

Syllabus – Ethics, Data, and Technology
PHI3681 * Summer B, 2024 * University of Florida

Please read all this information carefully! The answers to many of your questions are here!

Class: M, T, W, R, F, Period 3 (11:00-12:15) * Matherly 114
Office hours: M, T, W, R, F, 12:30-1:30 or by appointment * Griffin-Floyd Hall, 316
Instructor: Schuyler Sturm * tsturm@ufl.edu

Overview

New technologies pose new ethical problems, and this class is an examination of those problems through the lens of established theories of ethics in philosophy. Because the issues addressed are in the realm of applied ethics, the class is built around case studies rather than pure theory. The goal is to get you to think deeply about current problems and their possible solutions. Work on the case studies will also be done in groups, rather than individually, since collaboration to propose solutions to current ethical dilemmas is a valuable skill; although philosophy sometimes seems like an individual endeavor, this class works from the premise that it should not be.

Objectives

After taking this class, you should have a good understanding of the landscape of ethical problems that have arisen from contemporary applications of technology, including social media, mass surveillance, and AI. You should also have the conceptual tools to assess those ethical problems with both rigor and clarity.

Structure

Within each unit, there will be either four or five lectures, followed by a day for either discussion or group work on a case study. Each of the lectures will have one or two assigned readings, and you are expected to have read these before the lecture. Most of the readings are not overly long, but even the short ones can be somewhat difficult to understand. Make sure that you set aside enough time to complete each reading ahead of time! A complete understanding of each paper is certainly not expected, but you should at least grasp enough to ask about whatever parts are unclear to you. This is a philosophy class, and philosophy is not easy!

Attendance at all lectures and on all groupwork days is mandatory unless you are excused. Unexcused absences and lack of preparation and participation will affect your grade.

If you need any accommodations, please let me know. And please make use of office hours whenever doing so might help – that's what I'm there for!

Content

Some of the readings and lectures in this course will contain sensitive material that may be uncomfortable for some people to discuss. The unit on privacy includes some discussions of sexual content and privacy violations, and the unit on harmful uses of technology includes discussions of suicide and sexual abuse. If you do not feel able to do these readings or discuss this content, please let me know before those units begin, as you will not be required to engage with any content that you feel will harm you (alternative readings and assignments may be provided).

Honor Code

No breach of the UF academic honesty policy will be tolerated. You are expected to abide by the honor code, as stated here: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>

The Honor Pledge: We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity by abiding by the Student Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by Students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

The most common type of academic dishonesty in a class like this is plagiarism. When you are submitting written work, the best way to avoid plagiarism is through an abundance of caution. If you even suspect that an idea you are expressing came from someone other than you – whether an author, an instructor, or a fellow student – take pains to indicate its source. If you have any doubts about how ideas obtained from others should be cited, do not hesitate to ask! It is always better to take too much care in citations than to risk plagiarizing. And that risk is very serious. Punishment for egregious plagiarism can range from a failing grade in the class to suspension or other administrative sanctions. If an instance of plagiarism seems to have been done mistakenly, in good faith, it will still result in significant point deductions on an assignment, and the assignment may receive a grade of zero. Be vigilant!

Attendance

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies. [Click here to read the university attendance policies.](#)

Accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started](#)

[with the Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Assignments

Your grade for the course is based on six factors: four case studies, one set of individual essays, and class participation.

The case studies will be done in groups of either three or four. Groups will be randomly assigned, and you will not be in a group with the same person twice. Members of a group are expected to contribute equally to each submission, and I expect each of you to reach out to me should another member in your group not participate fairly in the assignment. Collaboration is of the utmost importance in these assignments, as the questions will be based on one another. It will not work to simply divide the questions between group members – you will need to put effort into discussing and coordinating the entire set of questions.

The final “exam” will be a set of individual essays concerning the range of topics discussed in the course. This will be your opportunity to demonstrate your personal understanding of the issues addressed by the class, and it will be the only assignment that you will work on alone. Essays are expected to be written clearly and grammatically and to demonstrate serious engagement with the readings and lectures.

Instructions for the case studies and the individual essays will be available on Canvas, and the rubrics used to grade the assignments will also be viewable there.

Your participation grade will be based on two factors: attendance and active engagement during classes. Unexcused absences after the second will automatically reduce this grade by five points. Active engagement can be demonstrated in a number of ways: asking or answering questions during lectures, discussing topics during office hours, and doing good group work on the case studies will all be taken into account. Of course, the quality of engagement will matter just as much as the quantity, if not more.

If you have any concerns about how the participation grade is figured, please let me know! I understand that some people feel uncomfortable talking publicly during classes, and I will certainly do my best to accommodate everyone!

