INLS 584: Information Ethics

**Instructor: Amelia N. Gibson**

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**Office: 205 Manning Hall**

**Class meetings: Thursdays, 2:00-4:45 pm, 304 Manning Hall**

**Office hours by appointment**

**Course Overview**

**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 moral theories and their application to ethical 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 societal implications of information creation and use, information/data as intellectual property, 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 applied ethics, this course will enable the participants to develop their skills in reasoning about such issues.

***A note on the course***. This course is largely student-led and discussion based. It involves a large amount of group work. We will adhere to a rigorous reading and research schedule. Students should come prepared to engage with challenging ideas and classmates fully but respectfully.

**Textbook and Readings**

Rachels, J., & Rachels, S. (2014). *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (8th edition). Dubuque: McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages. (The 7th ed. Is also fine, and in some places, much cheaper).

The text is available at UNC Student Stores.

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 class participation, a class leadership session, and a final project that involves a scholarly contribution to the end-of-semester Symposium for Social Good. Each assignment has several intermediate deliverables, so please pay attention to the assignment instructions and class schedule, which will be updated with readings throughout the semester.

**Participation (20%):** Each student will be expected to participate actively throughout the semester, including during the class meetings and in the online discussion forum.

**Planning/Leading Class Session (40%)**: Each student will be required to plan and lead a class session as part of a group. This will include construction of at least one stakeholder list, a scenario describing an ethical dilemma, and evaluation/reasoning through courses of action using at least two ethical frameworks.

**Symposium for Social Good (40%):** Each student will be required to make a scholarly contribution to the SILS Symposium for Social Good on April 21 (9-12 am). Students will either take part in a panel or participate in a poster session about an ethical/social problem related to information science.

**Grading**

UNC-CH graduate students are graded on the H/P/L/F scale. The following definitions of these grades will be used for this course. While assignments are not graded "on a curve," most students should expect to get a P, if they fully complete the course assignments.

**Graduate Grading Scale**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Letter grade** | **Numeric range** | **Description of grade** |
| H | 95-100 | High Pass: Clear excellence; beyond expectations for the course. |
| P | 80-94 | Pass: Entirely satisfactory; fully meets expectations for the course. |
| L | 70-79 | Low Pass: Minimally acceptable; clear weaknesses in performance. |
| F | Below 70 | Fail: Unacceptable performance. |
| IN | NA | Work incomplete. |

**Undergraduate Grading Scale**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Letter grade** | **Numeric range** | **Description of grade** |
| A | 95-100 | Mastery of course content at the highest level of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development. |
| A- | 90-94 |  |
| B+ | 88-89 |  |
| B | 86-87 | Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. |
| B- | 84-85 |  |
| C+ | 82-83 |  |
| C | 80-81 | A totally acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. |
| C- | 78-79 |  |
| D+ | 74-77 |  |
| D | 70-73 | A marginal performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment. |
| F | Below 70 | For whatever reason, an unacceptable performance. The F grade indicates that the student's performance in the required exercises has revealed almost no understanding of the course content. |
| IN | NA | Work incomplete. |

***Honor Code.*** The Honor Code, which prohibits giving or receiving unauthorized aid in the completion of assignments, is in effect in this class. Please contact the instructor if you have any questions about the application of the Honor Code to your work 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 equipment and materials. Follow the proper checkout procedures and return materials promptly to be a good SILS citizen.

**Assignments**

### Leading a Class Discussion (40%)

Students will be expected to form groups of 2 to lead one class session per group. Each group will select and assign up to 4 appropriate class readings, present an overview of the issues to be discussed, and lead a discussion or in-class exercise that will enable the class members to reason through the chosen topic. Readings should include at least 1 popular reading or video, and at least 1 scholarly research article; readings must be approved by the instructor.

Topic proposals for class discussions will be due on January 26. Reading lists will be due on February 9.

