

## **Information Ethics**

### **University of Maryland, College Park**

INST610 Information Ethics, Section ML01, Online

Instructor: Katie Shilton, College of Information Studies

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- Instructor will respond to email inquiries within 24 hours, unless otherwise noted in an “out of office” message

Phone/Skype office hours: by appointment

### **Course Description**

Recent advances in the production, use, and management of information present many new opportunities, but also raise ethical challenges that information professionals must confront.

For example:

- Is it wrong to create technologies that replace human labor, leading to unemployment?
- 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 morally acceptable to require citizens to vote online when 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 information professionals today. During the course, you will learn about a wide range of ethical theories, including non-Western and feminist theories, and you will apply these theories to confront critical information ethics issues using case-based learning.

### **Statement of Goals**

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 that drive your ethical framing
- Conduct research on specific ethical theorists and develop information ethics cases that focus on one or more contemporary information ethics issues relevant to your interests, experience, and professional trajectory

### **Course Format**

This course is conducted online through ELMS. No onsite meetings are required, although you will meet regularly with a small group via Skype, Google Hangout, or other method that you choose.

This course applies discussion-based and case-based learning approaches to information ethics. The case studies and examples presented in the course materials provide opportunities to apply

abstract theories and concepts to real-world scenarios, and create a safe environment for considering and resolving ethical dilemmas. Each week you will be asked to reflect on the course materials for that week in online discussion boards. You are encouraged to draw on personal experiences and external literature and resources to support your commentary. You will also have the opportunity to identify an ethical dilemma of interest to you and develop a case study that considers multiple points of view on that issue for your final assignment.

The course format consists of readings and online activities (such as videos), small group discussions, group and individual discussion board posts, and assignments. The first 1.5 weeks of every module will be reading-heavy; the second 1.5 weeks of every module will be writing-heavy.

### Course Readings

- Required textbook: Ess, C. (2013). *Digital media ethics*. Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Additional readings will be listed and uploaded to the course site.

### Coursework

The course is made up of 5 key components:

1. **Readings & Materials:** The required textbook for this course is Ess's *Digital media ethics*. Materials and readings beyond the required textbook can be found under "Course Materials" on the course site. The course is organized into two-week modules to provide time to read, discuss in groups, and then discuss as a class using the discussion board. Each module begins on a Tuesday.
2. **Group Participation:** During each module, you will meet with a small discussion group to discuss the module's topic and readings. Your groups are pre-assigned and should be visible in ELMS. Please pick a time as a group when you can meet once every three weeks for approximately 1 hour. This meeting should take place during week 2 of each module, to allow sufficient time for everyone to read the materials. Use Skype, Google Hangout, or any other virtual presence technology to conduct these meetings. Module discussion questions can be found at the top of the appropriate "Discussion Board" on ELMS. These should serve as launching points for your group discussion.
3. **Discussion Board Participation:** During each module, an individual from your small group should serve as the reporter. This responsibility should rotate among the members of your group; e.g. you will each take responsibility for reporting 2 times. The reporter is responsible for posting a summary of the group's discussion **by the end of Week 2 of each module**. Draw on the course readings, outside resources, personal experiences of your group, and your group's discussion to frame your arguments/comments. Cite references accordingly: e.g. (Quinn, 2012, p. 237) and add a brief citation list to the end of your post following APA citation style if you use citations (as explained here: <http://www2.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/workshop/citapa.htm>). **Title**

**your original post.** For example, if you are talking about an ethical issue related to the Kindle e-reader, title your discussion posting something like “Accessibility and the Kindle”.

During each module, each individual should post at least **two replies to other students’ posts and comments by the end of each module (about 75-150 words for each response)**. Please be respectful and professional when you reply to each other.

\*\*\*It is strongly recommended that you draft your posts in a word or text document before you post it to ELMS to check for spelling errors and ensure you have met the word count requirement.

Your discussion participation will be graded using the following rubric:

<b>Response</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
Is insightful about reading material	<b>20 pts</b>
Backs conclusions with evidence	<b>20 pts</b>
Introduces own ideas	<b>20 pts</b>
Responds thoughtfully to others	<b>20 pts</b>
<b>Presentation</b>	
Uses correct grammar and punctuation	<b>10 pts</b>
Writes in clear, concise sentences	<b>10 pts</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 pts</b>

- 4. Reading Reflections:** During each module, you’ll be asked to write a reflection on how to apply the ethical framework we’re studying to the cases featured in that module. You will complete four over the course of the semester: one on utilitarian perspectives, one on deontological perspectives, one on non-western ethical perspectives, and one on virtue ethics. Reflections should be about 500 words.

