Ethics of Technology (Tentative) Syllabus

Course Description and Objectives: In this course we will explore some of the many ethical challenges posed by contemporary technology. This course will provide the student with an understanding of fundamental ethical questions related to autonomous and information technology. This course will also provide a historical contrast with which to compare and contextualize the novel and exciting challenges of the 21st century.

By the end of this course the student will be able to identify and distinguish ethical challenges particular to information technology and autonomous technology as well as the implications of such technology for important moral concepts such as agency, responsibility and privacy. The student will also be able to cohesively articulate a critical analysis of novel ethical issues related to computational methods such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data.


Additional reading material will be provided digitally. This means that I will sometimes share the material, if available, through the digital platform of our course (Canvas). Other times you will have to access articles through your own University of Oregon library account. Being able to search, find and use digital material through your library’s database is an integral part of your college education, make sure you become acquainted with how to do so.

This course requires that you invest at least 2-4 hours a week of reading.

Meeting Schedule: Tuesdays 2PM-4:50PM

Contact information: The location of my office is room 245 in Susan Campbell Hall. The best way to contact me is via email, at ralvarad@uoregon.edu. I typically respond within 24 hours. (Please note that I do not normally check my email during the weekend/late at night. If you email me during those times my reply will be delayed.)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:00-1:00 PM.

Requirements/grading: At the end of the course, I’ll give you a grade between A and F. The grades A, B, C, and D are given specific interpretations at the University of Oregon grading policy. You can find it at the registrar's website in a section called “The Grading System” (https://registrar.uoregon.edu/current-students/grading-system), which says that an A should be given for achievement of excellent quality, a B for achievement of good quality, a C for achievement of satisfactory quality, and a D for achievement whose quality is less than acceptable (expected, explicitly or implicitly required from college-level work).
What letter grade I give you will depend on the final scores you get on the various assignments in the course (outlined below). I’ll use the following scale to convert your final average to a letter grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93.50 or greater</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90.00 through 93.49</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86.50 through 89.99</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83.50 through 86.49</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80.00 through 83.49</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76.50 through 79.99</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73.50 through 76.49</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70.00 through 73.49</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66.50 through 69.99</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63.50 through 66.49</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60.00 through 63.49</td>
<td>D-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.99 and below</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here are the factors that will determine your overall grade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 In class writing assignments (2% each)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1 due</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2 due</td>
<td>30%</td>
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**Attendance and Participation:** You are required to attend class in order to earn the full attendance and participation grade. However, merely showing up to class/discussion session is not sufficient to earn you any attendance and participation points. In order to earn some or the full 10% of your attendance and participation grade you must also engage in a thoughtful and deliberate manner with the content of the lecture and the readings in class and in your discussion sessions. Please expect your name to be called in class as we discuss key points of the assigned readings or lecture content. While having the “right” answer is not what is expected, a willingness to engage intellectually with the question as well as a degree of familiarity with the required readings is. Not being able or willing to thoughtfully engage in an ongoing discussion when called upon will count against your overall participation grade.

**In-Class Writing Assignments:** Every class period you will have to write a short but thorough answer to a question related to the readings for the day or the discussion taking place during lecture. The answers should be from 1 to 3 paragraphs and should fully address the contents of the question. That is, if the question has two or more components you should make sure each and every one of them is clearly and directly addressed. These answers should be genuinely
thoughtful responses, even if not thoroughly technical, and should include references to relevant
course material and concepts when applicable. No late in-class writing assignments will be
accepted.

**Coauthored Presentations:** An important part of your grade is an end-of-term research
presentation. You and a coauthor (TBD) should prepare to present on a specific topic (TBD) for
10-15 minutes and be ready to take on questions from the audience (your classmates and myself).
The presentation should include 1) a clear and concise description of a *philosophical* problem
within ethics of technology regarding a contemporary technology of your choice, 2) an overview
of the implications for ethical deliberation (preferably based on existing literature) with an
applied example, and 3) a philosophical analysis of the issue.