Grading

[The university grading policy is here](#).

There will be a total of 800 points available, 100 each from the case studies and from participation, and 300 from the individual essays. Your grade for the course will be determined from those points according to the following table:

Points	Scale	Letter
744-800	4.00	A
720-743	3.67	A-
688-719	3.33	B+
656-687	3.00	B
632-655	2.67	B-
600-631	2.33	C+
576-599	2.00	C
552-575	1.67	C-
528-551	1.33	D+
496-527	1.00	D
480-495	0.67	D-
0-479	0.00	E

Feedback

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Schedule of Readings

Segment 1 – Introduction, the problem of alignment

- Monday 7/1 – Course overview
 - Syllabus
- Tuesday 7/2 – Do artifacts have politics?
 - Winner, “Do Artifacts Have Politics?”
- Wednesday 7/3 – What are consequentialism and deontology?
 - Bentham, “An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation” (selections)
 - Kant, “Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals” (selections)
- Friday 7/5 – How can humans be virtuous in their use of technology?
 - Vallor, “Technology and the Virtues” (selections)
- Monday 7/8 – Discussion day

Segment 2 – Algorithmic bias

- Tuesday 7/9 – Can computer systems be biased?
 - Friedman and Nissenbaum, “Bias in Computer Systems”

- Wednesday 7/10 – Is COMPAS fair?
 - Angwin et al., “Machine Bias” <https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing>
 - Dieterich et al., “COMPAS Risk Scales: Demonstrating Accuracy Equity and Predictive Parity” (selections)
- Thursday 7/11 – Does any mathematical standard but equal calibration matter?
 - Hedden, “On Statistical Criteria of Algorithmic Fairness”
- Friday 7/12 – How much does the underlying data matter?
 - Mayson, “Bias In, Bias Out”
- Monday 7/15 – Case study 1

Segment 3 – Privacy

- Tuesday 7/16 – Why do we want privacy?
 - Rachels, “Why Privacy is Important”
- Wednesday 7/17 – Does privacy only matter when we have something to hide?
 - Marlinspike, “Why ‘I Have Nothing to Hide’ Is the Wrong Way to Think About Surveillance”
- Thursday 7/18 – Are there ways to ensure informational security?
 - Barocas and Nissenbaum, “Big Data’s End Run around Anonymity and Consent”
- Friday 7/19 – Are deepfakes violations of privacy?
 - Citron, “Sexual Privacy” (selections)
- Monday 7/22 – Case study 2

Segment 4 – Automation and human striving

- Tuesday 7/23 – Does AI infringe on the rights of artists?
 - Goetze, “AI Art is Theft: Labour, Extraction, and Exploitation, Or, On the Dangers of Stochastic Pollacks”
- Wednesday 7/24 – Should we automate everything?
 - Danaher, “Will Life Be Worth Living in a World Without Work? Technological Unemployment and the Meaning of Life”
- Thursday 7/25 – Should we automate everything?
 - Lenman, “On Becoming Redundant or What Computers Shouldn’t Do”
- Friday 7/26
 - Kelly, “A philosopher argues that an AI can’t be an artist”
<https://www.technologyreview.com/2019/02/21/239489/a-philosopher-argues-that-an-ai-can-never-be-an-artist/>
 - Zylinska
- Monday 7/29 – Case study 3

Segment 5 – Bad use and overuse

- Tuesday 7/30 – Does social media harm us?

- Wells, et al., “Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show” <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739>
- Wednesday 7/31 – What are we going for when we communicate?
 - Nguyen, “How Twitter Gamifies Communication”
- Thursday 8/1 – Should we give up our screens?
 - Aylsworth and Castro, “Is There a Duty to Be a Digital Minimalist?”
- Friday 8/2 – Can we do wrong in a virtual world?
 - Luck, “The gamer’s dilemma: An analysis of the arguments for the moral distinction between virtual murder and virtual paedophilia”
- Monday 8/5 – Case study 4

Segment 6 – Wrapping up

- Tuesday 8/6 – Final exam review
- Wednesday 8/7 – Didn’t we forget about AGI?
 - Bostrom
- Thursday 8/8 – TBD
- Friday 8/9 – No class

Schedule of Assignments

Case study 1

- Available – 7/10
- Group work day – 7/15
- Due date – 7/17

Case study 2

- Available – 7/17
- Group work day – 7/22
- Due date – 7/24

Case study 3

- Available – 7/24
- Group work day – 7/29
- Due date – 7/31

Case study 4

- Available – 7/31
- Group work day – 8/5
- Due date – 8/7

Individual essays

- Available – 7/31
- Due date – 8/9