

School of Information and Library Science
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

INLS 584, Information Ethics Fall 2009

Syllabus

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Class meetings: Tuesday & Thursday, 9:30-10:45; 208 Manning Hall

Course Description

Overview. The intention of this course is to introduce students to the variety of ethical issues they will need to address as information professionals. After a brief overview of ethical theories and their application to moral issues, as well as ethical codes of conduct for the information professions, the class will focus on particular issues that are most salient to information professionals, such as information/data as intellectual property, software as intellectual property, data integrity/accuracy, software accuracy, privacy, access to information/censorship, access to information technology, effects of computerization on the work environment (job displacement, deskilling, ergonomic issues, electronic monitoring), effects of computer-mediated communication on understandings of identity and relationships, and effects of computerization on democracy and government.

Rationale and relationship to the current curriculum. Many of the courses in the SILS curriculum briefly address ethical issues, such as censorship, intellectual property rights, the effects of systems design, and others. By focusing entirely on ethics, this course will enable the participants to develop their skills in reasoning about such issues.

Textbook and Readings

Rachels, J. (2007). *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 6th edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

The text is available at UNC Student Stores in either print or electronic form. Additional

readings will be available as noted in the class schedule. These readings will be selected by the instructor and class participants.

Assignments and Evaluation

The final grade will be based on one major paper, two small assignments, and class participation:

- The major paper will be due at the end of the semester (8:00am, December 17). It may be an integrative literature review on a particular ethical issue/case, a review of a particular court case or set of cases with implications for information ethics, or a critical review of a current book related to topics discussed in the course. In each case, there will be intermediate deliverables due throughout the semester. (45%)
- Each student will be asked to plan and lead a class session, either individually or with a partner. (25%)
- Each student will be asked to develop one scenario describing an ethical dilemma. (10%)
- Each student will be asked to respond to one scenario describing an ethical dilemma. (10%)
- Each student will be expected to participate actively throughout the semester, including during the class meetings and in the online discussion forum (10%).

Honor Code. The Honor Code, which prohibits giving or receiving unauthorized aid in the completion of assignments, is in effect in this class.

Library and Lab Resources. You will be using SILS library and lab resources during the course of the semester. Please remember that many of your fellow students also need to use the same material. Follow the proper checkout procedures and return materials promptly to be a good SILS citizen.



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Schedule

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Introduction to Ethical Reasoning

Session 1: August 25, Overview of the course; An exercise in ethical reasoning ([Arson case](#))

Session 2: August 27, Cultural relativism; Subjectivism; Emotions

- Rachels, Chapter 1, What is morality? (key: sections 1.5 & 1.6)
- Rachels, Chapter 2, The challenge of cultural relativism (key: sections 2.2, 2.4, 2.8, & 2.9)
- Rachels, Chapter 3, Subjectivism in ethics (key: sections 3.1-3.4)
- Artz, J. M. (2000). The role of emotion in reason, and its implications for computer ethics. *Computers and Society*, 30(1), 14-16. [[ACM Digital Library](#)]

Session 3: September 1, Morality and religion; Egoism

- Rachels, Chapter 4, Does morality depend on religion? (key: sections 4.2 & 4.3)
- Rachels, Chapter 5, Ethical egoism (key: sections 5.2-5.4)

Session 4: September 3, Social contracts

- Rachels, Chapter 6, The idea of a social contract (key: sections 6.1, 6.3, & 6.5)

Session 5: September 8, Utilitarianism

- Rachels, Chapter 7, The utilitarian approach (key: section 7.1)
- Rachels, Chapter 8, The debate over utilitarianism (key: sections 8.1, 8.3, & 8.4)

Session 6: September 10, Absolute moral rules and Kant; [Selection of issues to consider during course](#)

- Rachels, Chapter 9, Are there absolute moral rules? (key: sections 9.2, 9.4, & 9.5)
- Rachels, Chapter 10, Kant and respect for persons (key: section 10.1)

Session 7: September 15, Alternative ethical approaches

- Rachels, Chapter 11, Feminism and the ethics of care (key: sections 11.1 & 11.2)
- Rachels, Chapter 12, The ethics of virtue (key: sections 12.1 & 12.2)
- Rachels, Chapter 13, What would a satisfactory moral theory be like? (key: section 13.4)
- *Optional reading:* Adam, A. (2000). Gender and computer ethics. *Computers & Society*, 30(4), 17-23. [[ACM Digital Library](#)]

