class to working on the research projects at various points throughout the term. The main deliverables for this assignment are as follows:

- *Presentation:* The last class session of the semester will be devoted to presentations of the group research projects. Presentations will be graded based on: clarity and quality of communication (oral and visual), creativity, staying within timing parameters (time limits will be determined by the number of final projects), and handling of Q & A. Please practice!!!!
- *Final Report:* The final report (~10 single-spaced pages including references) is **due by 11:55pm, the Friday immediately following our last class.** More details to follow.

**Option B: Individual Book Review Project – 40% [final book review paper with full set of reading notes is worth 30 points (due by 11:55pm, the Friday immediately following our last class); presentation of is worth 10 points]**

Working individually, you will select one of the books on the list I provide in class (or choose your own selection with instructor approval) for a book review project. Students electing this option for the final assignment may not select a book another student has chosen. The main deliverables for this assignment are as follows:

- *Reading notes:* You will be expected to take thorough and well-organized reading notes of the entire work, carefully noting which thoughts are the author(s) (including citations for quoted material) and which are your own reflections. These reading notes will be appended to your final book review paper.
- *Book Review Paper:* You will write a 5 page single-spaced review of the book of “publishable quality.” (This page limit does not include citations.) Your review must tie into at least 3 other sources referenced in the course (either assigned readings or optional readings discussed in class lecture).
- *Presentation:* during the last class session you will give a brief presentation of the book you reviewed. Presentations will be based on: clarity and quality of communication (oral and visual), creativity, staying within timing parameters (time limits will be determined by the number of final projects), and handling of Q & A. Please practice!!!!

**Participation – 15%**

Your participation grade will be determined by your contribution to the learning of the class. The evaluation will be based not only on how frequently you speak in class, but more importantly, by the quality of what you say and how well you listen and respond to others.

High-quality contributions include: starting a class discussion with sound analysis, synthesizing class discussions, summarizing and moving class discussions ahead, giving constructive criticisms or building on others’ ideas, substantiating one’s views persuasively and logically, responding to others’ critiques with reasoned rebuttal, graceful acceptance of new ideas, presenting well thought-out analyses and policy recommendations, volunteering for special role-playing or presentations, recalling and sharing relevant experiences, being respectful and non-judgmental towards your classmates’ opinions, asking thoughtful questions during lectures and peer presentations. Respect for the course and each other are essential.

Some contribution/partial credit: attending class and participating but contributions do not meet the threshold of “high-quality” as described above.

Unsatisfactory contributions include: being absent from class without excuse, attending class but not participating in plenary or group discussions, being unprepared for class, seeming to have not read the assigned readings, using technology for activities unrelated to class, offering poorly thought-out analyses or policy recommendations, personally criticizing classmates or demeaning the perspectives of others, being close-minded, disrespectful, or otherwise disruptive. These behaviors will lead to negative contribution grades.

**Topics and Weekly Schedule:**

**1. Introduction & Overview**

- a. Assigned readings: None

**2. Foundations of Ethics and Critical Thinking**

- a. Assigned readings:
  - i. Quinn, Michael J. *Ethics for the Information Age* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Addison-Wesley, 2014. Chapter 2.
  - ii. Nosich, Gerald M. *Learning to Think Things Through: A Guide to Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson, 2012. Chapter 1.
  - iii. SKIM: Huss, Brian. *Everyday Ethics and Critical Thinking*, pp. 193-214.

**3. New Challenges: Ethics and Information Technology**

- a. Assigned readings:

- i. Moor, James H. "Why we need better ethics for emerging technologies." *Ethics and Information Technology* 7.3 (2005): 111-119.
- ii. Brey, Philip. "Values in technology and disclosive computer ethics." In Luciano Floridi (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Information and Computer Ethics*, 2010. Chapter 3, pp. 41-58.
- iii. Van den Hoven, Jeroen. "The use of normative theories in computer ethics." In Luciano Floridi (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Information and Computer Ethics*, 2010. Chapter 4, pp. 59-76.
- iv. SKIM: Watson (Tow Center for Digital Journalism), *Constructive Technology Criticism*: [https://www.cjr.org/tow\\_center\\_reports/constructive\\_technology\\_criticism.php](https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/constructive_technology_criticism.php)

#### **4. Choice Architecture: Technology, cognition and UX**

- a. Assigned Readings:
  - i. Wu, Tim. *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads*. Knopf, 2016. Chapters 25 & 26, pp. 308-327.
  - ii. Thaler Richard, H., & Sunstein Cass, R. (2008). *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. Chapter 5, pp. 83-102.
  - iii. Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Macmillan. Chapters 1 & 2, pp. 19-38.
- b. Reflection Paper due – upload to OWL before class and be prepared to discuss your reflections in class.

