

PH134: Computing Ethics

Worcester State University
Spring 2022 Course Syllabus

Professor Laura Kane

Course Description

Computing ethics is relatively young field, beginning near the end of World War II and growing exponentially (especially since the 1970's) in pace with developments in computer and information technology. Because *computing devices*, the *Internet*, and the sharing of *information* have all become such central parts of our lives, the questions that information and media ethics deal with have significant implications for the policies, practices, and principles that guide our use of technology and the means with which we share information with others.

This course will explore several foundational and contemporary arguments in Computing, Information, and Media Ethics, especially those that have shaped (and continue to shape) our notions of privacy, anonymity, the use(s) and development of artificial intelligence, algorithms, responsibility and accountability, free speech, truth, and fake news. Some of the questions we will discuss include: Ought we promote human values at the expense of limiting technological reach? Do those persons who design and develop computer-related technologies have a special responsibility to consider or prevent ethical dilemmas related to their designs? What kinds of things ought to be protected under the concept of 'Privacy'? Ought we ensure that algorithms are free from bias and do not perpetuate dangerous stereotypes? How has social media changes norms of communication? Whom should we hold responsible for the sharing of misinformation?

Course Reading Schedule

Week	Readings and Class Activities
Week 1: Introduction	To Read: The Syllabus and informational documents
Week 2: Crash Course in Ethical Theory	To Read: 1,000 Word Philosophy Articles – Consequentialism and Deontology (Kantian Ethics) and Virtue Ethics (selection) and Ethics and Feminism (selection)
Week 3: AI and Machine Morality	To Read: Wendell Wallach & Colin Allen, "Why Machine Morality?" and Wendell Wallach & Colin Allen, "Engineering Morality" Class Activity: MIT Moral Machine
Week 4: AI and Machine Morality	To Read: Nick Bostrom & Eliezer Yudkowsky, "The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence" Class Activity: <i>Should AIs have rights?</i>

Week 5: Privacy and Data	To Read: James Rachels, “Why Privacy is Important”
Week 6: Privacy and Data	To Read: Carissa Véliz, “Privacy is Power” (<i>from Privacy Is Power</i>) Watch in Class: Jaron Lanier Fixes the Internet
Week 7: Privacy and Data	Group Writing Activity: Applying ethical frameworks to issues in privacy and data
Week 8: Algorithms, Internet Search, and Accountability	To Read: Safiya Umoja Nobel – “Searching for Black Girls” (<i>from Algorithms of Oppression</i>)
Week 9: Algorithms, Internet Search, and Accountability	To Read: Dirk Lewandowski, “Is Google Responsible for Providing Fair and Unbiased Results?”
Week 10: Assessment	MIDTERM EXAM
Week 11: Internet Communication and Accountability	To Read: Bozdag and Hoven, “Breaking the Filter Bubble: Democracy and Design”
Week 12: Internet Communication and Accountability	To Read: Regina Rini, “Fake News and Partisan Epistemology”
Week 13: Internet Communication and Accountability	To Read: Karen Frost-Arnold, “The Epistemic Dangers of Context Collapse Online”
Week 14: Internet Communication and Accountability	To Read: C. Thi Nguyen, “How Twitter Gamifies Communication” Group Writing Activity: Analyzing the news through applied ethical frameworks
Week 15: Anonymity and Shame	To Read: James Fritz, “Online Shaming and the Ethics of Public Disapproval” Watch in Class: When Online Shaming Goes Too Far