SYLLABUS

Instructor: Ellen Rubenstein, Assistant Professor
Office: 401 W. Brooks, Bizzell Library basement (enter Bizzell from Van Fleet Oval, turn right and go
downstairs; turn left twice into SLIS office hallway)
Email: erubenstein@ou.edu
Office hours: Tuesdays 1:45-3:15; Thursdays 12-2:30 OR by appointment

Course Description:
This is an upper-level undergraduate and graduate course that examines ethical issues associated with
digital information and digital technologies. We will look at a broad range of moral issues and
controversies associated with the use of computers and the Internet, including but not limited to:
regulation and governance of the Internet, free speech, copyright, plagiarism, electronic surveillance,
hacking, online behavior, and games/virtual worlds. Students will use critical thinking and analysis to
understand the range and complexity of controversies related to the digital information age.

Prerequisite: None.

Course Objectives:
Upon completion of this course students will be able to:
  • Identify and discuss ethical thought as it relates to digital information
  • Identify critical issues related to the interaction of humans with digital technology
  • Understand multiple ethical and social perspectives that arise with respect to computers, the
    Internet, and online behavior

Teaching/Learning Methods:
This class is run as a seminar. While there will be some lecturing, the class will mainly consist of
discussions and other activities designed to give students insights into the material read each week.
Students are expected to contribute to a participatory experience that is receptive to others’ experiences
and contributions.

My teaching philosophy embraces the idea that learning is a shared process. We each bring something to
the learning environment, whether we are “teacher” or “student.” You will have experiences, knowledge,
and perspectives that differ from mine, and I will have the same. I do not believe in the “transmission”
process of learning, where an instructor spouts “knowledge” and “wisdom” and expects the students to
receive and repeat information back. Although in regard to the course material I have been exposed to and
worked with the material before, you will also have valuable and interesting insights. We are all
contributors to our mutual learning experiences.

Textbook:
Jones & Bartlett Learning.

Other readings:
In addition, there will be supplementary readings throughout the semester, which will be posted on D2L
for easy access.

Students are expected to have completed all readings before class each week.
Technology Requirements and Allowances:
Students will be using D2L to access readings. If you are unfamiliar with D2L, please contact OU IT at http://support.ou.edu or call them at (405) 325-HELP.

Computers and mobile devices are allowed in the classroom as long as they are used for class purposes.

Class Attendance:
You are allowed one absence in this class, unless there is an emergency or illness. Please keep in mind that non-attendance may negatively affect your performance on assignments. In addition, the following guidelines apply to this class:

University Policy 4.19.1 Class Attendance – Students
“Students are responsible for the content of courses in which they are enrolled. Specific policy concerning attendance requirements and announced and unannounced examinations is the responsibility of the individual instructor. Students have a responsibility to inform faculty prior to absences whenever possible. Faculty should make every effort to find a reasonable accommodation for students who miss class as a result of participation in Provost-approved University-sponsored activities or legally required activities such as emergency military service. Students missing class on account of jury duty must receive such an accommodation.

“When absences seriously affect a student’s class work, the instructor will report this fact to the Admissions and Records Office, where the information will be directed to the dean concerned.”

Absence for Religious Holidays:
“It is the policy of the University to excuse absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide without penalty for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required classwork that may fall on religious holidays” (Section 3.13.2, The Faculty Handbook). Students who plan to observe a religious holiday should notify the instructor as soon as possible in order to make appropriate arrangements for classwork or rescheduling of examinations.

Reasonable Accommodations:
The University of Oklahoma is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for all students with disabilities. Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate educational opportunities. Students requesting accommodations are required to contact the Office of Disability Services. This office accepts requests from students for reasonable accommodation after the student has self-identified as an individual with a disability. The Office of Disability Services on the Norman campus is located in Goddard Health Center, Suite 166, phone 405-325-3852, or TDD only 405-325-4173. On the OU-Tulsa campus, students should contact the OU-Tulsa Student Affairs office located in Room IC 53.

Academic Integrity and Misconduct:
The following web page outlines OU’s expectations of academic honesty, defines misconduct, provides examples of prohibited conduct (including plagiarism, improper collaboration, and Internet cheating), and explains sanctions for misconduct: http://integrity.ou.edu/.

Examples of plagiarism can be found at http://integrity.ou.edu/files/nine_things_you_should_know.pdf.

