INLS 776: Ethics, Values, and Society
Spring 2023

Basic information

Date and time: Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Location: Manning 01

Instructor information

Instructor: Melanie Feinberg (she, her, hers)
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Office: Manning 024
Student hours: Mondays 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. (in the office)

Introduction

In this course, we will consider how personal and social values manifest in information systems, services, and technologies. We will explore an array of ethical dilemmas and their intersection with our responsibilities as information professionals. Some of the core questions that we will interrogate include:
- How might we productively approach ethical dilemmas germane to the information professions?
- How are—and should—values and beliefs be expressed in information systems and services?
- How does our work affect society?
- How is power expressed in information systems, and to what effects?
- What are our professional responsibilities in relation to ethics and values?

All sections of INLS 776 have adopted similar learning objectives, themes, and requirements, including participation in the semester-ending Symposium for Information and the Social Good. That being said, each section will also differ in its precise subject matter, structure, and setup. Don't expect exact alignment across sections!

Learning objectives

At the end of this course, you will be able to:
- Identify and analyze ethical dilemmas that arise through the development and use of information systems, services, and technologies, and describe the personal and social values that manifest in the context of these dilemmas.
- Propose actions to resolve ethical dilemmas based on the application of established frameworks for moral reasoning.
- Describe and compare codes of ethics endorsed by relevant professional associations.
- Articulate and justify your own position on the responsibilities of information professionals in relation to ethics, values, power, and acccountability.
- Discuss complex social dilemmas with your peers in a productive, compassionate manner.
- Design and present a panel for a professional conference.

Course structure

This is an in-person course, meeting twice a week.

Our time together will be oriented around discussion. Some of our class sessions will focus on more scholarly readings, while other class sessions will be oriented around practical dilemmas and debates—what-if scenarios, analysis of current events, and professional challenges. When possible, lectures will be recorded for you to watch in advance rather than conducted in class.

Towards the end of the semester, our class structure will shift to examine topics and dilemmas selected by you. As part of our semester project, each project group will conduct one class session. This session will serve both as a "workshop" for your panel presentation at the Symposium for Information and the Social Good *and* provide a way for you to share what you've learned about your symposium topic with the rest of the class. (More details are in the Requirements section of this syllabus.)

This class will use the Canvas learning management system. Each week's materials, including readings, will be available via its own module in Canvas. Modules for the subsequent week will generally be posted on Wednesdays.

The Semester Calendar (below) provides an overview of each week.

Requirements

To pass the course, you must:.
- Complete a group project to investigate a topic of your choice related to ethics, society, and values in the information professions, culminating in a panel presentation at the semester-end Symposium for Information and the Social Good.
- Satisfy participation requirements: acquire at least six collegiality points and document your required points in a brief report.

Semester project: Investigating a professional matter of concern

The assigned work this semester will primarily comprise *an extended group project.* In groups of 4 or 5 students each, you will:
- Describe a topic that provokes professional dilemmas involving ethics, values, and society.
- Research academic, professional, and popular literature on that topic, producing an annotated bibliography of sources.
- Develop a 45-minute panel presentation on the topic to be conducted at a public event, the Symposium on Information for the Social Good. (See details below.)
- Conduct one entire session of our class, where you share what you've learned with your classmates (and workshop your symposium panel presentation).

The Symposium on Information for the Social Good will be held on Friday, April 21, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with both in-person and digital sessions. Students will be expected to attend at least two hours of the symposium, in addition to the time when you are presenting.

Project details
Ultimately, you will create a 45-minute symposium panel that:
- Defines a matter of concern: a topic area, professional dilemma, or current event.
- Outlines pertinent problems or questions related to ethics and values.
- Identifies associated stakeholders.
- Suggests a course of action, framework for understanding, mode of practice, or other mechanism to respond to the identified problems or questions.

(We'll talk about possibilities for how you might structure your panel in class.)

But the panel is merely the culmination of an extended investigation of your selected issue. The essence of this project lies in the *process* of researching your topic, collaborating with your group, and figuring out how best to share your ideas with others. If you take this process seriously, you will derive great value from it.