**Papers:** Papers must be submitted electronically through the class’ Canvas site. *Papers 1 and 2
shall be between 1400-1800 words.* All online paper submissions must be turned in using .doc or
.docx formats. *Papers are automatically compared to web materials and to other papers submitted.*
This means that any text borrowed from another source will be flagged, and any
plagiarized work will be brought to the attention of your professor. The rubric for assignments
will be explained in detail in a separate document.

Paper 1 (Due on Friday Oct. 25th) will focus on the initial sections of this course, particularly the
sections dealing with Technology, Ethics and Ethics of Technology as broadly construed in the
readings and lecture. The particular topic of your paper will be given to you by me during lecture
the week before the paper is due. That should give you approximately 10 days to write your
paper, as well as an extra lecture day and a couple of office hours prior to submission in case you
need to consult with me.

Paper 2 (Due on Friday December 10) will be focused on one of the three main topics covered in
the latter section of this course. Details will be discussed in class in due time.

**Policy on late papers and Canvas assignments:** Late papers will be accepted with a penalty of
1/3 of a grade for each day or partial day late (e.g., a B becomes a B- if the paper is between a
partial and a full day late, a C+ if it is more than one full day but less than two full days late,
etc.). In the event of a *documented* illness or emergency, the student will be granted an extension
and a new due date for the paper will be determined by the instructor. The late paper penalty
will then be applied if the paper is turned in after the new due date. Since this class takes place
over a shortened period of time, it is essential that all students continue progressing through the
material as a group. The only exception to this will be in the event of a *documented* illness or
emergency.

**Academic conduct/misconduct:** I take academic misconduct, especially cheating on papers,
extremely seriously, and am generally disposed to impose the harshest available penalties when
it occurs.

Please be mindful and respectful of other people’s time and voices. You can ensure an equitable
and productive lecture/discussion session by making sure you signal your desire to engage before
you speak, waiting your turn, and by trying not to interrupt your professor and/or others. If the
point you are trying to make or the question you are raising is of substantial complexity/length
please consider pursuing it/continuing it after class or during office hours with me. This will
ensure that your classmates do not miss out on other important aspects of the lecture/discussion.

No-Screen Policy: This class offers you the chance to learn about and discuss, for a mere 4 hours
per week, some of the most profound and old questions humans have had to deal with. You
should take this chance as a privileged opportunity of uninterrupted dialectic contemplation. In
order to enable such an opportunity, I have a no-screen policy in the classroom. This means no
smartphones, no tablets, no laptops, no wearables, no e-readers and definitely no etch-a-sketch
devices during class time. Usage of screens during class/discussion session will automatically
have a negative impact in your attendance and participation grade.

By the time you attend lectures you should already have read the assigned readings, so you do
not need a screen. This is not just what is best for you, but also what is best for those next to you
(1). Using a phone in class is highly distracting for your brain, even if you think you are good at
multitasking (2). Furthermore, while taking notes is actually not the best way to benefit from a
lecture/discussion, if you must do it, writing them by hand is in fact better for memory retention
(3). You can find more information about this from the following sources:


(If you are a designated note taker or if you require special accommodation to use a screen
please send me an email/talk to me early in the term and/or make sure you contact the Accessible
Education Center to request a letter as soon as school starts or before).

Disability accommodation: If you have a disability for which you may be requesting special
services or accommodations for this course, be sure to contact https://aec.uoregon.edu/request-
accommodations and provide a letter from that office documenting the accommodations to which
you are entitled. Please also contact me privately, at your earliest convenience, so that I can be
aware of your situation and can begin to prepare the appropriate accommodations in advance of
receiving the letter from the Accessible Education Center. A list of required course technology is
below – please contact Student Access Services and myself if you know you will encounter
difficulties with a specific technology listed.

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me
if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related
barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education
Center in 360 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu.

