Information Policy and Ethics (Info 725)

College of Computing & Informatics, Drexel University

Course Syllabus, Winter 2021

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> The essential problem of a computerized age remains the same as it has always been. That problem is not solely how to be more productive, more comfortable, more content, but how to be more sensitive, more sensible, more proportionate, more alive. The computer makes possible a phenomenal leap in human proficiency… But the question persists and indeed grows whether the computer makes it easier or harder for human beings to know who they really are, to identify their real problems, to respond more fully to beauty, to place adequate value on life, and to make their world safer than it now is.
>
> —Norman Cousins, "The Poet and the Computer," 1966

Course Overview

How should we decide what is best, particularly when we have to make tradeoffs—that is, when values, ideas, goals and facts come into conflict? Policy is about answering that question in an institutional context, and ethics is about the philosophical underpinnings of decision-making. *Information* policy and ethics, then, examines these issues with respect to information and communication technologies.

Some examples of questions in this connection include: Should you be a Facebook user? Should you get your DNA sequenced? Is it better to read digitally or in print? Is file-sharing the same thing as stealing? Is it okay to lie for a noble purpose? What kinds of technology should be allowed in the classroom? Should employees be allowed to take their computers and check email from home? Should scientists post their research on preprint servers? Should any content be off-limits on the internet? How should social networks be regulated? Should governments be able to know what their citizens are reading? What happens to truth when we get our news and information more from social media than newspapers? Are books obsolete? Is high-speed internet access a human right? You'll notice many of these questions include the word "should"; this is a good way to conceptualize the scope of policy and ethics: *what should be?*

We may think that we can easily tell right from wrong, good from evil, that we can readily determine the best course of action to take. But real-life situations can be messier than they at first

appear, and messier still is determining what principles underlie our values and actions. **This is a very demanding course that requires a commitment to close reading, contemplation and writing**. Be prepared.

Course description

This course introduces the philosophical, conceptual, and practical fundamentals, foundations, and issues—past and present—of information policy and ethics including computing, data, and management. Foci include policies in government documents, issues relating to the practical development and implement of information policies for a variety of organizations, companies and governments, the uses and abuses of information, human moral agency in relation to new information and communication technologies, and the meaning of social responsibility in the global information society.

Purpose within the program

This course will help you build a foundation for ethics and policy reasoning as an information or computing professional. Familiarity with information policies and questions of ethics is a key asset for all information and computing professionals. This course is designed for master's students in cybersecurity, information systems, and library and information science. It is a required course for the MS degree in cybersecurity and an elective for graduate students within the College of Computing and Informatics as well as interested graduate students from across the university. This course addresses how to act ethically as an information professional, especially in developing and implementing policies related to information and technology. This course teaches the analysis and formulation of ethical arguments, and it relates information ethics to professional decision- and policy-making.

Expected learning outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Discuss the historical foundation of information ethics and policy from a legal, user and organizational perspective
- Articulate the relationship between ethics and information policy
- Articulate what constitutes a code of ethics and an information policy
- Identify and explain current and historical ethical issues and information policies in a variety of contexts: international, government, private and public sector organizations
- Design and create a code of ethics and an information policy for a specific organization
- Evaluate and articulate arguments regarding professional decision making
- Interpret the professional and scholarly literature of information ethics and information policy

Course structure

This course is online and asynchronous. The course makes use of Drexel Learn (a.k.a. Blackboard or BbL). This is where assignments will be submitted and discussion will take place. The course is organized into topical weeks, each ending on Sunday. This is a seminar-style course, meaning it is centered around readings and discussion.

Contacting me

Student–instructor interaction is an important part of any course, and I am available to you. I want to help you succeed in this course, in your program at Drexel, and in life. **Feel free to contact me** with any questions, problems, discoveries, ideas or anything else.

If your question may be of interest to others in the class (e.g., syllabus, readings, schedule, etc.), please post it on the *Raise Your Hand* Discussion Board so that others can benefit. With **personal or urgent matters**, you should email me directly to get in touch (tjg68@drexel.edu). If you have a **technical question**, you will be better off contacting the Instructional Technology Group. Visit their website, email them at itg@drexel.edu, or call them at (215) 895–1224.

Note that **I do not check email on nights or weekends**. In our always-on society, it is important to set boundaries—firstly because healthy lives require off-time, but also because our academic activities require uninterrupted periods of reading, writing and thinking. I hope you will join me in living with more balance.