To structure your group's investigation, milestones will include:
1. Forming a group and selecting a topic.
2. Determining your panel's focus and writing an extended abstract to set your intentions.
3. Researching literature on your topic and preparing an annotated bibliography of sources.
4. Creating a detailed outline of your proposed panel.
5. Conducting one entire session of our class to share what you've learned and workshop your symposium presentation. Possible activities include:
    a. Selecting a set of appropriate readings.
    b. Piloting a "rough draft" of your panel.
    c. Guiding the class in discussion, based on the readings you selected and the ideas that you shared.
6. Presenting the panel at the symposium.
7. Writing a concluding reflection based on your experiences working on the panel and attending the symposium.

Complete details for each milestone will be available in Canvas. We will also go over each component in class, and we will have some time set aside for project groups to meet during class (although you will likely need to meet outside of class also).

Participation

We're all in this together! In a course that emphasizes student interaction, it's important that we all find ways to contribute to our mutual learning and well-being. Accordingly, to pass the class, you must *acquire at least six* collegiality points *throughout the semester.*[1]

Some ways to obtain collegiality points include:
- *Consistently* doing the assigned reading and being prepared for class discussion.
- *Generally* fulfilling the discussion success criteria (listed below).
- Facilitating a small-group discussion: getting the conversation started, keeping the group on task, ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak, synthesizing ideas, and so on.
- Serving as the "devil's advocate" in a small-group discussion by articulating opinions or objections that you do not personally share, but that extend the conversation in interesting ways. (This involves acting as the persistent devil's advocate for an entire class, rather than just making a single remark.)
- Acting as the reporter for a small-group discussion, presenting what the group talked about to the class as a while.
- Writing up thoughts about a reading, lecture, discussion, or other activity as a Canvas discussion post.
- Reflecting on a recent news item or everyday experience that expands upon topics germane to the class as a Canvas discussion post.
- Sharing your knowledge with others: for example, helping to explain a reading, discussion topic, or something else from the course to one of your classmates.
- Soliciting knowledge from others: for example, asking a fellow student (or me) for help when you don't understand something.

Any of these actions will earn a collegiality point. You don't need to do six different actions; you can act as a discussion reporter six times, or you can write six Canvas discussion posts. It's really up to you.

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[1] The idea for collegiality points is liberally adapted from Max Liboiron via Megan Winget.

Have an idea for some other way to obtain collegiality points? Great! Just let me know what you're thinking, and we'll see if it makes sense. We can continue adding to this list throughout the semester.

Tracking collegiality points
I will not keep track of your collegiality points; you will. At the end of the semester, you will submit a report that lists what you've done. This will not be onerous if you keep track throughout the semester.

In the report, you will document each collegiality point in 2-3 sentences. (A sample description of a collegiality point might be: "On Monday, January 30, I facilitated my group's process for creating our code of ethics for the information professions. I asked each person to share the directive that they thought was most important from one of the different professional codes of ethics, and we used those to begin our own code.")

Also note that, although I encourage you to perform these activities whenever you can, you only need to tell me about *six* of them. So your report can just tell me your six *favorite* collegiality items (or the *first* six), and not all 45 things that you did. In other words, if you want, you can get this report completed early in the semester and be done with it (as long as you don't have more than two unexcused absences, as explained below).

Attendance
In a class that emphasizes student interaction, being absent affects the learning experience of others. Therefore, attendance is a required component of participation.

Everyone has two unexcused absences for the semester. An unexcused absence is when you are away from class for any reason.

If you have more than two unexcused absences in the semester, you must obtain one extra collegiality point for each unexcused absence. (For instance, if you have four unexcused absences for the semester, you will need eight collegiality points, rather than six.)

If you have a good reason to miss class, you can request an excused absence. You don't need to obtain an extra collegiality point for an excused absence.

Acceptable reasons for excused absences include:
- Ill health (physical or mental).
- Family emergencies (your child is sick, your partner is in the hospital).
- Accidents and unanticipated disasters (your apartment floods, your car is stolen, etc).
- Religious holidays.