Session 8: September 17, Applying moral theories as information professionals

- Smith, H. J., & Hasnas, J. (1999). Ethics and information systems: the corporate domain. *MIS Quarterly*, 23(1), 109-127. (Read pages 109-119 only.) [[UNC libraries](#)]
- Fallis, D. (2007). Information ethics for twenty-first century library professionals. *Library Hi Tech*, 25(1), 23-36. (Skim entire article; focus on two sections: The theories, and Limitations of the theories) [[UNC libraries](#)]
- Leonard, L. N. K., Cronan, T. P., & Kreie, J. (2004). What influences IT ethical behavior intentions: Planned behavior, reasoned action, perceived importance, or individual characteristics? *Information & Management*, 42(1), 143-158. (Read sections 1, 2, and 4 only.) [[UNC libraries](#)]

Session 9: September 22, Values clarification

- Smith, M. (1977). *A Practical Guide to Value Clarification*. Lajolla, CA: University Associates.
 - Chapter 1, The need for exploring values, p3-18 [[Electronic reserves](#)]

Session 10: September 24, Professional codes of conduct (Additional codes and other resources)

- ALA Code of Ethics. (1995, June 28). American Library Association. <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statementspols/codeofethics/codeethics.cfm>.
- ACM code of ethics and professional conduct. (1992, October 16). Association for Computing Machinery. <http://www.acm.org/constitution/code.html>.
- ASIS&T professional guidelines. Adopted 5/30/92. <http://www.asis.org/AboutASIS/professional-guidelines.html>.
- Buchanan, E.A., & Henderson, K.A. (2009). Professional ethics. In *Case Studies in Library and Information Science Ethics*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 95-99. [SILS reserves - Z682.35 .P75 B83 2009; also available in the Resources on the class Sakai site]
- Huff, C. (1996). Unintentional power in the development of computer systems. *Computers & Society*, 26(4), 6-9. [[ACM Digital Library](#)]
- Literature review: Topic/question due
- Review of court cases: List of cases due
- Book review: Citation due

Issues in Information Ethics

The remainder of the course will be devoted to reasoning about moral issues of relevance to information professionals. The specific issues to be considered in the course will be selected

and presented by the course participants. Key issues and possible readings are listed here:

- Information/data as intellectual property (copyright, moral rights of authors, open source content)
- Software as intellectual property (open source software, legal mechanisms for software protection)
- Information/software integrity/accuracy (professional responsibility for correct information/programs)
- Privacy (government surveillance, commercial surveillance, computer-mediated communication, exoinformation)
- Access to information/censorship (equitable access to information, censorship, freedom to read)
- Access to information technology (equitable access to computers and the internet, discrimination)
- Effects of computerization on the work environment (job displacement, deskilling, ergonomic issues, electronic monitoring)
- Effects of computer-mediated communication on understandings of identity and relationships
- Effects of computerization on democracy and government

Session 11: September 29, To be developed by class member

- Readings to be selected by class member

Session 12: October 1, To be developed by class member

- Readings to be selected by class member

Session 13: October 6, To be developed by class member

- Readings to be selected by class member

Session 14: October 8, To be developed by class member

- Readings to be selected by class member
- Literature review: Annotated bibliography due
- Review of court cases: Annotated bibliography due

Session 15: October 13, To be developed by class member

- Readings to be selected by class member

Session 16: October 15, To be developed by class member

- Readings to be selected by class member

Session 17: October 20, To be developed by class member

- Readings to be selected by class member

October 22: No Class; Fall Break**Session 18: October 27, To be developed by class member**

- Readings to be selected by class member
- Book review: Outline of book due

Session 19: October 29, To be developed by class member

- Readings to be selected by class member

Session 20: November 3, To be developed by class member

- Readings to be selected by class member
- Literature review: Outline due
- Review of court cases: Outline due

Session 21: November 5, To be developed by class member

- Readings to be selected by class member

November 10: No Class; ASIST**November 12: No Class; ASIST****Session 22: November 17, To be developed by class member**

- Readings to be selected by class member

Session 23: November 19, To be developed by class member

- Readings to be selected by class member
- Book review: Outline of review due

Session 24: November 24, To be developed by class member

- Readings to be selected by class member

November 26: No Class; Thanksgiving Break**Session 25: December 1, To be developed by class member**

- Readings to be selected by class member

Session 26: December 3, To be developed by class member

- Readings to be selected by class member

- Last day to turn in scenarios and responses to scenarios

Session 27: December 8, Course wrap-up/review; Carolina Course Evaluation

- Readings to be selected by class member

December 17, 8am: Major paper due (literature review, review of court cases, book review)

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Assignments

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During the semester, each student will write one major paper, will lead the discussion in one class session, will write one scenario describing an ethical dilemma, will respond in writing to one such scenario developed by another member of the class or published as a case study, and will participate actively in class, leading at least one class session. Each of these expectations is described in more detail below.

