COMM 360: Digital Media Ethics
TR 11:30am-12:45pm
SOC Building Room 010

Loyola University of Chicago
School of Communication
Instructor: Alan Perry
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Office Hours by Appointment

Course Description

There are very few corners of the world left untouched by digitization, but the need to engage ethically in these digital environments becomes increasingly evident, especially as these issues manifest in our own backyards, and the devices in our pockets. In the field of Communication, we are very familiar with some of the social issues arising from the uses and abuses of what the digital world has to offer. On the one hand, there is immense freedom and empowerment; on the other, oppression and exploitation. How will we, as an engaged populace, work to create both form and content that improves lives rather than act to diminish them?

This course is a deep-dive into the digital ethics issues of our time--of which there is a constant and steady stream of examples that affect our everyday lives through media, policy, and law. Notions of privacy and identity are constantly shifting, and yet everything about us from the biological to the social may be collected and housed in digital formats at any point, and in perpetuity. We will discuss answers to questions such as: Is it possible for a machine to have social bias?

Students will leave this course having engaged with several critical analytical perspectives, formulating their own toolkit for handling emergent issues in digital ethics, and contribute their knowledge towards creating a more just society amidst a changing world.

Recommended Texts

Eubanks, Virginia. (2017). *Automating Inequality*. St. Martin's Press.
Noble, Safiya. (2018). *Algorithms of Oppression*. NYU Press.
Taibbi, Matt. (2019). *Hate, Inc.* OR Books.
Carr, Nicholas. (2011). *The Shallows.* W.W. Norton & Company.

All assigned readings will be made available via Sakai.

SCHEDULE

Note: *This schedule is subject to change to better fit the goals and needs of the course. Any changes will be announced in class as soon as possible.*

Part 1 – What is Digital Media? What is Ethics?

WEEK 1
Jan 14   Syllabus Review & an Etymology of Digital Media Ethics
Jan 16   **Lecture:** A Brief History of Digital Technology / What is Critical Thinking?
(http://www2.winthrop.edu/login/uc/crtw/Stages%20of%20Development%20in%20Critical%20Thinking.pdf, https://miriamsweeney.net/2012/06/20/readforgradschool/)

WEEK 2
Jan 21   **Due:** Reading Response to *Making Choices: A Framework for Making Ethical Decisions*; **Lecture:** Systems of Ethics (https://www.brown.edu/academics/science-and-technology-studies/sites/brown.edu.academics.science-and-technology-studies/files/uploads/Framework.pdf)
Jan 23   **Discussion:** What framework do you find sensible? What are its strengths? What are its weaknesses?

Part 2 – The Californian Ideology

WEEK 3
Jan 28   **Due:** Reading Response to *The Californian Ideology*
(http://www.comune.torino.it/gioart/big/bigguest/riflessioni/californian_engl.pdf); **Lecture:** The Californian Ideology
Jan 30   **Discussion:** How can we introduce ethics to the conversation in *the Californian Ideology*?

WEEK 4
Feb 4   **Due:** Reading Response to *The Shallows Intro & Chapter 1*; **Lecture:** The Medium is the Message
Feb 6   **Lecture/Workshop:** Writing an Academic Paper & post-course options, Final Project Proposal Assignment Given

WEEK 5
Feb 11 **Due:** Reading Response to *The Shallows Chapter 8*; **Lecture:** Information Bubbles
Feb 13 **Discussion:** How can information bubbles be challenged? How are information bubbles reinforced?

WEEK 6
Feb 18 **Due:** Reading Response to *The Shallows Chapter 7*; **Lecture:** The Architecture of the Internet
Feb 20 **Discussion:** Does technological development have an inherent value? Or, is technological advance good/bad/neutral?; **Due:** Final Project Proposals

WEEK 7
Feb 25 **Final Project Proposal Peer Reviews – Group A**
Feb 27 **Final Project Proposal Peer Reviews – Group B**

WEEK 8
Mar 3   Spring Break – No Classes
Mar 5   Spring Break – No Classes

Part 3 – Algorithms

WEEK 9
Mar 10 **Due:** Reading Response to *Algorithms of Oppression Intro*; **Lecture:** Identity and the Internet
Mar 12 **Discussion:** How does the Internet affect the expression and reception of identity?