To obtain an excused absence, send me an e-mail with your reason for being absent. Do not go into detail about your personal circumstances, just tell me the basic reason (e.g., "I'm not feeling well today" etc.).

As a rule of thumb, if it would seem wrong for me to cancel class for that reason, it's probably not an acceptable excuse. For instance, studying for an exam in another class or attending a work meeting are not likely to be acceptable reasons to miss class.

As with the collegiality points, I won't keep track of your absences; you will. But misrepresenting your unexcused absences would be a violation of the honor code, and honor code violations are quite serious (see the course policies below).

Discussion success criteria
If you consistently achieve the following throughout the semester, you can award yourself one collegiality point.

You contribute actively to discussions by:
- Initiating conversations by asking questions of others.
- Volunteering your thoughts, feelings, impressions, and examples.
- Where appropriate, supporting your opinions and claims with evidence.
- Speaking up when you are confused or uncertain. (For instance, it's absolutely fantastic to begin a conversation by saying that you aren't quite sure how to distinguish between rights-based and duty-based approaches to ethical questions.)
- Retaining focus on matters germane to the course.
- Maintaining confidence that your contributions are valuable, no matter your background or level of previous knowledge or expertise.

You listen carefully and respond thoughtfully by:
- Maintaining respect and compassion for your classmates.
- Demonstrating that you value others' contributions. (For instance, use verbal and nonverbal cues to show that you're paying attention to your classmates. When someone makes a good point, say so.)
- Attempting to understand unfamiliar perspectives rather than dismissing them (for instance, by asking questions or requesting explanations).
- Disagreeing constructively (for instance, by volunteering a counter-example to consider or referring everyone to the text of a reading).
- Attending to the flow of a conversation (for instance, by changing the topic if interest is flagging, or *not* changing the topic if everyone is enthusiastic about it).

You monitor group dynamics, and adopt the Step Up/Step Back principle:
- *Step back* if you've been talking more than your share.
- *Step up* if you haven't been contributing as much.

Grading and assessment

All students who satisfy the course requirements will receive a P.

You will receive written or oral feedback on all assigned work. The feedback will be based on the success criteria and deliverables for each required assignment (available in the Assignments area of Canvas).

Should a submission be incomplete or not meet minimum standards of performance, you will be invited to resubmit it. (If a live event, such as your group's facilitation of one class session, does not meet minimum standards, you will be invited to resubmit an alternate assignment.)

Late work
There are no penalties for late work. *However, participation in the Symposium for Information and the Social Good and your associated class workshop session are live events that will occur at specified times, which makes late submission impossible. If an emergency requires that you miss one of these events, alternate submissions will need to be negotiated individually with the instructor. It will be your responsibility to make such arrangements with me.*

If you cannot make a deadline for a written assignment, send an e-mail to inform me when you plan to submit your completed assignment. I appreciate being informed about your intention to submit late work

as soon as possible, and ideally well before the scheduled due date. In your e-mail, you just need to tell me when you intend to submit your work. You don't need to explain your circumstances; you don't need to apologize; and you don't need to ask me if a certain date is okay with me. Just tell me when you intend to submit your work.

The later that projects are submitted, the less time I will have to provide feedback on them, so keep this in mind. **You'll get fewer comments—or potentially no comments—when you turn things in late.**

Due dates

Participation requirements	*Due date*
Collegiality points report	**Wednesday, April 26**

Group project milestones	*Due date*
Group formation and topic selection	**Wednesday, February 8**
Extended abstract and program abstract	**Wednesday, March 8**
Content outline and annotated bibliography	**Wednesday, March 29**
Facilitation of one class session/panel workshop	**Week 13, 14, and 15 (signups in class)**
Attend and present at the symposium	**Friday, April 21**
Reflection on the project and symposium (individual work)	**Wednesday, April 26**

All assignments should be submitted as a PDF document via Canvas.

Semester Calendar

This calendar is subject to modification as the semester proceeds.

All readings are available via each week's Canvas module and should be completed before class begins.