Reading

As mentioned, this course involves a lot of reading. **Give yourself ample time to read—and keep in mind that you will need to read some things more than once**. The vast majority of the readings will be provided as PDFs on Blackboard. Full references are provided in the weekly schedule at the end of this document.

There is one book that you'll be required to purchase: ***Deepfakes: The Coming Infocalypse***, by Nina Schick (2020), published by Twelve Books. We will read this during Week 8, and you won't need it till then. Feel free to procure this book in print, digital or audio, as you prefer.

Besides that book, you may wish to get ***Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* (third edition)**, by Deborah Stone (2012). We will read several chapters from this book. I will provide you scans of the required chapters, but you may prefer having your own copy on hand. If you're interested in delving deeper into policy-making, you'd enjoy reading more of the book than what we'll explore in class. Lastly, I recommend reading ***The Thinker's Guide to Ethical Reasoning*** (Paul & Elder, 2013). I will discuss and summarize this during Week 2, but it's a handy (and short) booklet that you may wish to read and study on your own.

Participation, Assignments and Grading

In addition to close reading, this course involves ongoing participation and two written assignments. Before getting into the details, a word about timeliness. **Meeting deadlines is an important professional responsibility for both you and me**. In this course, each week begins on Monday morning and ends at 9:00 p.m. Eastern on Sunday. Activities and assignments due during a given week are due by 9:00 p.m. on Sunday. For my part, I will review and provide feedback on your work within a week. I will accept **late work**, but it will receive a grade penalty of at least one letter grade. Work submitted more than three weeks late will not be accepted. Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis; if you think you may need an extension, please contact me as soon as possible. Grace Hopper did say, "Ask for forgiveness, not permission"; but when it comes to coursework, it's best to ask for permission first.

Class participation

The major substance of this course will be class participation, which has three main components: completing the OpenMind training, weekly video responses, and Blackboard Discussion Board

participation. You will be expected to be present and participate each week. If you will miss a week, please let me know ahead of time. If you are ill or have another compelling reason to be absent for more than a brief period, please notify me as soon as you can. As a student in this course, you will be expected to show professionalism, open-mindedness, reflection, intellectual humility, careful preparation, punctuality, clear communication and, most especially, a willingness to learn. Throughout the term, you'll be asked to complete a number of assignments that count toward your class participation grade.

OpenMind training

In Weeks 2–5, we will complete the OpenMind program; expect it to take about 90 minutes per week. Much of this work can be done on your own schedule, but you will be expected to connect with an assigned classmate each week for guided peer conversations. OpenMind is an online training program that responds to the increase in political tension and decline in trust that has become evident across communities in recent years. As societies are becoming increasingly diverse, and as polarization rises, many people are finding it harder to engage with those whose values or perspectives differ from their own. But if we're unable to understand and communicate with one another, how can we possibly overcome our differences and work together to solve our collective problems? OpenMind will guide us through five steps that will equip us with the cognitive tools to engage more constructively across differences. These tools are based on the latest psychological breakthroughs as well as time-tested wisdom. They have been shown to improve success at work and in relationships, and even increase happiness. Moreover, such tools are requisite for productive ethical reasoning and policy-making.

Weekly video responses

To liven up our class discussions, we will use the Flipgrid platform. Each week, I will post a new topic for discussion on Flipgrid, and you will post a video response of up to one minute sharing your perspective on the topic. These are for our eyes only and needn't be polished; in fact, it's better to show your in-the-moment thinking to make more authentic connections with your classmates. You can have fun with the selfie filters and drawing options on Flipgrid, too.

Discussion board posts

To delve deeper into the course materials, we'll make use of the Discussion Board feature on Blackboard. In this class, you will create threads to pose questions that you found while engaging with the week's materials. I will expect you to make at least three posts per week—one of these as an original topic question, and two as responses to others' questions. Your posts should be substantive but not overlong—aim for a single paragraph. Posts should reference class readings, including those from previous weeks, and they should incorporate your own analysis and perspective. You should make your topic question post by Thursday evening each week, and you should finish all the week's posts by Sunday evening.

Your original topic question should be open-ended (not to be satisfied by a one-word answer, and not being limited by only one possible answer). When you create your original topic question, please give it a relevant title (e.g., in the form of a question), rather than something like "Gorichanaz Week 3 Discussion Topic."