Codes and Policies of Behavior:
To protect its faculty and students, the School of Library and Information Studies fully subscribes to the University’s codes, policies, and procedures involving academic misconduct, grievances, sexual, racial, and ethnic harassment, and discrimination based on disability. You are strongly encouraged to acquaint yourself with both your responsibilities and your protections. See “Student Code” at: http://judicial.ou.edu/content/view/27/32/.
ASSIGNMENTS:

Class Participation – Ongoing – 20%
In addition to participating generally in class discussion, we will be talking about your response papers each week (see below) as well as some of your assignments. In addition, students are encouraged to bring in articles related to the ethical issues of the week, to enhance the class experience.

Reading Summaries/Responses – To be turned in weekly: 10%
Each week you are expected to hand in a brief reading summary and response, single-spaced, 300-500 words. The first paragraph should be a summary of one of the readings for the week. The rest should be your reaction to the readings as a group – this can be a comparison to ethical issues in your life, in the world at large, or it can be your personal response to what you have read for the week. The most important aspect of these responses is to take a critical look at the readings to become more engaged with the material. We will talk about your responses in class, and you will hand them in at the end of class.

These will be graded as follows:

A: You wrote something that shows insights or thoughtfulness beyond what is in the reading; e.g., you enhanced what you read in some way.

B: You wrote something that shows you did the reading.

C: You wrote something, but it was hard to understand what your points were, or there were a number of typos and/or grammatical error, making it difficult to read.

Note: Please be aware that punctuation, grammar, typos, and clarity of writing are important to me in ALL assignments. If you are unable to express your thoughts clearly encompassing all of these elements, you should contact the OU Writing Center for guidelines.

Leading Discussion – As assigned – 10%
Each week, beginning on February 7, students will be responsible for leading discussion for a particular week of your choosing. You will need to email me by Friday, January 27 at midnight with your first two choices of topics (only one will be assigned to you). They will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis. Take time to look over the syllabus and see which topics most interest you – in addition to reading the topic heading for the week, you should also look at the actual reading titles as they will help you determine your level of interest.

Part of this responsibility will be to bring in one or more news articles related to the weekly topic, and talk about it/them in relation to the readings.

You should plan to lead discussion for around 20-30 minutes (do the best you can in predicting the time). If there are two people signed up for one week, then each of you should plan for 20-30 minutes (a total of 40-60 minutes) and you should collaborate with each other to determine how you will discuss the subject matter. You can each do a separate part of the discussion, or you can run it together.

Your job is to focus on only a few aspects of the readings, and you also need to inform me about what you will be discussing by Friday night, 5pm, the week before your class session so I can plan for the rest of the class session.

Some guidelines for this:
1. Your role is to lead discussion, not summarize readings.
2. For example, you might start with a question related to the readings.
3. You could ask for people’s interpretations of a part of the reading that seemed unclear.
4. Or you could focus on a specific part you thought was of interest (either something you disagreed with, or something you thought was a good point).
5. You could then ask for others’ thoughts on specific points.
6. You could ask for people’s experiences with similar circumstances, or experiences which
   either seem to support or counter aspects of the readings.
7. Bring in a newspaper article or some other account of a recent event that seems related, and
talk about it. (See the end of the syllabus for suggestions of where you might find articles.)
8. You are welcome to use videos or slides, or any other strategies (e.g., games, discussion
groups, etc). This is only limited by your imagination. However, I do not want slides that
merely summarize the readings. Think about how you can have fun with the material.
9. I do not expect you to be an expert – I only want you to engage the class in talking about the
material.

Rationale for this assignment: I have found that when students have time to lead the class, they bring
interesting ideas and thought that I may not have thought of. In leading discussion, students are
contributing to the diversity of thought that encompasses thinking about ethical issues in the digital world.

Note: the week you lead class discussion, you do not have to write a response paper.

Google Essay – Due February 14 - 10%

1. Google yourself. Look at the first five pages of Google (not the first five entries on the page) and see
what information shows up. Write an assessment about how well you think the entries represent who
you are and what you would want people to know about you. Some sample questions to answer might
be: Are there entries that you might not want other people to see? Are you comfortable with the
information that shows up?

If you don’t see anything about yourself, report on what you do find.

2. Do the same exercise about someone you know fairly well. In addition to writing about how well you
think Google entries represent that person, ask that person for his/her reaction to the entries.

This assignment should be 2-3 pages, double-spaced.

Rationale for this assignment: To gain an understanding of what kind of identity might be out in
“cyberspace” about you that you have absolutely no control over.

Interview with a Professional – Due February 28 - 15%

Both Undergrads and Grads:

Arrange an interview with someone who works with digital information in some way. This could
be: an IT professional – anyone who designs software, manages IT systems, teaches computer
science, etc., or it could be a digital librarian, or a medical provider who uses digital medical
records, someone who works with other types of digital records, or…whoever you think might
provide interesting information about the ethical issues dealt with in a particular workplace.

