

Information Ethics
INF 385T
28605

“Technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral” – Melvin Kranzberg

“Technological progress is like an axe in the hands of a pathological criminal” – Albert Einstein

“A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention” – Herbert A. Simon

“Eliminating the distinction between information rich and poor countries is critical to eliminating economic and other inequalities” – Nelson Mandela

Fall 2013
UTA 1.504
Mondays 12:00 pm – 2:45 pm

Instructor: Professor Kenneth R. Fleischmann
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Office Hours: Mondays 2:45 pm – 4 pm and by appointment (or via e-mail)

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I. Rationale:

Recent advances in the production, use, and management of information present many new opportunities, and also raise ethical challenges that we must confront. Is it wrong to create technologies that replace human labor, leading to unemployment? Is it morally acceptable for law enforcement officers to pose as children online to catch child predators? Is it wrong to share music with friends using peer-to-peer networks? Is it morally acceptable to use body scanners that violate personal privacy to prevent acts of terrorism? Is it wrong to release software with known bugs that might have unintended consequences, potentially including loss of life? Is it morally acceptable to require citizens to vote online when there are security concerns and not every citizen has access to or the skills to use the Internet? This course covers past, current, and future issues in information ethics, and encourages you to develop your own standpoint from which to address the diverse range of ethical challenges facing us in the information age. During the course, you will learn about a wide range of ethical theories, including non-Western and feminist theories, and you will then apply these theories to confront critical information ethics issues using a case-based educational computer simulation.

II. Course Aims and Objectives:

Specific Learning Objectives:

Upon successfully completing this course, you will be able to:

- Identify key problems in information ethics and propose solutions to these problems
- Articulate your own values and understand and appreciate the values of others
- Conduct research on specific ethical theorists and develop information ethics cases that focus on one or more contemporary information ethics issues relevant to your professional trajectory

III. Format and Procedures:

This course applies a case-based learning approach to information ethics. The cases used in this class provide opportunities to apply abstract theories and concepts learned in class to real-world scenarios, and create a safe environment for considering and resolving ethical dilemmas. You will work in groups to solve information ethics cases delivered using a text-based educational computer simulation.

IV. Tentative Course Schedule: ***This syllabus is subject to change with advance notice.*

Date	Main Topic(s)	Work to do at home Readings – to be completed <u>before</u> class	Evaluation
9/9	Introduction		
9/16	The Information Age	Quinn, Chapter 1	
9/23	Ethics	Quinn, Chapter 2	
9/30	Additional Ethical Perspectives I	Indian ethics Islamic ethics Ubuntu culture and participatory management Rational egoism: A profile of its foundations and basic character	
10/7	Additional Ethical Perspectives II	Buddhist ethics Classical Chinese ethics Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective Gender identity and the ethics of care in globalized society	
10/14	Professional Ethics	Quinn, Chapter 9 Codes of Ethics Posted in Blackboard	Midterm Assignment Due
10/21	Networking	Quinn, Chapter 3	
10/28	Intellectual Property	Quinn, Chapter 4	
11/4	Privacy	Quinn, Chapters 5 & 6	
11/11	Computer and Network Security	Quinn, Chapter 7	
11/18	Computer Reliability	Quinn, Chapter 8	
11/25	Work and Wealth	Quinn, Chapter 10	
12/6	Case Presentations/Wrap-Up Discussion		Final Assignment Due

V. Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and Participation:

(a) Attendance Policy: Because the vast majority of the learning in this class will occur within the classroom, you are required to attend class regularly. Attendance will be taken during each class period. Absences will only be excused in situations following university policy (illness, religious observances, participation in University activities at the request of university authorities, and compelling absences beyond your control) with proper documentation and timely notification (prior to class for non-emergencies). Excessive tardiness may be considered as an unexcused absence.

(b) Class Participation: Class participation is a critical element of this course. The effectiveness of the course will be significantly impacted by the quality of your participation. Class participation is not just attendance, but factors in your overall contributions to the collaborative learning environment, including the quantity and quality of your interactions in all aspects of the course. Participation in the cases is especially critical. You are expected to complete all written and oral aspects of each case during the class period, and to be ready to discuss the process and outcome of their case with the class following the completion of each case. Preparation prior to the class period is also important. You should come to class prepared to discuss important points from the required readings, as well as your perspectives on these readings. You should strive for balance in your contributions, and participation grades will be based on consistent participation of significant quantity and, most importantly, quality, including both written and oral aspects of class participation.