The requirement to ask a discussion question of your own is to help you build your skills in questioning, and it is a proven way to deepen your understanding of the course material. Asking good questions takes practice. If you're having a hard time coming up with questions, you can draw from the following list of question types, which spell out CLOSE-UP:

- *Clarity:* What does the author mean by that? Can someone try to put this another way?
- *Linking:* How is this similar to what we read earlier? How does X's viewpoint compare to Y's?
- *Open-ended:* What's happening here? What interests you about this issue? Why did we read this? Do you have any experience with this?
- *Synthesis:* What stands out about this based on what we discussed previously or so far? How does this connect to some current event?
- *Evidence:* How did the author come to this conclusion? What experience or data is their analysis based on? Might the evidence or reasoning be insufficient in any way? Can you find any counter-examples?
- *Understanding:* Why do you think this is the case? How would you explain this situation?
- *Priority:* What matters to you most about this? What's the most important value or principle we should consider here?

Moreover, you can use this inventory of question types not just in creating new topics, but also in responding to your classmates! It's a great way to get a conversation going and keep it going.

Written assignments

There are two written assignments in this course. First, as a midterm, you will write an essay explaining and attempting to solve an information-ethical problem you are facing in your own life. Second, as a final paper, you will write a policy brief document presenting evidence and argumentation in support of a policy position within the scope of information and communication technology or the information professions. Specific guidance for these assignments will be provided on Blackboard.

Standards for written work

You will be assessed according to the Universal Intellectual Standards published by the Critical Thinking Community. As such, your grade will depend on how well you responded to the requirements of the assignment (relevance), the quality of your argument (clarity, logic and fairness), your grasp of the subject matter (accuracy and precision), the depth of your analysis, and the effective use of the literature to support your arguments and observations (breadth). Moreover, I expect your work to be well-written (as befitting a graduate-level course); your grade will take into account grammar, readability and spelling in addition to content. If you are interested in improving your writing, I recommend the book ***The Sense of Style***, by Steven Pinker (2014).

As for references and citations, I recommend following the American Psychological Association (APA) seventh-edition style guide. This is the standard style guide for writing in the social sciences, including information science and systems. However, in this course you can use a different style if you prefer; I only ask that you be consistent and complete.

Grading

Research has demonstrated that grades diminish students' learning, decrease students' interest in the subject matter, and prevent students from taking creative risks. Moreover, many students experience anxiety about grades. In this class, we are here to learn, to become interested in policy and ethics, and to take some creative risks by trying new things (not just following a rubric). And, needless to say, we certainly don't need more anxiety in our lives. My intention with this class is to help you to work in an organic way, as you will after graduation (perhaps even already do in your day job).

So in this class, we will take a different approach to assessment: When it comes to class participation, if your contribution is timely, complete and on-topic, you'll get full points. For the two written assignments, by default your work will receive a B. If it is excellent, then it will receive an A. If it is weak, then it will receive a C. You can expect to receive feedback within a week of an assignment's due date. If you are unhappy with the grade you received, you can always make revisions and resubmit the assignment, up until the end of Week 9; if you do this, include a cover letter explaining what changes you made and why.

For reference, here is my interpretation of the meaning of the final letter grades:

- *A – Excellent:* Original and creative thinking, strong writing. Goes above and beyond expectations. Demonstrates mastery of the course content by referencing and exemplifying concepts from the readings, lectures and other materials. Supplements required coursework with additional readings, reflections and observations.
- *B – Good:* Meets expectations. Demonstrates overall understanding of the concepts presented in class. Most writing is well done with well supported arguments.
- *C – Marginal:* Meets most expectations. Some learning is shaky.
- *D – Poor:* Shows flawed understandings of course content. Little participation and effort.
- *F – Failing:* Deep misunderstandings, poor attention, very low participation.

Your final grade will be calculated according to the following scheme:

Component	**Percent of Grade**
Class Participation	
OpenMind training completion	10%
Weekly video responses	10%
Discussion board participation	30%
Written Assignments	
Ethical problem essay	20%
Policy brief	30%

Policies

Academic integrity

You are expected to conduct yourself in a respectful manner as befitting the university environment. This includes academic integrity. In this course, as with any Drexel course, cheating will not be tolerated. This includes plagiarism (using others' intellectual work without reference) and cheating. All work you submit must be your own work, with sources properly cited. Any plagiarism or other academic dishonesty will result in a sanction that may extend to failing the course. I am obligated to report incidents of cheating (including plagiarism) to Drexel administration. A student who is found in violation twice (even if in two different courses) will be expelled from the university. For more information, please refer to the Provost academic integrity policy or to resources regarding Student Conduct and Community Standards.