**Proposals** should include the following:

1. Two potential topics for class discussion
2. Three potential dates for class discussion
3. Names of group members

Leadership of a class session will be evaluated on the following criteria:

* Group members’ demonstration of an in-depth understanding of the issue being discussed (based on individual conversations with the instructor, as well as in-class leadership)
* Group members’ ability to describe/summarize the facts of the case or issue, to describe the stakeholders, and to select readings to help classmates understand and engage in discussion.
* Students’ ability to respectfully and successfully engage class members in negotiating issues.

### Class Participation (20%)

Each student will be expected to participate actively in the class, through both in-class and online discussion. Class participation will be evaluated on the substance and quality of the student's comments and reasoning, primarily in class (and secondarily, on the online discussion board).

**Symposium for Social Good (40%)**

Students in INLS 584 (Information Ethics – graduate level), 384 (Information and Computer Ethics – undergraduate level), INLS 690-197 (Information Services in a Diverse Society), and INLS 739 (Information Services for Specific Populations) will collaborate to host the SILS Symposium for Social Good on Friday April 21, from 9 am – 12 noon. Each student will be expected to make a scholarly contribution to this event, either in the form of a panel or poster presentation about an ethical issue or social problem related to information science. Presentations should be of professional quality.

**The symposium will be held on a Friday morning. Any student who is unable to arrange to be available for the symposium should consult the instructor for specific instructions regarding additional assignment requirements. Grade adjustments/make-up assignments will not be made based on failure to communicate and plan appropriately.**

**Content:** Panels should include a presentation component and a question-answer/interactive-audience component. Posters should include an online poster (using PDF, Sway, ArcMap, or another embeddable online presentation format), a video component, and an in-person discussion component. Preliminary research and outlines for all presentations will be due on March 23.

While there are many ways to present your work (and we will discuss some of them during class), panels and posters should do the following, at a minimum:

* Address a specific, applied topic or current event (which may be related to the topic you choose for class discussion, or may be new)
* Outline relevant moral/ethical issues
* Identify the stakeholders involved
* Outline possible courses of action
* Suggest ethical implications of courses of action

**Group participation/selection:** Panels will comprise 4 group members each. Poster groups will comprise 3 group members each. Students may elect to form groups with students from any of the participating classes (INLS 584, 384, 690-197, and 739) who might be interested in collaborating on a topic. You are responsible for ensuring that your collaboration is fruitful, and that your presentation fulfills the assignment as given in this course.

**Time:** Students are expected to attend the entire 3-hour symposium session. Approximately one hour should be spent presenting, and the other two hours should be spent attending other students’ presentations. The final portion of this project – an end of semester reflection on the symposium – should address your own presentation experience as well as your experiences interacting with other students’ work.

Panel presentations will be 45 minutes long, and should include an interactive or audience discussion component. Poster presentations will be 3 hours total, with each group member responsible for one hour of physical attendance at the poster (while the other two members engage with other students’ presentations).

**Deliverables:**

1. **Proposals (Open February 10 – Close/Due February 23)(5 points)**:

Proposals should be related to the general topic of *Information for Social Good*, and should address ethical issues related to information and library science broadly. Proposals from INLS 584 students should focus on a topic relevant to applied ethics of information and/or library science. Topics that refer to current or recent events are preferred. Proposals from combined class groups must address the topic requirements from each class.

**Format:** Proposals should take the form of a presentation or poster abstract (300-500 words) describing the issues to be addressed by the symposium presentation or poster. Submissions should include the following metadata:

1. Full names, email addresses, and class (584, 384, 690, or 793) for each group member.
2. Selected presentation type (poster or presentation).
3. Title of the poster or presentation.
4. Full abstract for the poster or presentation (300-500 words).
5. Short abstract (50-100 words) for use on the symposium website.

Each group member must submit a copy of the proposal document by the due date.

Presentation and poster slots will be filled on a first come, first serve basis. Course instructors reserve the right to reject or modify proposals in consultation with students.