Pick an issue raised by an author in the module (e.g. filtering in prison libraries, snooping on your children, boycotting technology companies accused of human rights violations). Make an argument for or against a course of action *using the assigned framework*.

Reading reflections will be graded according to the following rubric:

<b>Response</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
Comprehension of material	<b>20 pts</b>
Makes a persuasive argument	<b>10 pts</b>
Backs conclusions with evidence	<b>20 pts</b>
Introduces own ideas	<b>10 pts</b>
Organizes argument logically	<b>10 pts</b>
<b>Presentation</b>	

Uses correct grammar and punctuation	<b>10 pts</b>
Writes in clear, concise sentences	<b>10 pts</b>
Uses clear word choice and professional vocabulary	<b>10 pts</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 pts</b>

5. **Final Assignment – Information Ethics Case:** 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 study involving multiple stakeholder perspectives. Examples will be provided to you in the second half of the course.

Each case must involve **1) a case description, 2) three stakeholder roles with role descriptions, 3) a scenario description for each role, and 4) sequential binary decisions for each role.** A case that adequately addresses each of these pieces will be approximately **1,500-2,000 words** in length.

Your final assignment will be graded based on creativity and evidence of critical thinking, appropriateness, clarity of writing, and adherence to length and component requirements. It will be graded according to the following rubric:

<b>Response</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
Clarity of scenario	<b>20 pts</b>
Identifies clear ethical dilemmas	<b>20 pts</b>
Uses comprehensive roles and choices	<b>10 pts</b>
Introduces own ideas	<b>10 pts</b>
Organizes cases logically	<b>10 pts</b>
<b>Presentation</b>	
Uses correct grammar and punctuation	<b>10 pts</b>
Writes in clear, concise sentences	<b>10 pts</b>
Uses clear word choice and professional vocabulary	<b>10 pts</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 pts</b>

*Submit all assignments through ELMS, unless otherwise specified. If you have any issues with ELMS contact the Help Desk immediately:*

301-405-1400; [https://elms.umd.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab\\_id= 300\\_1](https://elms.umd.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_id= 300_1)

## Grading

Your work in this course will be evaluated via your group and Discussion Board participation, your midterm assignment, and your final assignment. The weighted percentages for each component are listed below.

Evaluated Components	Due Date	Weight
Discussion board	End of each module	40%
Reading reflections	End of each module	40%
Final assignment	12/17/2013	20%

## Letter Grades:

A+ 97-100	B+ 87-89	C+ 77-79	D+ 67-69
A 93-96	B 83-86	C 73-76	D 63-66
A- 90-92	B- 80-82	C- 70-72	D- 60-62
			F 0-59

## Checking Grades

You will receive grades for your discussion board contributions within one week of the submission due date. You will receive grades for your reading reflections and final assignment within two weeks of the submission due date. The instructor will provide comments and feedback to accompany the numerical grade.

## Late Submissions Policy (Assignment & Discussion Board Postings)

Late assignments will be automatically **marked down 10% for each day** past the due date. Discussion boards will be closed at the end of each module on Sunday at 11:59 PM. **If you did not post responses to the Discussion Board by then, you will receive zero discussion points for that week.** Discussion boards will be made available in advance of each week to give you plenty of time to contribute to the Discussion board within the confines of your personal schedule.

## Academic Integrity

Students are reminded that the University of Maryland has absolute expectations for academic integrity from every student. The Code of Academic Integrity strictly prohibits students from cheating on assignments, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. Instances of any suspected academic dishonesty will be reported and handled according to University policy and procedures. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit <http://www.shc.umd.edu>. For a more detailed description of the University's definition of academic dishonesty, visit <http://www.faculty.umd.edu/teach/integrity.html>.

## Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The University is committed to providing appropriate accommodations for students with documented disabilities. In order to ascertain what accommodations should be provided to

facilitate your learning experience, please be sure to inform the instructor of your needs at the beginning of the semester. The instructor will then contact relevant parties such as the University's Disability Support Services, who will make arrangements with you to determine and implement appropriate academic accommodations. For more information on the University's policies, see <http://www.faculty.umd.edu/teach/disabilities.html>.