Changes to the syllabus

I am here to help you learn, and I want to make sure we achieve the expected learning outcomes in this course. To do this, I may have to make some changes to the syllabus—for instance, if it becomes clear that we need to spend more time on some topic. I'll do my best to honor the syllabus as is, and I'll be sure to let you know about any changes as far in advance as possible.

Dropping the course

If you are considering whether to continue your enrollment in the course, please refer to the Course Add/Drop Policy and the Course Withdrawal Policy.

Student conduct

Drexel University adopted a student conduct policy requiring that all students have the responsibility to be aware of, and abide by, the University's policies, rules, regulations, and standards of conduct. The Student Conduct and Community Standards policy information is available in the Official Student Handbook.

Appropriate use of course materials

It is important to recognize that some or all of the course materials provided to you may be the intellectual property of Drexel University, the course instructor, or others. Use of this intellectual property is governed by Drexel University policies, including the Acceptable Use Policy. Briefly, this policy states that course materials, including recordings, provided by the course instructor may not be copied, reproduced, distributed or re-posted. Doing so may be considered a breach of this policy and will be investigated and addressed as possible academic dishonesty, among other potential violations. Improper use of such materials may also constitute a violation of the University's Code of Conduct.

Participating in course evaluations

Student evaluations are a required element of every course. Evaluation forms are completely anonymous. They are confidentially used to make improvements in our curriculum and teaching. They are also used by administration in evaluating faculty performance, and in decisions about promotion, tenure and retention. Please take part in course evaluations.

Support and Recommendations

If you are experiencing anxiety, depression or other issues

Drexel offers free and confidential support for anxiety-related problems, depression, family concerns, relationship issues, adjustment issues, eating disorders, alcohol- and drug-related problems, and questions about gender and sexual identity, all through the Drexel Counseling Center. The Counseling Center is located at Suite 201 in the Creese Student Center at 3210 Chestnut St. The telephone number is (215) 895–1415. **For emergencies, or to reach an on-call counselor after regular business hours, please call (215) 416–3337**. Learn more on the Counseling Center website.

If you need technical support

Get 24/7 technical support for Blackboard Learn from the Instructional Technology group online or by calling (215) 895–1224. For any other technical support (email, logins, etc.), Drexel University IT is here for you. You can contact them through email at consult@drexel.edu, by phone at (215) 895–2020, or by submitting the online Problem Report Form.

Support for equality and diversity

Drexel University strives to promote an environment of equality of opportunity and compliance with university policies and federal, state and local laws prohibiting discrimination based upon race, color, religion, gender, marital status, pregnancy, national origin, age, disability and veteran status. If you have a question or complaint concerning discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation, contact the Office of Equality and Diversity online or at (215) 895–1405.

Coaching, mentorship and tutoring

The Center for Learning and Academic Success Services (CLASS) serves as the organizing department for a variety of programs and services that promote coaching, peer mentoring and tutoring at Drexel. The Center is located on campus at the Creese Student Center (3210 Chestnut Street), Suite 050.

Campus activities and community

Find the Student Handbook**,** conduct and community standards, and the Counseling Center at on the Student Life website. Consult this site for information on campus activities and student programs.

English help

The English Language Center offers English language instruction and support services to students, especially those who speak English as a second language. They are located at 229 N. 33rd Street. The telephone number is (215) 895-2022.

If you have a disability or are facing other challenges

Students requesting accommodations due to a disability at Drexel University need to request a current Accommodations Verification Letter (AVL) in the ClockWork database before accommodations can be made. These requests are received by Disability Resources (DR), who then issues the AVL to the appropriate contacts. For additional information, visit the DR website, reach them by phone at (215) 895–1401, or by email them at disability@drexel.edu.

Free health services

The Student Health Center is located at 3401 Market St, Ste 105. You can call them at (215) 220–4700.

Career counseling

CCI Career Services offers help with job placement, job postings and credentialing. Outside our college, the Steinbright Career Development Center (SDLC) offers individualized career

counseling, career fairs, career programs and resume workshops. The office is located at 3201 Arch Street, Suite 250, Philadelphia, PA 19104. The telephone number is (215) 895-2185.