Ask this person about what her/his job entails in relation to digital information. Get as complete a
picture as you can, perhaps having her/him talk about a typical day or week, how s/he interacts
with digital information, etc. Then ask about ongoing ethical aspects that are part of the job, and
find out what kind of ethical dilemmas this person has faced in her/his career, and how they were
resolved. Try to get as much detail as possible.

When writing the paper, please keep the person’s name confidential by using a pseudonym.

Undergrads:

Write a 3-5 page, double-spaced essay that gives an account of the information you obtained.
Grads:

Write a paper 5-8 page, double-spaced paper that includes a literature review of ethical aspects related to the occupation of the person you have interviewed. Then give an account of the information you learned through the interview.

Rationale for this assignment: To obtain an understanding of the ethical issues that people encounter in their daily lives in the workplace.

Case Study/Research Paper – 20% + Proposal – 5% + Outline – 10% - TOTAL: 35%

Proposal Due: March 13 (see #3 below for instructions)
Outline Due: April 3 (see #4 below)
Paper and Presentation Due: May 1

1. Students will complete a research paper on an ethical topic of your choosing. This can be related to one of the topics we cover in class, or it can be something else.

2. Do some preliminary searches on the web and through library resources to determine if there is an interesting case or cases that represent the ethical area you would like to research. Your task is to locate discussions in newspapers, academic journals, online, or in other publicly available sources about a real-life ethical dilemma related to your topic. Finding a good example may take a little trial and error, so make sure you give yourself enough time to settle on an interesting case.

3. **Proposal:** Write a brief proposal (1-3 pages, double-spaced) for your paper. This proposal should include three things:
   - a brief description of the topic;
   - a brief description of the specific example(s) you will discuss;
   - a list of the resources you have found so far and that you expect to use to complete your paper.
   - Your list of resources must include at least two non-academic sources (that discuss the case) and at least three academic sources other than class readings. If you are writing about a case that has relevance to class material, you should list class readings that you expect will be relevant. **It is expected that you will use more resources than this, but this is the minimum expected at the proposal stage.**

   The proposal is due March 13.

4. **Rough Outline:** Think about how you will organize your paper. You will have three weeks between the time you hand in your proposal and the time a rough outline is due. During that time you should conduct enough research that you have an idea about how you would like to present your topic. I do not expect an minute outline of every aspect you will be discussing, but I want some idea of where you are going with your topic, including section headings and what will be discussed in the body of each section. Doing an outline will help you in the writing of your paper.

   The rough outline is due April 3.

5. Conduct an analysis of the discussion. Classify the different ethical aspects using concepts from class. Usually ethical dilemmas generate disagreements, and you will also want to identify and analyze the different positions. Compare positions of various authors.

6. **Undergrads:** You will write an 8-10 page paper, excluding references.
**Grads:** You will write a 15-20 page paper, excluding references.

**Your paper should include the following elements:**

a. An introduction. The introduction should be 1-2 paragraphs long and include a thesis statement. If you need help with your thesis statement, please see me. The thesis statement should discuss what you will be writing about. This link can help you with your thesis statement: [http://writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/writing-the-paper/thesis-statements#section-2](http://writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/writing-the-paper/thesis-statements#section-2)

b. A description of the incident or other example that generated the ethical dilemma. This should be concise. You may want to save details to bring up as you discuss arguments later in the paper.

b-1: **For Graduate Students Only:** You are to conduct an extensive literature review of your topic, and include this after your introduction and description of the case you will be discussing.

c. An organized discussion of your analysis.

d. A conclusion. Your conclusion should not introduce any new concepts. It should sum up what you have discussed, and restate in some fashion your thesis statement. You may also want to provide pointers to future research or other action that might be taken with regard to your example.

e. Proper citation for all the sources you use. In the School of Library and Information Studies, the citation style used is the Chicago Manual of Style. Please see either the Writing Center or look online for examples. There are two different ways to cite in Chicago – you should use the author/date system, which does not require footnotes. For a quick reference, see [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).


Please note, again, that the 5 sources listed in your proposal are only the minimum – you are expected to do research beyond what you have cited in the proposal.

f. Final presentation of project: On the last day of class, students will do a presentation of their case and their findings. This will be an informal presentation as a way to share your research with the rest of the class (i.e., you do not have to use slides, but you can if you want to). Your presentation should be about 10 minutes long, and will be factored into the final grade for the paper. I do want to stress that these are informal presentations, and you should not worry excessively about them.