WEEK 10
Mar 17 **Due:** Reading Response to *Algorithms Chapter 1, pgs. 15-35*; **Lecture:** TBD
Mar 19 **Discussion:** TBD

WEEK 11
Mar 24 **Due:** Reading Response to *Algorithms Chapter 1, pgs. 36-63*; **Lecture:** TBD
Mar 26 **Discussion:** Can algorithms be ethical?

Part 4 – Automation

WEEK 12
Mar 31 **Due:** Reading Response to *The Future of Employment*; **Lecture:** Automation & Income Inequality
([https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The_Future_of_Employment.pdf)](https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The_Future_of_Employment.pdf)
Apr 2   **Discussion:** Does automation also require universal basic income?

WEEK 13
Apr 7   **Due:** Reading Response to *Automating Inequality Conclusion*; **Lecture:** Big Data
Apr 9   **Discussion:** TBD

WEEK 14
Apr 14   **Due:** Reading Response to *Self-Driving Mercedes & AI Religion*; **Lecture:** Moral Machines &
Artificial Intelligence (https://www.fastcompany.com/3064539/self-driving-mercedes-will-be-programmed-to-sacrifice-pedestrians-to-save-the-driver, https://www.wired.com/story/anthony-levandowski-artificial-intelligence-religion/)
Apr 16   **Discussion:** Can machines be trusted to make moral decisions? To what degree (medical operability, punishment, etc.)?

WEEK 15
Apr 21   **Due:** Reading Response to *Hate, Inc. Intro*; **Lecture:** 2020 & Beyond: Posthumanism & Cyborgs
Apr 23   **Discussion:** What opportunities exist to exercise and strengthen ethical approaches to digital media?

WEEK 16 – FINALS WEEK
Final Paper due at start of scheduled final *(No final exam)*

Assignments

Weekly Reading Responses (Pass/Fail) – 12 total, 5 points each for a total of **60 points**
Respond to the contents and/or arguments in the weekly reading assignment. Apply critical thinking to the topic – what assumptions does the author hold? What is shaping your own approach to the topic?
Rubric: Does the student demonstrate critical engagement with the reading? Are objections or agreements with the reading well thought-out and reasoned?
Due: 200-300 word response to reading

Final Paper Proposal – **10 points**
Write a proposal for your final project in which you will describe your project, justify it, outline all steps required to execute it, and plan a schedule for completion. In class, your peers will provide comments and feedback for your proposal in a critique format.
Rubric:

	0-2 points	3-4 points
Abstract (0-4)	Abstract is unclear or too ornate (see Purple prose; i.e. cup of coffee vs. graspable cylinder of liquid containing caffeine)	Abstract clearly summarizes the purpose/topic of the paper, the findings and argument(s), and your conclusions
Outline (0-4)	Outline has little or no structure, and/or does not demonstrate thoughtfulness	Outline clearly shows topics and illustrates the general flow of the paper
Bibliography (0-3)	Bibliography has citation errors and/or citations with no relevance to topic	Bibliography has a consistent citation style (MLA suggested) and relevant sources

Due: 1-2 page proposal in PDF format, containing a 200-300 word abstract, an outline, and a short bibliography of at least 5 sources.