Additional Resources

As you become acquainted with the key issues, concept and scholarship in information policy and ethics, you may be interested in learning about related organizations. Most of these have mailing lists that you might subscribe to. They may also provide ideas for assignments and discussion along the way. Here are some organizations whose websites you can browse:

- Center for Democracy and Technology: http://cdt.org
- Center for Digital Democracy: http://www.democraticmedia.org
- Center for Ethics and Technology at Georgia Tech: https://ethics.gatech.edu
- Center for Humane Technology: https://www.humanetech.com
- Center for Media Education: http://www.cme.org/
- Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions: http://ethics.iit.edu
- Committee on Publication Ethics: https://publicationethics.org
- Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility: http://www.cpsr.org/
- Chilling Effects Clearinghouse: http://www.chillingeffects.org
- Data & Society: https://datasociety.net
- Electronic Frontier Foundation: http://www.eff.org
- Electronic Privacy Information Center: http://www.epic.org
- Federation of American Scientists Project on Government Secrecy: http://www.fas.org/sgp
- Library Freedom Project: https://libraryfreedom.org
- Open Data Institute: https://theodi.org
- Oxford Internet Institute: https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk
- Privacy Coalition: http://privacycoalition.org/
- Technology Ethics Center at Notre Dame: https://techethics.nd.edu

Course Schedule

In this course, the weeks run Monday to Sunday. All assignments are due on Sunday at the end of the given week by 9:00 p.m. Eastern, with one exception: The final assignment (Policy Brief) is due on the Wednesday of exam week at 9:00 p.m. Eastern. **You can find an at-a-glance table of the course schedule on the last page of this syllabus**. Here you can find a detailed list of the topics and readings to be explored in each week.

The course begins with foundational content in Weeks 1 and 2. Then we will examine various aspects of policy and ethics with an outward motion, beginning with the individual and later considering organizations, society and eventually the world. Throughout, we'll hear from a number of scholars coming from a variety of particular perspectives. I am not hoping that you will agree with all these authors (indeed, they won't even agree with each other!), but rather that engaging with these diverse perspectives will help you better formulate your own. I hope these readings, along with our lecture videos and other activities, will spark lively discussions—perhaps even debate!

Week 1 (Jan 11–17)
Introduction to Information Policy and Ethics

This week we'll get a handle on what's at stake in this class. Through lecture videos, we'll learn about the three main theoretical approaches to ethics (**virtue ethics**, **deontology**, and **consequentialism**); distinctions between policy, ethics and religion; and a brief history of information ethics. Our main reading this week is the introductory chapter from Sheila Jasanof's book *The Ethics of Invention*. Jasanof is a scholar of science, technology and society (STS), and this chapter will get us thinking about concepts like **technological determinism** and **unintended consequences**. In addition, we'll read a blog post by Beck Tench, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Washington Information School, that may help us shift our approach to the "burden" of reading so much in grad school, not least in this course.

Readings

Jasanof, Sheila. (2016). **The power of technology**. In *The ethics of invention: Technology and the human future* (chapter 1, pp. 1–30). Norton.

Tench, Beck. (2018, January 3). **Reading is useless: A 10-week experiment in contemplative reading**. *Medium*. Available at https://medium.com/@10ch/reading-is-useless-644399af3cce

Week 2 (Jan 18–24)
Reasoning in Policy and Ethics

This week we will examine the process of "doing" policy and ethics through reasoning and deliberation. All this will come in handy for your Ethical Problem Essay, due in Week 6. In lecture, we will explore the **eight steps of ethical reasoning** articulated by Paul and Elder (2013) in *The Thinker's Guide to Ethical Reasoning* (an optional reading for this course). We'll also begin our **OpenMind** training, which will equip us with tools for dealing fruitfully with people we disagree with (as in any policy/ethics situation!). In our readings this week, we'll begin digging into Deborah Stone's *Policy Paradox*, a paragon text for learning the ins and outs of policy-making. We'll also

read a short paper by Luciano Floridi, the preeminent philosopher of information, where he spells out the **connections between ethics, governance and regulation** with regard to digital technology. Finally, we'll read a classic paper by Thomas Nagel, one of the most celebrated philosophers of our age, that reflects upon the reality that we may have many **competing values** in any given situation and yet can only take one action. How do we adjudicate between them?

Readings

Floridi, Luciano. (2018). **Soft ethics and the governance of the digital**. *Philosophy & Technology, 31*(1), 1–8.

Nagel, Thomas. (1979). **The fragmentation of value**. In *Mortal questions* (pp. 128–141). Cambridge University Press.