### **CourseEvalUM**

Your participation in the evaluation of courses through CourseEvalUM is a responsibility you hold as a student member of our academic community. Your feedback is confidential and important to the improvement of teaching and learning at the University as well as to the tenure and promotion process. Please go directly to the website (<http://www.courseevalum.umd.edu>) to complete your evaluations at the end of the semester.

### **Three Keys to Success**

Information Ethics is a challenging topic. Rarely are there straight forward answers to how one should address an ethical dilemma. Personal values shape the ethical approaches we take when solving information dilemmas in our everyday lives. As a result, open-mindedness and respect are critical to engaging in collegial dialog in an Information Ethics course. With this in mind, here are some tips for ensuring your success in this course:

1. **Be courteous and respectful.** The Discussion Board is a place to bring out healthy debates, but those debates should remain collegial and academic at all times – never personal.
2. **Be timely.** Posting to the Discussion Boards and submitting your mid-term and final assignments via ELMS on time show respect for your fellow cohort members, and your instructor, and are crucial to your success in this course.
3. **Be open-minded.** Information ethics is a course that allows you to explore issues from a variety of ethical perspectives. Engaging in critical thinking while reading the course materials and developing your assignments will help you gain the most from this course and will ensure a high grade in the class. Don't be afraid to "think from" new perspectives and challenge yourself.

### **Syllabus Change Policy**

This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

**A detailed course schedule follows on the remaining pages.**

## Course Schedule

Module	Dates	Topics Covered	Readings	Assignments & Due Dates
1	9/2/14 (1 week)	Course Overview, Defining Values & Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ess, Preface and Chapter 1</li> <li>• Baase, S. (2013). Chapter 1. <i>A gift of fire: social, legal, and ethical issues for computing technology</i>. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.</li> <li>• Dole, W. V., &amp; Hurych, J. M. (2001). Values for Librarians in the Information Age. <i>Journal of Information Ethics</i>, Fall, pp. 38-50.</li> <li>• ALA Core Values of Librarianship <a href="http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statement_spols/corevaluesstatement/corevalues.cfm">http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statement_spols/corevaluesstatement/corevalues.cfm</a></li> <li>• ALA Code of Ethics <a href="http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statement_spols/codeofethics/codeethics.cfm">http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statement_spols/codeofethics/codeethics.cfm</a></li> <li>• ACM Code of Ethics <a href="http://www.acm.org/about/code-of-ethics">http://www.acm.org/about/code-of-ethics</a></li> </ul>	<b>Individual post due 9/7/14</b>
2	9/8/14 – 9/28/14 (3 weeks)	Intellectual Freedom & Applying utilitarian perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buchanan, E. A. (2013). The internet and intellectual freedom. In M. Alfino &amp; L. Koltutsky (Eds.), <i>The Library Juice Press handbook of intellectual freedom: concepts, cases, and theories</i> (pp. 166–177). Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press.</li> <li>• Gaffney, L. (2013). Intellectual freedom and libraries. In M. Alfino &amp; L. Koltutsky (Eds.), <i>The Library Juice Press handbook of intellectual freedom: concepts, cases, and theories</i> (pp. 405–421). Sacramento, CA: The Library Juice Press.</li> <li>• Levy, S. (2011). Chapter 6: Guge: Google’s Moral Dilemma in China. <i>In The Plex: How Google Thinks</i>,</li> </ul>	<b>Group Discussion Post due 9/21/14</b> <b>Response posts due 9/28/14</b> <b>Reading reflection due 9/28/14</b>

*Works, and Shapes Our Lives.* Simon & Schuster.

- Houghton, S. (2010, May 7). Why internet filters don't work and why libraries who filter are wrong [Blog]. Retrieved from <http://librarianinblack.net/librarianinblack/2010/05/filtering.html>
- Ess, Chapter 6, pp. 197-206
- Driver, J. (2009). The History of Utilitarianism. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2009.). Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/utilitarianism-history/>