Final Paper – **30 points**
Write a paper exploring a topic within Digital Media Ethics of your choice. It may be a topic covered in class or a topic that has not been covered in class you are interested in exploring further. The paper must include a description of an ethical or moral issue related to digital media (broadly understood) and an application of an ethical framework to the issue. While a suggested course of action related to the issue is highly encouraged, it is not required.
Rubric:

	0-3 points	4-7 points	8-10 points
Topic Exploration	Topic has not been critically engaged with; student has not demonstrated a synthesis of sources	Topic has been critically engaged with and arguments are supported	Paper shows a robust critical engagement with the topic and addresses multiple

			perspectives on the topic
Ethical Framework Application	Ethical framework is not referenced at all, or is not applied to topic	Ethical framework is applied, but only partially or without anticipation of potential counter-arguments	At least one ethical framework is applied and others are addressed; student demonstrates an engagement with ethical theories
Grammar/Structure/Bibliography	Grammar and structure are weak and/or unclear; bibliography has inappropriate citations	Grammar and structure are strong but still requires improvement in areas; bibliography has marginal issues with citation formatting	Grammar and structure are exemplary; bibliography contains no errors

Due: 5-7 page paper with in-text citations or footnotes. Citation format should be one most appropriate to your career goals; if you are uncertain, MLA format suggested. Bibliography should contain at least 7 sources.

Policies

ATTENDANCE/LATENESS

Attendance counts. If you miss more than 6 of the classes without an authorized excuse you will automatically fail this class. After two unexcused absences, your grade will begin to drop by 5 points for each absence. Missed work cannot be made up or excused except in the case of severe illness, death in the family, or religious holiday - these absences must be documented if you'd like to make up missed work. Documentation for a university-authorized absence must be cleared with the professor in advance. Come to class on time. Coming in late disrupts the class, and you'll likely miss important information. It is your responsibility to ask classmates for announcements you may have missed by arriving late. Arriving late repeatedly will bring down your participation grade.

ILLNESS

If you have, or think you have a cold or the flu (swine, bird or whatever) do not come to class. Do not come to class to tell me you are sick. Message me on Slack before class and contact the Wellness Center for advice - and get documentation! Ask a classmate for what you missed before you ask me.

DO NOT come back to class until you are fever-free for 24 hours!

PARTICIPATION

Attendance and lateness policies described above factor into your participation grade, and so does your contribution the community of learning in our classroom. Your participation in class depends on quantity and quality of participation. In this class, you'll attend lectures, discuss, work in groups, and provide peer review feedback to classmates. Your positive and substantive contribution to each of these class elements is expected for a passing grade - doing the bare minimum will earn you a bare minimum grade. Your physical presence in the room is less than bare minimum participation; participation includes attendance, attention, and attitude as well as substantive contributions. Leaving early, texting, checking facebook, chatting, sleeping, eating meals, and doing other non-class related work are distractions to you, me, and your classmates and will bring down your participation grade. If you need to leave class early, please tell me before class starts and sit near the door.

CLASSROOM CITIZENSHIP

Students are expected to respect each other. When you enter a classroom, you are a member of a cohort - a community of learning. Your success depends on your neighbors' success. Learning is a collaborative effort - in discussion, group work, and even lecture, understanding is co-produced. Your questions and perspectives matter, and so do your classmates'. Treat each other with tolerance and understanding. The people you'll interact with in class are your peers and future colleagues. Strive to do better on your own, but also strive to help your classmates to elevate the level of conversation in the classroom. You are responsible for your own work, but you are also responsible to your teacher and

your peers - your positive substantive participation in discussion and group work is a valuable aspect of the class.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

Use of technology in the classroom is encouraged! Bring laptops, smartphones, etc. Use note-taking software; use bibliographic software; use the Internet. Class topics are not bound to lecture, discussion, and the room we are sitting in. Take your discussion, questions, exploration online - look up definitions and more information as we discuss and share that with the class. With laptops, smartphones and other communication devices, you have a world of resources to help you learn - use them!