(c) Calculation of Attendance and Participation Grade: Your attendance and class participation grade will be calculated by multiplying the numerical assessment of your class participation by the percentage of classes that you attend (with exceptions made for documented, university-recognized absences as noted above). Please note that regular attendance and active participation in each class session are critical for receiving a good grade in this course.

Religious Holy Days:

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

2. Course Readings/Materials:

Quinn, M.J. (2013). *Ethics for the information age* (5th Ed.). Boston: Addison Wesley.
Additional readings are available on the course Blackboard site or are free Web-based materials.
All course readings must be completed prior to the course meeting for that week.

3. Assignments, Assessment, and Evaluation

Midterm Assignment: Reports on Ethical Theorists:

In the first half of the course, you will select four ethical theorists and write brief reports on their key ethical stances and how those stances might apply to contemporary information ethics issues. Each report on each ethical theorist will be 400-500 words in length and should cite at least three sources. The overall assignment that you turn in should total 1,600-2,000 words and cite at least twelve references following APA style (as explained here:

<http://www2.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/workshop/citapa.htm>). Your midterm assignment will be graded based on the appropriateness of your specific selected ethical theorist, your description of the key ethical stances of the theorist, your application of the ethical theorist's stances to contemporary information ethics issues, your adherence to the length requirement, and your adherence to the requirement to cite references.

Final Assignment: Information Ethics Case:

In the second half of the course, you will select a specific contemporary information ethics dilemma of relevance to your professional or educational background, experiences, and interests, and use this dilemma to build a case similar to the cases used in the simulation during the second half of the semester. Each case must involve three roles and sequential binary decisions for each role. Your final assignment will be graded based on creativity, appropriateness, and adherence to requirements.

Late Assignment Policy:

All assignments are due at the start of class. Late assignments will only be excused in situations following university policy (illness, religious observances, participation in University activities at the request of university authorities, and compelling absences beyond your control) with proper documentation and timely notification (prior to the deadline for non-emergencies). In all other cases, assignments received after the deadline will be penalized 10% per 24-hour period. If you turn in an assignment (without prior authorization or extreme emergency circumstances) even one minute late, you will have an automatic deduction of 10% prior to grading of the assignment; if you are five days late, even an otherwise perfect assignment will only receive half-credit; and any assignment turned in ten days late will receive a 0.)

4. Use of *Blackboard* in class

In this class we will use *Blackboard*—a Web-based course management system with password-protected access at <http://courses.utexas.edu>—to distribute course materials, to post grades, and to submit assignments. You can find support in using Blackboard at the ITS Help Desk at 475-9400, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., so plan accordingly.

VI. Grading Procedures: Grades will be based on:

- (a) 40% Attendance and Participation
- (b) 30% Midterm Assignment: Reports on Ethical Theorists
- (c) 30% Final Assignment: Information Ethics Case

VII. Academic Integrity

University of Texas Honor Code

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student's own work.

You are encouraged to study together and to discuss information and concepts covered in lecture and the sections with other students. You can give "consulting" help to or receive "consulting" help from such students. However, this permissible cooperation should never involve one student having possession of a copy of all or part of work done by someone else, in the form of an e-mail, an e-mail attachment file, a diskette, or a hard copy.

Should copying occur, both the student who copied work from another student and the student who gave material to be copied will both automatically receive a zero for the assignment. Penalty for violation of this Code can also be extended to include failure of the course and University disciplinary action.

VIII. Other University Notices and Policies

Use of E-mail for Official Correspondence to Students

- All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that e-mail be checked daily, but at a minimum, twice per week. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/help/utmail/1564> .

Documented Disability Statement

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at (512) 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). Faculty are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation letter from SSD.

- Please notify me as quickly as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible (e.g., instructional videos need captioning, course packets are not readable for proper alternative text conversion, etc.).
- Please notify me as early in the semester as possible if disability-related accommodations for field trips are required. Advanced notice will permit the arrangement of accommodations on the given day (e.g., transportation, site accessibility, etc.).
- Contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone) or reference SSD's website for more disability-related information:
http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/for_cstudents.php

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)

If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

Emergency Evacuation Policy

Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform me in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow my instructions or those of class instructors.

Do not re-enter a building unless you're given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.