#### **5. Copyright, Libraries and Scholarly Communication**

- a. Assigned Readings:
  - i. Perzanowski, Aaron, and Jason Schultz. *The end of ownership: Personal property in the digital economy*. MIT Press, 2016. Chapter 2: Property and the Exhaustion Principle.
  - ii. Perzanowski, Aaron, and Jason Schultz. *The end of ownership: Personal property in the digital economy*. MIT Press, 2016. Chapter 6: The Promise and Perils of Digital Libraries
  - iii. Bodó, Balázs. "Libraries in the post-scarcity era." (2015).

#### **6. Hacking and Hacktivism**

- a. In-class screening of "The Internet's Own Boy: The Story of Aaron Swartz."
- b. Assigned readings: None
- c. Assignment: Group Project assignment introduced, in-class workshop to jump-start projects.

### **BREAK**

#### **7. Social Media and Collective Action**

- a. Assigned readings:
  - i. Bergstrom, Kelly. "'Don't feed the troll': Shutting down debate about community expectations on Reddit.com." *First Monday* 16.8 (2011).
  - ii. Matias, J. N., Johnson, A., Boesel, W. E., Keegan, B., Friedman, J., & DeTar, C. (2015). Reporting, Reviewing, and Responding to Harassment on Twitter. *Women, Action, and the Media*. May 13, 2015. <http://womenactionmedia.org/twitter-report>
  - iii. TBD
- b. Position paper due, upload to OWL before class

#### **8. Privacy**

- a. Assigned Readings:
  - i. Brunton, Finn, and Helen Nissenbaum. *Obfuscation: A User's Guide for Privacy and Protest*. Mit Press, 2015. Chapter II, pp. 45-95.
  - ii. Mulligan, Deirdre K., Colin Koopman, and Nick Doty. "Privacy is an essentially contested concept: a multi-dimensional analytic for mapping privacy." *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. A* 374.2083 (2016): 20160118.
  - iii. TBD

#### **9. Machine Learning Algorithms and Big Data**

- a. Assigned Readings:

- i. Pasquale, Frank. *The black box society: The secret algorithms that control money and information*. Harvard University Press, 2015. Chapter 2, pp. 19-58.
- ii. Jurgenson, N. "The View from Nowhere." *The New Inquiry*. (2014). <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/view-from-nowhere/>
- iii. SKIM: Gillespie, Tarleton. "The relevance of algorithms." In *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, edited by Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo Boczkowski, and Kirsten Foot. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014.

## 10. Disruption: Robots, AI, Blockchain and more ...

- a. Assigned readings:
  - i. Turkle, Sherry. *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. Basic books, 2012. Chapter 2, pp. 35-52.
  - ii. Lichocki, P., Kahn Jr., P., and Billard, A. "The Ethical Landscape of Robotics." *IEEE Robotics and Automation Magazine*, 18(1):39-50
  - iii. TBD
  - iv. SKIM: Bitcoin crash course: <http://www.cryptocapitalism.center/bitcoin-crash-course/>

## 11. Global Networked Society

- a. Assigned Readings:
  - i. Alsheikh, Tamara, Jennifer A. Rode, and Siân E. Lindley. "(Whose) value-sensitive design: A study of long-distance relationships in an Arabic cultural context." *Proceedings of the ACM 2011 Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*. New York, NY: ACM, 2011.
  - ii. Boyd, Danah. *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. Yale University Press, 2014. Chapter 6, pp. 153-175.
  - iii. TBD

## 12. Ethics & Information Work

- a. Assigned Readings:
  - i. Hill, Heather. "Disability and accessibility in the library and information science literature: A content analysis." *Library & Information Science Research* 35.2 (2013): 137-142.
  - ii. Honma, Todd. "Trippin' over the color line: The invisibility of race in library and information studies." *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 1.2 (2005).
  - iii. Carlos Bueno, "Inside the Mirrortocracy," <http://carlos.bueno.org/2014/06/mirrortocracy.html> & "Refactoring the Mirrortocracy." <http://carlos.bueno.org/2014/06/refactoring.html>

## 13. Final Project Presentations

*Our time will be devoted to presentations of final projects. No assigned readings.*