1. **Symposium outline/preliminary research (Due March 23) (5 points):**

Students must submit an outline of the presentation content (not just a plan for what you will talk about, but the actual information you will use to construct your presentation). While this does not have to be polished, it should be well-organized into topic areas, or headings that are indicative of the conceptual organization of your presentation. This should include a 20-30 item bibliography, and should cover the content areas described in “Content” above.

1. **Symposium Participation (April 21, 2017, 9 am-12 noon) (20 points)**

Students will participate in the symposium, and attend at least two other student presentations. Poster packages (to include short bio, posters, videos, and bibliographies) and final panel packages (to include short bios, 2 pg. structured notes/short paper and bibliography) should be submitted on April 21 by midnight.

1. **End of Semester Reflection (Due Monday, May 8, 9 am) (10 points)**

Students will write a 500-word reflection on your participation in the symposium. The reflection should include an evaluation of their own work and presentation experience, and a summary and evaluation of two peer groups’ presentations.

**Schedule**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Class Date** | **Topic/Readings** |
|  |  |
| January 1/12 | **Course Overview; Ground Rules; Intro to Ethical Reasoning**   * Rachels, Chapter 1, What is morality? (key: sections 1.5 & 1.6) * 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](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0276-7783%28199903%2923%3A1%3C109%3AEAISTC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-9)] * 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](http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/07378830710735830)] * Kizza, J.M. (2007). Ethics and the professions. In *Ethical and Social Issues in the Information Age*. London: Springer, 65-96. (Read sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.4.1.) [Sakai Resources] |
| 1/19 | **Cultural relativism; Subjectivism; Emotions**   * 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. [Sakai Resources] |
| 1/26 | **Morality and religion; Egoism; Social Contracts**   * 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) * Rachels, Chapter 6: The idea of a social contract (key: sections 6.1, 6.3, & 6.5)   ***Class Discussion proposals due.*** |
| 2/2 | **Utilitarianism, Absolute moral rules, and Kant**   * 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) * 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) |
| 2/9 | **Feminism and Ethics of Care; Ethics of Virtue; Value Clarification**   * 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) * Smith, M. (1977). *A Practical Guide to Value Clarification.* Lajolla, CA: University Associates.   + Chapter 1, The need for exploring values, p3-18 [Sakai Resources]   *Optional*: Adam, A. (2008). The gender agenda in computer ethics. In Himma, K.E., & Tavani, H.T. (eds.), *The Handbook of Information and Computer Ethics.* Wiley, 589-619. [Sakai Resources]  ***Discussion Reading Lists Due*** |
| 2/16 | **Professional codes of ethics/conduct**   * ALA Code of Ethics. (2008, January 22). American Library Association. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/proethics/codeofethics/codeethics> * Mathiesen, K., & Fallis, D. (2008). Information ethics and the library profession. In Himma, K.E., & Tavani, H.T. (eds.), *The Handbook of Information and Computer Ethics.* Wiley, 221-244. (Focus on sections 9.1 and 9.2; read other sections as interested.) [Sakai Resources] * ACM code of ethics and professional conduct. (1992, October 16). Association for Computing Machinery. <http://www.acm.org/constitution/code.html>. * Huff, C. (1996). Unintentional power in the development of computer systems. *Computers & Society, 26*(4), 6-9. [Sakai Resources]   ASIS&T professional guidelines. Adopted 5/30/92. <http://www.asis.org/AboutASIS/professional-guidelines.html> |
| 2/23 | ***Symposium Proposals Due*** |
| 3/2 | **Group meetings: No class session** |
| 3/9 |  |
| 3/16 | **Spring Break: No class** |
| 3/23 | S***ymposium outline/ preliminary research due*** |
| 3/30 |  |
| 4/6 |  |
| 4/13 |  |
| 4/20 |  |
| 4/21 | Symposium for Social Good (Friday) |
| 4/27 | Last Calss |