Stone, Deborah. (2012). **Introduction: Why this book?** In *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making* (intro, pp. 1–15). Norton.

Stone, Deborah. (2012). **The market and the polis**. In *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making* (ch. 1; pp. 19–36). Norton.

Week 3 (Jan 25–31)
Rights and Virtues

This week, we begin our journey of exploring a selection of particular questions at issue in information policy and ethics, starting with the inner life of the person as a moral agent; in later weeks, we will move toward the sociopolitical. This week we'll reflect on the concepts of **rights** and **virtues**. In lecture, we'll explore the distinction between rights-based and virtue-based approaches to ethics. Are these at odds, or might they be synergistic? We'll read the UN's famous **declaration of human rights**, written in 1948, a testament to the possibility of a shared morality between people of vastly different cultural backgrounds. To learn more about rights, we'll read another chapter from Stone. Then we'll turn to the question of virtues. We'll read a chapter from Shannon Vallor's book *Technology and the Virtues* in which she outlines a suite of "technomoral" virtues for the Digital Age, and we'll also read a short paper of my own exploring the relationship between **intellectual humility** (a virtue) and people's information-seeking behavior.

Readings

Gorichanaz, Tim. (2021). **How the intellectually humble seek and use information**. Paper presented at *iConference 2021*, Beijing, China.

Stone, Deborah. (2012). **Rights**. In *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making* (ch. 15, pp. 331–353). Norton.

United Nations. (1948). **Universal declaration of human rights**. Available at http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml

Vallor, Shannon. (2016). **Technomoral wisdom for an uncertain future: 21st century virtues**. In *Technology and the virtues: A philosophical guide to a future worth wanting* (ch. 6, pp. 118–155). Oxford University Press.

Week 4 (Feb 1–7)
Privacy

Privacy is a keystone concept in information policy and ethics. But what do we really mean when we talk about privacy? This was never an easy question, even before the Information Age. This week we'll read the seminal legal argument for a **right to privacy** in the United States, by Warren and Brandeis (1890). Though there is no mention of privacy in the U.S. Constitution or Bill of Rights, Warren and Brandeis find grounds for it in the Fourth Amendment (the prohibition of unwarranted search and seizure of property). Their article also includes surprisingly contemporary reflections on **how privacy changes along with new technology**. Next, we'll look at two distinct and more recent discussions of privacy: Helen Nissenbaum's now-famous **"contextual" approach to privacy**, which posits that people's preferences and behaviors regarding privacy change with their context; and Christian Fuchs' argument for a **socialist privacy concept** as an alternative to the dominant individualist/liberal privacy concept. To go along with our readings this week, we'll work through WNYC's **Privacy Paradox** five-day program, which offers a number of other perspectives and considerations on privacy and will guide us through examining our own attitudes and practices regarding privacy and our digital technologies The program is from 2017 and is a bit dated in some respects, but I hope you'll agree it's still quite valuable.

Readings

This week, in addition to doing the readings, please complete the **Privacy Paradox five-day challenge** from WNYC Studios' *Note to Self* podcast. Each day consists of a short audio podcast and an online activity. See https://project.wnyc.org/privacy-paradox/

Fuchs, Christian. (2011). **Towards an alternative concept of privacy**. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society, 9*(4), 220–237.

Nissenbaum, Helen. (2011). **A contextual approach to privacy online**. *Daedalus, 140*(4), 32–48.

Warren, Samuel D., & Louis D. Brandeis. (1890). **The right to privacy**. *Harvard Law Review, 4*(5), 193–220.

Week 5 (Feb 8–14)
Professional Ethics

We began with the individual person as a locus of moral action, but now we'll more clearly start moving outward, looking at how individuals relate to organizations and societies. This week our focus is on political and ethical issues in the workplace. In lecture, we'll discuss **codes of ethics** that articulate the responsibilities of members of professional associations and organizations. In our readings, we'll first look at Don Fallis' discussion of **ethical challenges** faced by library professionals today. Even if you're not planning on becoming a librarian, Fallis' article applies across the information and computing professions. (As you read, I'd encourage you to substitute the word "librarian" with whatever career path you're following and see how it resonates.) Besides this, we'll read two articles on workplace dynamics; Ricks' argument for the importance of personal responsibility in the workplace, drawing on military history, and Duhigg's chronicling of Google's quest to build the perfect team. Today, a common assumption is that the more diverse a team is, the better it will perform; as you read, consider how these articles relate to that assumption. Do they support it, challenge it, or simply offer a different lens?