Major Paper (45%)

The major assignment is a paper, due at the end of the semester (8:00am, December 17). It may be any *one* of the following, or a specific project/paper proposed by the student and approved by the instructor:

- An integrative literature review on a particular ethical issue/case. The goal of this assignment is to analyze a particular ethical issue or case in depth. The student will identify and study the literature related to that issue or case. The review will integrate and critique the major points made in the literature.
- A review of a particular court case or set of cases with implications for information ethics. The goal of this assignment is similar to the previous alternative, but the focus of the review is on a particular legal case or set of related cases. The review will integrate and critique the major points made through the selected case(s), including references to other relevant literature.
- A critical review of a current book related to topics discussed in the course. In addition to providing a recommendation concerning the quality of the book reviewed, the student should analyze the content of the book in relation to issues in information ethics. (The book to be reviewed must be at least 150 pages in length; a list of possible books is available for inspiration.)

In each case, there will be intermediate deliverables that are due throughout the semester.

For *literature reviews*, the following deliverables will be handed in for comment:

- A one-page proposal of the topic/question to be covered in the review (due September 24);
- An annotated bibliography of the documents to be included in the literature review (due October 8); and
- An outline of the major points of the review (due November 3).

For *reviews of court cases*, the following deliverables will be handed in for comment:

- A list of the case(s) to be reviewed (due September 24);
- An annotated bibliography of the other sources that will be used to review the case and its ethical implications (due October 8); and
- An outline of the ethical issues to be raised and discussed in the review (due November 3).

For *book reviews*, the following deliverables will be handed in for comment:

- The citation of the book to be reviewed (due September 24);
- An outline of the major points made in the book, or an extensive abstract of the book (due October 27); and
- An outline of the ethical issues raised by the book and to be discussed in the review (due November 19 or earlier).

The major paper should be approximately 15-20 double-spaced pages. It will be evaluated, based on the following criteria: the quality (logic, depth, etc.) of the reasoning about ethical issues and the application of moral principles, clarity (including grammatical correctness), and completeness. It is expected to be of publishable quality, and students are encouraged to prepare their papers in anticipation of submission for publication. The paper is due by 8:00am on Thursday, December 17.

Leading a Class Discussion (25%)

Each student will be expected to lead one or more class sessions of interest to him or her, either alone or with a partner. The session leader(s) will select appropriate class readings (in consultation with the instructor), present an overview of the issues to be discussed, and lead a discussion or in-class exercise that will enable the class members to wrestle with the issue.

Students will sign up on September 10 for the topic of the class discussion that they wish to lead. The instructor will then schedule the class sessions, September 29-December 3.

Leadership of a class session will be evaluated on the following criteria: the student's demonstration of an in-depth understanding of the issue being discussed (based on individual conversations with the instructor, as well as in-class leadership), and the student's ability to engage the class members in wrestling with that issue.

Developing a Scenario Describing an Ethical Dilemma (10%)

Each student will be asked to develop one scenario describing an ethical dilemma. Throughout the course, we will be working with a variety of such scenarios, varying in length from a paragraph to a collection of articles. Each dilemma presents a realistic (or real) situation in which issues related to information ethics are raised.

Writing a scenario describing an ethical dilemma is like writing a story. It should be realistic, vivid, and fairly detailed. For the purposes of this assignment, it should raise one or more ethical issues for each of three or more actors within the story. It should conclude with a set of questions, highlighting the ethical issues faced by each actor. It should be approximately 2 single-spaced pages in length.

It is anticipated that each student will choose to develop a scenario in his or her particular area of interest. Thus, the due dates will be associated with the scheduling of particular topics for discussion in the course. In general, the scenarios associated with a particular topic will be due one week after we have finished discussing the topic in class. Students may use the class discussion of a draft scenario, to get feedback concerning its clarity and effectiveness in raising ethical issues. All scenarios must be completed and turned in for grading by December 3, at the latest.

The scenarios written by students will be evaluated on the following criteria: realism, effectiveness in raising important ethical issues, clarity, and vividness.

Responding to One Scenario of an Ethical Dilemma (10%)

Each student will respond to a scenario depicting an ethical dilemma. It may be a scenario developed by another member of the class, or one of the scenarios included on our [reading lists](#). The response is due approximately one week after the issue raised by the scenario is discussed in class.

Responding to a scenario entails identifying and responding to the ethical issues faced by each actor in the scenario. For each actor, identify the ethical issues faced by that person. For each issue, state whether the person acted ethically and the basis for your judgment about the person's actions. If the scenario does not specify the actions taken (i.e., it specifies only the situation), then describe the possible actions that could be taken by each actor, state which are ethical, and why. The written response should be 2-3 single-spaced pages in length.

The responses will be evaluated on the following criteria: clear identification of the ethical issues raised, quality of reasoning about those issues, and application of moral theories in that reasoning.

Class Participation (10%)

Each student will be expected to participate actively in the class, both in in-class and online discussion. Class participation will be evaluated on the substance and quality of the student's comments, either in class or on the online discussion board.

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