Part 1. Foundational concepts

Week 1	
Introduction	
Monday, January 9	Wednesday, January 11
Readings	*Readings*
• Course syllabus	• hooks, 1994
Week 2	
Frameworks for moral reasoning	
Monday, January 16	Wednesday, January 18
No class (Martin Luther King, Jr holiday)	*Readings*
	• Regan, 2005
	• Brown University Science and Technology Studies, n.d.
	• Quinn, 2020
Week 3	
Frameworks for moral reasoning (continued)/Values, techhnology and professional responsibility	
Monday, January 23	Wednesday, January 25
No readings (start on Wednesday's readings instead)	*Readings*
	• Winner, 1980
	• Introna and Nissenbaum, 2000
	• JafariNaimi, Nathan, and Hargreaves, 2015
Week 4	
Values , technology, and professional responsibility (continued)	
Monday, January 30	Wednesday, February 1
Readings	*No readings (start on Monday's readings instead)*
• Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Code of Ethics	• Form project groups
• American Library Association (ALA) Code of Ethics	
• Society for American Archivists (SAA) Values Statement and Code of Ethics	
• IEEE Code of Ethics	

Part 2. Values conflicts and ethical dilemmas in the information professions

Week 5	
Dilemmas related to systemic bias in information systems	
Monday, February 6	Wednesday, February 8
Readings	*Readings*
• Noble, 2013	• Imbler, 2021
• Tripodi, 2021	
• Drabinski, 2013	Project group check-ins (finalize topics)
Week 6	
Dilemmas related to institutional racism in the information professions	
Monday, February 13	Wednesday, February 15
No class (university wellness day)	*Readings*
	• Amrute, 2020
	• Sutherland, 2017

Week 7 **Dilemmas related to information access**	
Monday, February 20 *Readings* • Moore, 2016 • Thystrup, 2019 • Srinivasan, Finn, and Ames, 2017 • Harris and Alter, 2022	Wednesday, February 22 *No readings (start on Monday's readings instead)* • Semester project exercise: researching a topic
Week 8 **Dilemmas related to datafication**	
Monday, February 27 *Readings* • Nopper, 2019 • Ahmed, 2019 • Liu, 2019	Wednesday, March 1 *Readings* • Romeo, 2021 • Lai and Kodé, 2022 Project group check-ins (writing an abstract)
Week 9 **Dilemmas related to data collection**	
Monday, March 6 *Readings* • Benjamin, 2016 • Keyes, 2019 • Cifor and Garcia et al, 2019	Wednesday, March 8 *Readings* • Farkas, 2017 • Singh and Jackson, 2017 Project group check-ins (compiling your annotated bibliography and planning your workshop)
Week 10	
Monday, March 13 *Spring break; no class*	Wednesday, March 15 *Spring break; no class*
Week 11 **More dilemmas related to data collection**	
Monday, March 20 *Readings* • Liang, Hutson, and Keyes, 2020 • Yu, 2022 • Chen, Huang, and Hu, 2022	Wednesday, March 22 *Readings* • Kolata, 2021 Project group check-ins (compiling your annotated bibliography and planning your workshop)
Week 12 **Dilemmas related to algorithmic prediction**	
Monday, March 27 *Readings* • Angwin, et al 2016 • Søe, 2021 • Scannell, 2019	Wednesday, March 29 *Readings* • Ebeling, 2016 Project group check-ins (compiling your annotated bibliography and planning your workshop)

Part 3.The topics important to you (selected by project groups)

Week 13 **Class facilitated by project groups**	
Monday, April 3 *Readings TBD (selected by each project group)*	Wednesday, April 5 *Readings TBD (selected by each project group)*
Week 14 **Class facilitated by project groups**	
Monday, April 10 *Readings TBD (selected by each project group)*	Wednesday, April 12 *Readings TBD (selected by each project group)*

Week 15	
Class facilitated by project groups	
Monday, April 17	Wednesday, April 19
Readings TBD (selected by each project group)	*Readings TBD (selected by each project group)*
Symposium for Information and the Social Good	
Friday, April 21, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.	
Week 16	
Additional fun dilemmas RIPPED from the headlines	
Monday, April 24 • McDonald, 2022	Wednesday, April 26 • Kugel, 2022 • Hill, 2022

Course policies

COVID-19 community standards
As specified by current UNC community standards, everyone at UNC is encouraged to be fully vaccinated and to receive any eligible boosters.