Readings

Duhigg, Charles. (2016, February 25). **What Google learned from its quest to build the perfect team**. *New York Times Magazine*. Available at https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/magazine/what-google-learned-from-its-quest-to-build-the-perfect-team.html

Fallis, Don. (2007). **Information ethics for twenty-first century library professionals**. *Library Hi Tech, 25*(1), 23–36.

Ricks, Thomas E. (2012). **What ever happened to accountability?** *Harvard Business Review, 90*(10), 93–100.

Week 6 (Feb 15–21)
Social Media

Among the most visited websites in the world are YouTube, Facebook and Reddit; among the most downloaded smartphone apps are TikTok, WhatsApp and Instagram. For many people today, social media is almost a synonym for the internet. The proliferation of **social media** is changing humanity in ways that we will still be coming to grips with for decades; its effects hit us personally and in our family life, as well as on societal and global levels. This week's readings give us a little food for thought on these big issues. We'll begin with the personal: First, James Parrish's article takes the classic **PAPA framework** of ethical issues in the information age (privacy, accuracy, property and access) and applies it to sharing information on social media. Next, we'll read two short chapters from Jonathan Sacks' book *Morality* which argue that, despite its name, social media has come to be rather *anti*-social. Sacks served as Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom from 1991 to 2013 and in the U.K. Parliament until his death in late 2020; in addition to his rabbinical training, Sacks earned a Ph.D. under the direction of philosopher Bernard Williams. Next, we'll look at philosopher S. Matthew Liao's consideration of whether we have a **moral duty** to leave Facebook, written in late 2018; as you read, consider whether anything has changed in the past year-and-change that would tip the scales of his argument. Lastly, we'll move from the personal to the societal, reading a policy report from the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute arguing that the government should *not* **regulate social media**. You may have heard calls from both left and right for such regulation, and this piece gives a well-reasoned response. Moreover, it serves as an example of a policy brief, which is the genre you'll be engaging in the final paper for this course.

Readings

Liao, S. Matthew. (2018, Nov 24). **Do you have a moral duty to leave Facebook?** *New York Times*. Available at https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/24/opinion/sunday/facebook-immoral.html

Parrish, James L., Jr. (2010). **PAPA knows best: Principles for the ethical sharing of information on social networking sites**. *Ethics and Information Technology, 12*(2), 187-193.

Sacks, Jonathan. (2020). **Unsocial media**. In *Morality: Restoring the common good in divided times* (ch. 3, pp. 47–59). Basic Books.

Sacks, Jonathan. (2020). **The return of public shaming**. In *Morality: Restoring the common good in divided times* (ch. 15, pp. 206–212). Basic Books.

Samples, John. (2019). **Why the government should not regulate content moderation on social media**. Cato Institute. Available at https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/why-government-should-not-regulate-content-moderation-social-media

Week 7 (Feb 22–28)

Big Data

In the 21st century we are collecting more data from more sources than ever before, and through computation we can analyze this data in ways that would be impossible for any human to answer new questions and explore urgent issues. **Big data** has contributed undeniably to climate science and epidemiology, for example. But it is not without its problems. In lecture, we'll reflect on some of the more striking issues of the so-called **zettabyte era**, such as the fact that we now have the capacity to generate more data than we could ever store. In our readings, Andrej Zwitter's article will adumbrate some of the **underlying ethical issues** at stake in big data; and the book chapter by Seth Stephens-Davidowitz will give some concrete examples of **ethical dilemmas** in this space. Next we'll read a paper by Eszter Hargittai exploring some possibilities for **bias** in social media data—a major source of big data. Last, we'll zoom in on the issue of facial recognition, one of the empowering and frightening applications of big data. We'll read an NBC News article reporting on the online photos used without consent for **facial recognition** system training, and then we'll read a blog post by Microsoft President Brad Smith arguing for regulation in facial recognition.

Readings

Hargittai, Eszter. (2018). **Potential biases in big data: Omitted voices on social media**. *Social Science Computer Review, 38*(1), 10–24.

Smith, Brad. (2018, December 6). **Facial recognition: It's time for action**. *Microsoft on the Issues*. Available at https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2018/12/06/facial-recognition-its-time-for-action/

Solon, Olivia. (2019, March 12). **Facial recognition's "dirty little secret": Millions of online photos scraped without consent**. *NBC News*. Available at https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/facial-recognition-s-dirty-little-secret-millions-online-photos-scraped-n981921

Stephens-Davidowitz, Seth. (2018). **Mo data, mo problems? What we shouldn't do**. In *Everybody lies: Big data, new data, and what the internet can tell us about who we really are* (ch. 8, pp. 257–270). Dey Street Books.