A Warning: Be respectful with your use of technology. Using technology is a skilled literacy and is a privilege - do not take advantage of this privilege. If you have a laptop or smartphone in front of you, expect to be called on to look up additional information. The presence of technology in the classroom does not give you an excuse to be physically present in the room but intellectually absent. If you are not using your technology as a learning tool relevant to this classroom, put it away. Technology can be a distraction to you, me and your classmates. You are here to substantively add to a community of learning. Texting under the table, using headphones to listen to music, messages or videos, giggling at facebook status updates, chatting, etc. during lecture, discussion, workshops, or any other in-class activity is rude! If I suspect that you are not using your laptop, smartphone, or whatever as a learning tool, I will call you out in class. Each time I have to call you out for using technology inappropriately in class, your participation grade will drop by a whole letter grade. If I have to call you out a second time you will be asked to leave the class. If I call you out a third time your technology privileges will be revoked entirely, which will make it very difficult for you to complete the course well.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student with a learning disability that needs special accommodation during exams or class periods should provide documentation from Services for Students with Disabilities confidentially to the instructor. The instructor will accommodate that student's needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of the course content and processes. It is the student's responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. Plagiarism in your work will result in a minimum of a failing grade for that assignment. The case may carry further sanctions from the School of Communication or the University, the most serious being permanent expulsion. Avoid turning in work that could be interpreted as plagiarism or academically dishonest (e.g., failing to properly credit a source or using someone else's ideas without clarifying that they are not yours).

This is an academic community; being uninformed or naïve is not an acceptable excuse for not properly referencing your sources.

It is dishonest to:

turn in the same work for two classes without speaking to your profs first;

turn in a paper you have not written yourself; or copy from another student or use a "cheat sheet" during an exam, unless otherwise allowed by the course professor.

LATE WORK/ LOST WORK

Late work will not be accepted. Extensions will not be granted. Incompletes will not be assigned. Make-up work will not be assigned unless pre-arranged, or due to an authorized documented absence. If you anticipate you will miss an assignment, please discuss it with the professor early in the semester to arrange an alternative. You must give at least one week notice to arrange alternative exam/quiz locations and times. Save early, save often, and archive your emails. If an assignment is lost or you discover a discrepancy later in the semester, email documentation will be required (e.g., if you are sure you handed in an assignment that I do not have a grade listed for, be prepared to show me your dated original files or dated emailed work). Always double-check your emails when you send in assignments - all files should be PDFs; all links should be functioning. It is your responsibility to make sure I get your work - it is not my responsibility to tell you your file was corrupted, or your email bounced, or to remind you to hand in work.

GRADING

The grade given to average work on all assignments is a C. So, if you just complete the bare minimum for each assignment, expect to earn a C for your work. Grades of B or A indicate impressive achievement above the average. Grades of A in particular indicate especially exceptional work. Grades below C indicate inadequacies or errors in any or all of the grading criteria.

The grading scale is as follows:

A: 100-94

A-: 93-90

B+: 89-88

B: 87-83

B-: 82-80

C+ 79-78

C: 77-73

C-: 72-70

D+: 69-68

D: 67-63

D-: 62-60

F: 59-0

Percentage grades are rounded to the nearest whole number, not up. An 89.45 % is a B+, not an A-.

Students will receive comments and grades for each assignment. It is your responsibility to keep track of the grades you earn. I will not send you updates on cumulative grades. I will not send you warnings when you drop below some point value. I will not send you prompts to participate more or to work harder. Again, it is your responsibility to keep track of the grades you earn. The total points for the class and for the assignment are listed in the syllabus so at any point in the semester, you should be able to calculate an approximation of your grade easily. Students may meet with me during office hours throughout the semester to discuss their grades and comments.

If you would like a grade on an assignment reevaluated you must make an appointment to visit me during office hours. Bring the assignment, my comments, and a written explanation of how your work met the requirements of the assignment, and showed impressive achievement above the average. You have two weeks from the day I return the assignment to dispute my assessment of that work. After two weeks, I will assume you are satisfied with my assessment, and I will not reconsider the assessment for any reason. If you'd like to discuss a grade to clarify comments or get advice on improving in the next assignment, make an appointment for office hours and bring specific questions.

MANAGING LIFE CRISES AND FINDING SUPPORT

Should you encounter an unexpected crisis during the semester (e.g., securing food or housing, addressing mental health concerns, managing a financial crisis, and/or dealing with a family emergency, etc.), I strongly encourage you to contact the Office of the Dean of Students by submitting a CARE referral (LUC.edu/csaa) for yourself or a peer in need of support. If you are uncomfortable doing so on your own, please know that I can submit a referral on your behalf – just email me or schedule a meeting with me during office hours. To learn more about the Office of the Dean of Students, please find their websites here: LUC.edu/dos or LUC.edu/csaa.