**Due Dates and Late Assignments:**
Assignments are due at or before the beginning of class on the stated due date. Assignments will be accepted later than the due date only by prior arrangement with the instructor or in the case of a documented illness or emergency. Assignments submitted later than the due date for reasons other than documented illness or emergency will be subject to an automatic reduction of 10% of the grade for the assignment.
GRADING:

ASSIGNMENTS (TOTAL of 500 pts):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>DUE</th>
<th>GRADE % of TOTAL/Pts.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>20% (100 pts.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Summaries/Responses</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>10% (50 pts.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading Discussion</td>
<td>As assigned</td>
<td>10% (50 pts.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Essay</td>
<td>February 14</td>
<td>10% (50 pts.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>February 28</td>
<td>15% (75 pts.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Proposal</td>
<td>March 13</td>
<td>5% (25 pts.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Outline</td>
<td>April 3</td>
<td>10% (50 pts.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper and Presentation</td>
<td>May 1</td>
<td>20% (100 pts.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SCHEDULE & READINGS:

Note: In addition to the scheduled readings for class, it is possible that if I come across an interesting news item that is related to our topic, I will email it to you for discussion. Alternatively, I may distribute news articles in class for you to read during class time.

WEEK 1 - January 17 – Introduction to the Class

WEEK 2 - January 24 – Ethical Thought & the Internet

DUE JAN 27: Your two choices for which week you want to lead discussion.

Spinello, Chapter 1

Selections from Chapters 2-3:

- Relativism (pp. 35-40)
- Utilitarianism (pp. 44-49)
- Kantian Deontology (pp. 49-56)
- Ethics of Care vs. Ethic of Justice (pp. 63-68)


Take a look at this website – it offers nice, clear explanations of various ethics topics:
Ethical Decision Making: [http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/](http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/)
WEEK 3 - January 31 – Regulating and Governing the Internet

Note: It looks like a lot of readings here, but several of them are very short.

Spinello, Chapter 2

U.S. Principles on the Internet’s Domain Name and Addressing System

United States Announces Intention to Maintain Control Over the Internet
http://www.globalization101.org/united-states-announces-intention-to-maintain-control-over-internet-2/


***Look up SOPA and PIPA in preparation for discussion.

WEEK 4 - February 7 – Free Speech and Content Control

Spinello, Chapter 3

http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3850/3075


WEEK 5 - February 14 – Privacy & Surveillance – Part 1

DUE: Google Essay

Spinello, Chapter 5


WEEK 6 - February 21 – Privacy & Surveillance – Part 2


WEEK 7 - February 28 – Professional Responsibility

DUE: Interview


Take a look at this web page, which lists a bunch of computer system failures: http://www.softwareqatest.com/qatfaq1.html#FAQ1_3

Take a look at these pages, which are various professions’ codes of ethics: http://www.acm.org/about/se-code http://www.ieee.org/about/corporate/governance/p7-8.html http://courses.cs.vt.edu/cs3604/lib/WorldCodes/Australia.Code.html

WEEK 8 – March 6 – Who Are We When We’re Online?


**WEEK 9 - March 13 – Intellectual Property**

**DUE: Paper Proposal**

Spinello, Chapter 4


***Let’s again take a look at SOPA and PIPA.***

**SPRING BREAK**

**WEEK 10 - March 27 – Ethics in Search Engines, Wikipedia, and Computer Chips**


**WEEK 11 – April 3 – Games and Virtual Worlds**

**DUE: Rough Outline for Paper**


**WEEK 12 - April 11 – Digital Inequalities and Inclusion**


**WEEK 13 - April 17 – Facets of Blogging and YouTube**


Antony, Mary Grace, and Ryan J. Thomas. 2010. ‘This is citizen journalism at its finest’: YouTube and the public sphere in the Oscar Grant shooting incident. *New Media & Society* 12(8): 1280-1296.


**WEEK 14 - April 24 – Securing the Electronic Frontier**

Spinello, Chapter 6


**WEEK 15 - May 1**
Final papers due, and presentations of final papers

**Some sites where you can find material for presentations and paper:**

Wired: [http://www.wired.com](http://www.wired.com)
Wall Street Journal: [http://online.wsj.com/home-page](http://online.wsj.com/home-page)
Internet Governance Project: [http://internetgovernance.org/](http://internetgovernance.org/)
Center for Democracy and Technology: [https://www.cdt.org/](https://www.cdt.org/)
Electronic Frontier Foundation: [https://www.eff.org/](https://www.eff.org/)
Creative Commons: [http://creativecommons.org/](http://creativecommons.org/)
Sunlight Foundation: [http://www.sunlightfoundation.com](http://www.sunlightfoundation.com)
Lawrence Lessig, Codev2: [http://codev2.cc/](http://codev2.cc/)