Zwitter, Andrej. (2014). **Big data ethics**. *Big Data & Society, 1*(2), 1–6.

Week 8 (Mar 1–7)

Misinformation

The correctness and quality of information has always been a concern, but in the Digital Age the issue of misinformation seems to have an existential urgency. In lecture, we'll discuss the distinction between **misinformation** and **disinformation**, and definitions for these terms. Bound up with these concepts is the issue of **lying**. Is lying ever okay, such as for a noble purpose? In our readings, we'll return to *Policy Paradox* for the chapter on **facts**, and then we'll read a short book on one particularly thorny issue in misinformation: *Deepfakes* by tech journalist and policy advisor Nina Schick. Schick tells the story of **how political misinformation came to proliferate online**, focusing particularly on AI-generated synthetic media, such as fake videos of politicians or celebrities. She thinks it's only a matter of time before we won't be able to tell real from fake—what she calls the **infocalypse**.

Readings

Schick, Nina. (2020). **Deepfakes: The Coming Infocalypse**. Twelve Books.

Stone, Deborah. (2012). **Facts**. In *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making* (ch. 14, pp. 311–330). Norton.

Week 9 (Mar 8–14)
Global Information Ethics and Governance

Of the world's 7.6 billion people, 4.7 billion currently have internet access. Digital technology allows us to reach out further and faster, and to affect more people by our actions than ever before. As we've seen, this is not without its problems. How can we move forward as a human race, with different cultures and traditions but with a shared internet? In our readings, we'll read another chapter from Sacks' book *Morality*, this time reflecting on the question of whether there is a single best approach to morality, or if **moral relativism** is the answer. Ultimately, Sacks thinks that morality is like language: even if different people speak different languages, we can point to a common reality. When it comes to information policy and ethics, what is that common reality? This is the question of **global information ethics**. For one perspective, we'll read Johannes Britz's argument that **justice** is a cornerstone value of the information society. For another perspective, in lecture we'll discuss Luciano Floridi's concept of the **ontic trust**. Next, we'll turn toward regulatory questions; the law article by Sabeel Rahman discusses the regulation of our IT infrastructure, including the issue of **net neutrality**, and then we will take a deep dive in one particularly disturbing issue that society and regulators need to deal with: the circulation of **child sexual abuse material** (more commonly, if incorrectly, known as child pornography). The article we'll read by Keller and Dance demonstrates the thorniness and urgency of this topic.

Readings

Britz, Johannes J. (2008). **Making the global information society good: A social justice perspective on the ethical dimensions of the global information society**. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 59*(7), 1171–1183.

Keller, Michael H., and Gabriel J. X. Dance. (2019, September 29). **The internet is overrun with images of child sexual abuse. What went wrong?** *New York Times*. Available at https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/09/28/us/child-sex-abuse.html

Rahman, K. Sabeel. (2018). **Regulating informational infrastructure: Internet platforms as the new public utilities**. *Georgetown Law and Technology Review, 2*(2), 234–251.

Sacks, Jonathan. (2020). **Which morality?** In *Morality: Restoring the common good in divided times* (ch. 20, pp. 263–275). Basic Books.

Course Schedule at a Glance

In this course, the weeks run Monday to Sunday. Assignments are due on Sunday at the end of the given week by 9:00 p.m. Eastern. Exception: The final assignment (Policy Brief) is due on the Wednesday of exam week at 9:00 p.m. Eastern.

Week	Dates (M–Su)	Topics	Due
1	**Jan 11–17**	Introduction to Information Policy and Ethics	
2	**Jan 18–24**	Reasoning in Policy and Ethics	
3	**Jan 25–31**	Rights and Virtues	Ethical Problem Proposal
4	**Feb 1–7**	Privacy and Access	
5	**Feb 8–14**	Professional Ethics and Policy	OpenMind Completion
6	**Feb 15–21**	Social Media	Ethical Problem Essay
7	**Feb 22–28**	Big Data	
8	**Mar 1–7**	Misinformation	Policy Brief Proposal
9	**Mar 8–14**	Global Information Ethics and Governance	
	Wed, Mar 17		Policy Brief