3	9/29/14 – 10/19/14 (3 weeks)	Information privacy & Applying deontological perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ess, Chapter 2.</li><li>• Gilliom, J., &amp; Monahan, T. (2013). Chapter 3: Lives Online. <i>SuperVision: an introduction to the surveillance society</i>. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.</li><li>• Altman, I. (1977). Privacy regulation: culturally universal or culturally specific? <i>Journal of Social Issues</i>, 33(3), 66–84.</li><li>• Ingram, M. (2013, August 7). Snooping on your kids: If the NSA's tools were available, I probably would have used them. GigaOM blog.</li><li>• Ess, Chapter 6, read pp. 206-213</li><li>• Alexander, L., &amp; Moore, M. (2012). Deontological Ethics. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), <i>The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> (Winter 2012.). Retrieved from <a href="http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/ethics-deontological/">http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/ethics-deontological/</a></li></ul>	<b>Group Discussion Post due 10/12/14</b> <b>Response posts due 10/19/14</b> <b>Reading reflection due 10/19/14</b>
4	10/20/14 –	Global Networked Societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ess, Chapter 4.</li><li>• Alsheikh, Tamara, Jennifer A. Rode, and Siân E. Lindley.</li></ul>	<b>Group Discussion Post due 11/2/14</b> <b>Response posts due 11/9/14</b>

11/9/14  
(3 weeks)

&  
Applying Non-western  
ethical approaches

2011. "(Whose) Value-Sensitive Design: A Study of Long-Distance Relationships in an Arabic Cultural Context." In *Proceedings of the ACM 2011 Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work, CSCW '11*, New York, NY, USA: ACM, 75–84.
- "The Online Ummah." 2012. *The Economist*. <http://www.economist.com/node/21560541> (September 10, 2014).
  - Brunton, Finn. 2013. Chapter 2, "You Know the Situation in Africa: Nigeria and 419" in *Spam: A Shadow History of the Internet*. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press.
  - Boswell, Jason. 2014. "The Students behind Nigeria's Online Jobs Giant." *BBC News*. <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-29013286> (September 10, 2014).
  - Bilimoria, P. (1993). Indian ethics. In P. Singer (Ed.), *A companion to ethics* (pp. 43-57). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
  - Nanji, A. (1993). Islamic ethics. In P. Singer (Ed.), *A companion to ethics* (pp. 106-118). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
  - De Silva, P. (1993). Buddhist ethics. In P. Singer (Ed.), *A companion to ethics* (pp. 58-68). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
  - Ess, Chapter 6, read pp. 229-237, 245-253.
  - Song, S. (2014). Multiculturalism. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014.). Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/multiculturalism/>

**Reading reflection due 11/9/14**

–  
11/30/14  
(3 weeks)

wealth  
&  
Applying virtue ethics

- folly: Demonstrating the real net worth of a library degree. *American Libraries*, (September/October). Retrieved from <http://www.americanlibrariesmagazine.org/article/forbes-folly>
- Packer, G. (2013, May 27). Change the World. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/05/27/130527fa\\_fact\\_packer](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/05/27/130527fa_fact_packer)
  - Johnson, J. (2011, February 28). 1 Million Workers. 90 Million iPhones. 17 Suicides. Who's to Blame? *Wired Magazine*, 19(3). Retrieved from [http://www.wired.com/magazine/2011/02/ff\\_joelinchina/](http://www.wired.com/magazine/2011/02/ff_joelinchina/)
  - Video: Everything You Need to Know about Net Neutrality in 2 minutes: <http://mashable.com/2014/02/26/mashable-explains-net-neutrality/>
  - Benkler, Y., & Nissenbaum, H. (2006). Commons-based Peer Production and Virtue. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 14(4), 394–419.
  - Huff, C., Barnard, L., & Frey, W. (2008). Good computing: a pedagogically focused model of virtue in the practice of computing (part 1). *Journal of Information, Communication & Ethics in Society*, 6(3), 2008.
  - Hursthouse, R. (2013). Virtue Ethics. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2013.). Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/ethics-virtue/>

**Response posts due 11/30/14**  
**Reading reflection due 11/30/14**

6	12/1/14 – 12/12/14 (2 weeks)	Practicing What We Preach: Professional Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baase, S. (2013). Chapter 9. <i>A gift of fire: social, legal, and ethical issues for computing technology</i>. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.</li> <li>• Koehler, W. (2003). Professional Values and Ethics as Defined by “The LIS Discipline.” <i>Journal of Education for Library and Information Science</i>, 44(2), 99–199.</li> <li>• Lor, P. J., &amp; Britz, J. j. (2012). An ethical perspective on political-economic issues in the long-term preservation of digital heritage. <i>Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology</i>, 63(11), 2153–2164.</li> </ul>	<b>Group Discussion Post due 12/10/14</b> <b>Response posts due 12/19/14</b>
	12/13/14 – 12/19/14		Exam period	<b>FINAL ASSIGNMENT DUE 12/19/14</b>