Ethics for a Digital World

Fall 2023   **Instructor: N/A**

Antirequisites: Phil 2998 (F/W 2019-20), Phil 2268

DESCRIPTION

We spend a considerable portion of our lives in the digital world. What moral considerations ought to guide our conduct as cyber-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 cyber-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 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 essays.

The secondary goal of the course is to familiarize students with recent attempts by scholars to identify and address some of 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.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Quizzes: 15% (11 multiple choice quizzes, worth 1.36% each)
Essays: 60% (2 essays, 1100 – 1300 words, worth 30% each)
Final Exam: 25% (scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during the December 2023 Final Exam period)

AUDIT

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

LATE PENALTIES
Essays – An essay will be considered late if it is not submitted to OWL by the time specified on the assignment description. Late essays will be penalized at a rate of **five** percentage points per day (weekends included), to a maximum of 10 days (or 50%), at which point a grade of 0 will be entered.

Quizzes – Missed quizzes CANNOT be made up.

DUE DATES
The **11 weekly quizzes** (worth a combined total of 15% of your final grade) must each be completed by the end of the Unit in which they appear… so:

Unit 1 quizzes must be completed by Thursday September 21st by 11:55 p.m.
Unit 2 quizzes must be completed by Thursday October 5th by 11:55 p.m.
Unit 3 quizzes must be completed by Thursday October 19th by 11:55 p.m.
Unit 4 quizzes must be completed by Thursday November 16th by 11:55 p.m.
Unit 5 quizzes must be completed by Thursday December 8th by 11:55 p.m.

Essays: Essay #1 is due on OWL by 11:55 p.m. EDT on Friday October 20th.
          Essay #2 is due on OWL by 11:55 p.m. EST on Friday, December 8th.

Your **Final Exam** (worth 25% of your final grade) will be scheduled at some point during the December Exam Period by the office of the registrar.

E-MAIL POLICY
I am **not** able to respond to philosophical concerns or questions over e-mail (i.e., I don't have the time to discuss concepts/arguments covered in the course materials by e-mail). I will address those concerns or questions during my Zoom office hours (or by appointment) **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 Zoom office hours (or make an appointment).

GENERATIVE AI
The use of any generative AI software (e.g., ChatGPT), for any element of this course (the exams or essays), is **prohibited**. Evidence that a student has relied on generative AI for any submission of work for the course will yield 0 on that submission.

TOPIC SCHEDULE

Unit 1 (Weeks 1 and 2, September 7th – 20th): What is Philosophy, What is Ethics, What is Digital Ethics?

Week 1: Introduction to Philosophy and Ethics
Week 2: Ethics in the Digital World… same old story, or something new?

Unit 2 (Weeks 3 and 4, September 21st – October 4th): Personal Identity and the Possibility of Friendship in the Digital World

Week 3: Me, My Online Identity, and the Possibility of Moral Wrong
Week 4: Can we Make Friends Online?

Unit 3 (Weeks 5 and 6, October 5th – 18th): The Effect of Digital Life on Truth and Privacy

Week 5: The Internet, Truth, and Anonymity
Week 6: Privacy

Unit 4 (Weeks 7, 8, and 9 October 19th – November 15th): The Ethics of Open Access, Piracy, and Hacking

Week 7: Open Access
Week 8: Piracy and Hacking
Week 9: Hacking

Unit 5 (Weeks 10, 11 and 12 November 16th – December 8th): Big Data, Gender, and Cyberbullying

Week 10: Big Data; the Potential and the Problems
Week 11: Gender and the Internet
Week 12: The Problem of Cyberbullying

This Topic Schedule is Subject to Change Given Sufficient Prior Notice

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.

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 may 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.