Required technology: In order to complete this course, you will need to have or have access to:

• A computer with a modern internet browser and sufficiently fast internet access to stream video
  content.
• Microsoft Word: This software is used for creating documents (i.e., your paper assignments).
• A PDF reader: This software is used for reading some of the course’s documents. If you do not already have this software installed on your computer, the free official Adobe Acrobat Reader software may be downloaded at https://get.adobe.com/reader/.
• Video streaming capability: This class requires you to watch a few videos which have been posted online.

**Technical support:** If you experience technical difficulties using Canvas or having access to any digitally distributed material for this class, email me as soon as possible. You can also contact UO’s Information Technology at: https://service.uoregon.edu/TDClient/KB/ArticleDet?ID=31879

Telephone support is available Monday through Friday, 8am to 5pm. Phone number is 541-346-HELP (541-346-4357). During the fall, winter, and spring, extended hours are offered for phone and service portal ticket support: 8am-7pm, M-F.

### Class Reading Schedule (Subject to change)

**Lesson 1 Introduction: Technology and Ethics.**

**Week 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10/01</th>
<th>Introduction/What is technology?</th>
<th>Read: “Introduction” Winner (p.2-12)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do: in-class writing assignment.</td>
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**Week 2**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do: 1 of 1: in-class writing assignment.</td>
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**Lesson 2 Ethics of Technology**

**Week 3**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Watch: 1 of 1: All watched over by machines of love and grace: Love and Power.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do: 1 of 1: in-class writing assignment.</td>
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### Week 4

**10/22**

Paper 1 (TBD) due by Friday, October 25th by 8PM.

**Read:**
1 of 3: “On the Philosophical Foundations of Information Ethics” Floridi
2 of 3: “Virtue Ethics, Technology and Human Flourishing” Vallor
3 of 3: “History of Information and Computer Ethics” Bynum

**Do:**
1 of 2: in-class writing assignment.
2 of 2: Paper 1 due (end of week)

### Lesson 4 Autonomy/Autonomous

**Week 5**

**10/29**

**Read:**
1 of 2: “Autonomy and Mastery (p.13-18)
2 of 2: “Autonomy and Animism” (p.31-43)

**Watch:**
1 of 1: Mechanisms of fire control computers

**Do:**
1 of 1: in-class writing assignment.

### Week 6

**11/05**

**Read:**
1 of 1: SEP “Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy
2 of 2: “The Evitable Conflict” Asimov

**Do:**
1 of 1: in-class writing assignment.

### Lesson 5 Privacy

**Week 7**

**11/12**

**Read:**
1 of 2: “The Right to Privacy” Judith Jarvis Thomson (p.272-289)
2 of 2: “Informational Privacy” Tavani (p.131-164)

**Watch:**
1 of 1: “Weapons of Mass Surveillance” BBC

**Do:**
1 of 1: in-class writing assignment.
### Week 8:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Read:</th>
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</table>
| 11/19 | 1 of 2: “Locating the Value in Privacy” Nissenbaum (p.67-88)  
2 of 2: “Knowing us better than we know ourselves” Nissenbaum(p.35-50) |

**Watch:** Zuboff “Surveillance Capitalism and our Democracy”

**Do:** 1 of 1: in-class writing assignment.

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### Lesson 6 Agency and Responsibility

#### Week 9:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Read:</th>
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</table>
| 11/26 | 1 of 3: Ch. 7 “Complexity and the loss of agency” (p.279-305) Winner  
2 of 3: “Science Neither by the People, nor for the People” (p.6-8) Humphreys  
3 of 3: Agency SEP |

**Do:** 1 of 1: in-class writing assignment.

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### Week 10:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Read:</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 12/3  | 1 of 2: “Accountability in a computerized society” Nissenbaum  
2 of 2: Responsibility SEP |

**Watch:** 1 of 1: “The Great Hack”

**Do:** 1 of 1: in-class writing assignment.

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### Student Presentations

#### Week 11:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Read:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12/10</td>
<td>2 of 2: Final paper Due on Friday Dec. 13th.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>