Mask use is encouraged but optional in university buildings.

Please do not come to class if you are sick. Although this class will not offer a remote option, class materials will be posted to Canvas so that you will have access to them, even if you are ill.

For additional information about UNC's current COVID protocols see https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/

Respectful class environment
Learning requires an atmosphere of respect, care, and empathy for each other. This does not mean that we can't disagree; understanding the nature of our disagreements can help us all grow. But disrespect for any person or their identity will not be tolerated.

Asking for help
Should you encounter barriers to your learning—whether it's something that I'm doing or not doing, or challenges in your personal circumstances—I am here to help. Please set up an appointment so that we can work together towards your success.

The work that we will be engaging with this semester is difficult, and most of you will be unfamiliar with some or all of it. It is normal to feel confused or lost sometimes.

Additionally, we are living in challenging times, and we are all grappling with chronic stress and anxiety. It is common and natural to feel overwhelmed. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness or failure.

No busy work
No one wants to do boring things for no reason, including me! From my perspective, everything that we do in this class has a purpose that requires thinking. If anything seems like busy work, I probably haven't articulated the purpose well. Be sure to ask for help, so that I can better explain what the task is supposed to achieve.

Instructor communication
For specific, concrete questions, e-mail is the most reliable means of contact for me. If you do not receive a response after a few days, please follow up. It is always helpful if your e-mail includes a targeted subject line that begins with "INLS 776."

For more complicated questions or help, come to student hours (no appointment necessary) or make an appointment to talk with me at a different time.

You are welcome to call me by my first name ("Melanie"). However, you may also use "Dr. Feinberg" or "Professor Feinberg" if that is more comfortable for you.

Student hours
During student hours, I am available to talk with students about anything, without an appointment.

You can use student hours to ask questions, seek help, consult about project work, obtain more information about course topics, or just say hello. You're not bothering me if you attend student hours! I've dedicated this time to talk with students.

During student hours, my office door will be open; simply come in! If I'm talking with someone else, make sure that I know you're there.

Inclusive learning and accessibility
I want everyone to do well in this class. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know. We'll work together on strategies to meet your needs and satisfy the requirements of the course.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Web site (ars.unc.edu) for details.

Mental health resources
All students have access to counseling and other resources through Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to caps.unc.edu or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building.

Basic needs
If you are navigating financial, health, or housing challenges that may have an impact on your ability to thrive at UNC, one resource is the Dean of Students, which also oversees the Dean's Emergency Fund: https://dos.unc.edu/student-support/student-emergency-and-hardship-funds/

If you are struggling with food insecurity, SILS has a food pantry in the student lounge on the second floor of Manning Hall; feel free to take what you need. You can also get assisstance through Carolina Cupboard, an on-campus food pantry: http://carolinacupboard.web.unc.edu/

Academic integrity
The UNC Honor Code states that:

It shall be the responsibility of every student enrolled at the University of North Carolina to support the principles of academic integrity and to refrain from all forms of academic dishonesty...

This includes prohibitions against the following:
- Plagiarism.
- Falsification, fabrication, or misrepresentation of data or citations.
- Unauthorized assistance or collaboration.
- Cheating.

All scholarship builds on previous work, and all scholarship is a form of collaboration, even when working independently. Incorporating the work of others, and collaborating with colleagues, is welcomed in academic work. However, the honor code clarifies that you must always acknowledge when you make use of the ideas, words, or assistance of others in your work. This is typically accomplished through practices of reference, quotation, and citation.

If you are not certain what constitutes proper procedures for acknowledging the work of others, please ask the instructor for assistance. It is your responsibility to ensure that the honor code is appropriately followed. (The UNC Office of Student Conduct provides a variety of honor code resources.)

The UNC Libraries has online tutorials on citation practices and plagiarism that you might find helpful.

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