

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY/DIGITAL HUMANITIES
Undergraduate Course Outline 2019-20

Phil 2078F/DH 2126F: Ethics for a Digital World

Fall 2019

Day and Time: Thursdays 1:30 – 2:30 p.m.

Classroom: WSC 55

Instructor: Dr. Ryan Robb

Office: Stevenson Hall, 4126

**Office Hours: Thursdays 11:30 a.m. –
1:30 p.m.**

e-mal: rrobb@uwo.ca

DESCRIPTION

We spend a considerable portion of our lives in the digital world. What moral considerations ought to guide our conduct as digital citizens, given the possibility that online behaviour is morally distinct from real world behaviour? This class will engage materials that address the philosophical issues raised by these two questions: Specifically: What's the relationship between our virtual identities and our physical identities? How is online activity changing our interpersonal relationships? What are our rights and responsibilities toward others in the digital world? How do we trade between the potentially conflicting values of anonymity and accountability? How do we balance copyright claims against demands for open access? Is piracy always wrong? Does a hacker's code of ethics make any sense? How should we respond to sexism, racism, homophobia and other forms of hate and exclusion in online communities?

TEXTS

All the readings for this course will be made available through OWL

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this course is to help students improve their critical thinking skills. Specifically, students should expect to improve their abilities to understand the arguments made in the readings and respond with arguments of their own in their online discussion posts, their online participation, and their term papers.

The secondary goal of the course is to familiarize students with recent attempts by scholars to identify and address the ethical issues that emerge in our increasingly digital lives. This goal will be satisfied by testing student comprehension of the materials with online quizzes, and on the final exam.

REQUIREMENTS

Online Quizzes: 15% (11 quizzes, worth 1.36% each)

Online Discussion Posts: 20% (two 400 – 600 word posts, worth 10% each)

Online Discussion Participation: 10% (8 responses, worth 1.25% each)

One 1200 – 1300 word term-paper: 25%

Final Exam: 30%

AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

COURSE POLICIES

1. Extensions

If you fail to meet the submission dates for the two essays, extensions may be granted only as a result of a petition to the Academic Counselor of the student's faculty (barring a student's use of the new 48 hour 'Self-Reported Absence Form', outlined below). **Instructors have no authority to waive this requirement, and any unofficial arrangements they make with students will not be respected by the administration.**

All course work must be submitted by the last day of classes, i.e., Wednesday December 4th, 2019.

Academic policies on examinations, appeals, absences due to illness, etc. may be found in the 2019-20 Academic Calendar. For further information, contact your Faculty's Academic Counselor.

2. Late Assignments and penalties

Weekly Quizzes: Quizzes not completed prior to the end of the relevant Unit **cannot** be made up.

Unit Discussion Posts: Late online discussion posts will lose 1 (out of 10) marks per day for each day they are late; after 9 days (weekends included), a grade of 0 will automatically be recorded.

Discussion Responses/Participation: A failure to respond with the required number of replies (four in both Units 2 and 4) to your group mates' discussion posts before the deadline specified on the course syllabus **cannot** be made up.

Term Papers: Late term papers (due on Monday December 2nd, 2019) will lose 5% (out of 100) for each day they are late. In accord with UWO Senate guidelines, **no term papers will be accepted after the last day of classes, i.e., Thursday December 5th, 2019. ANY PAPER NOT SUBMITTED BY THIS TIME WILL (regrettably) RECEIVE A GRADE OF 0.**

3. E-mail policy

I am **not** able to respond to philosophical concerns or questions over e-mail (i.e., I won't discuss concepts/arguments covered in the materials by e-mail). I will address those concerns or questions during my office hours **only**. If you need to make an appointment with me or you have some private issue you would like to communicate to me, feel free to use e-mail. Otherwise, please attend my office hours (or make an appointment by e-mail).

TOPIC SCHEDULE

Unit 1 (Weeks 1 to 3, September 5th – 22nd):

Introduction – What is Philosophy, What is Ethics?

Unit 2 (Weeks 4 and 5, September 22nd – October 6th):

Virtual Persons and Virtual Friendships

Unit 3 (Weeks 6 and 7, October 7th – 20th):

Truth, Anonymity, and Privacy in the Digital World

Unit 4 (Weeks 8 and 9, October 21st – November 10th):

The Ethics of Open Access, Piracy, and Hacking

Unit 5 (Weeks 10 to 12, November 11th – December 5th):

Big Data, Gender and the Internet, and the Problem of Cyber-Bullying

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>.

It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

ACCOMMODATION

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. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested.

The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at

http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

SELF-REPORTED ABSENCE FORM

Students who experience an unexpected illness or injury or an extenuating circumstance (48 hours or less) that is sufficiently severe to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements (e.g., attending lectures or labs, writing tests or midterm exams, completing and submitting assignments, participating in presentations) should self-declare using the online Self-Reported Absence portal. This option should be used in situations where the student expects to

resume academic responsibilities within 48 hours or less.

The following conditions are in place for self-reporting of medical or extenuating circumstances:

http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#SubHeading_322

EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

At least three days prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a course without academic penalty, students will receive assessment of work accounting for at least 15% of their final grade. For 3000- or 4000-level courses in which such a graded assessment is impracticable, the instructor(s) must obtain an exemption from this policy from the Dean and this exemption must be noted on the corresponding course syllabus. In rare instances and at the Dean's discretion, other courses could receive a similar exemption, which also must be noted in the course syllabus.

COURSE ASSIGNMENT

The last day of scheduled classes in any course will be the last day on which course assignments will be accepted for credit in a course. Instructors will be required to return assignments to students as promptly as possible with reasonable explanations of the instructor's assessment of the assignment.

ACADEMIC OFFENCES

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

PLAGIARISM CHECKING

All required papers will 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>.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519.661.3030 (during class hours) or 519.433.2023 after class hours and on weekends.