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

A basic mission of a university is to search for and to communicate truth as it is honestly perceived. A genuine learning community cannot exist unless this demanding standard is a fundamental tenet of the intellectual life of the community. Students of Loyola University Chicago are expected to know, to respect, and to practice this standard of personal honesty.

Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including, but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student's work, and submitting false documents. These examples of academic dishonesty apply to both individual and group assignments.

Academic cheating is a serious act that violates academic integrity. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, such acts as:

- Obtaining, distributing, or communicating examination materials prior to the scheduled examination without the consent of the teacher;
- Providing information to another student during an examination;
- Obtaining information from another student or any other person during an examination;
- Using any material or equipment during an examination without consent of the instructor, or in a manner which is not authorized by the instructor;
- Attempting to change answers after the examination has been submitted;
- Taking an examination by proxy. Taking or attempting to take an exam for someone else is a violation by both the student enrolled in the course and the proxy.
- Unauthorized collaboration, or the use in whole or part of another student's work, on homework, lab reports, programming assignments, and any other course work which is completed outside of the classroom;
- Falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines; or
- Any other action that, by omission or commission, compromises the integrity of the academic evaluation process.

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas, language, work, or intellectual property of another, either by intent or by negligence, without sufficient public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is not one's own. It is true that every thought probably has been influenced to some degree by the thoughts and actions of others. Such influences can be thought of as affecting the ways we see things and express all thoughts. Plagiarism, however, involves the taking and use of specific words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement of the sources, and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Submitting as one's own material copied from a published source, such as Internet, print, CD-ROM, audio, video, etc.;
- Submitting as one's own another person's unpublished work or examination material;
- Allowing another or paying another to write or research a paper for one's own benefit; or
- Purchasing, acquiring, and using for course credit a pre-written paper.
- Submitting the same work for credit in two or more classes, even if the classes are taken in different semesters. If a student plans to submit work with similar or overlapping content for credit in two or more classes, the student should consult with all instructors prior to submission of the work to make certain that such submission will not violate this standard.

The above list is in no way intended to be exhaustive. Students should be guided by the principle that it is of utmost importance to give proper recognition to all sources. To do so is both an act of personal, professional courtesy and of intellectual honesty. Any failure to do so, whether by intent or by neglect, whether by omission or commission, is an act of plagiarism. A more detailed description of this issue can be found at https://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml .

Plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will result minimally in the instructor's assigning the grade of "F" for the assignment or examination. The instructor may impose a more severe sanction, including a grade of "F" in the course. All instances of academic dishonesty must be reported by the instructor to the Associate and Assistant Deans of the School of Communication. Instructors must

provide the appropriate information and documentation when they suspect an instance of academic misconduct has occurred. The instructor must also notify the student of their findings and sanction.

The Associate and Assistant Deans of the School of Communication may constitute a hearing board to consider the imposition of sanctions in addition to those imposed by the instructor, including a recommendation of expulsion, depending on the seriousness of the misconduct. In the case of multiple instances of academic dishonesty, the Dean's office may convene a separate hearing board to review these instances. The student has the right to appeal the decision of the hearing board to the Dean of SOC. If the student is not a member of the SOC, the dean of the college in which the student is enrolled shall be part of the process. Students have the right to appeal the decision of any hearing board and the deans of the two schools will review the appeal together. Their decision is final in all cases except expulsion. The sanction of expulsion for academic dishonesty may be imposed only by the Provost upon recommendation of the dean or deans.

Students have a right to appeal any finding of academic dishonesty against them. The procedure for such an appeal can be found at:

http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicgrievance.shtml .

The School of Communication maintains a permanent record of all instances of academic dishonesty. The information in that record is confidential. However, students may be asked to sign a waiver which releases that student's record of dishonesty as a part of the student's application to a graduate or professional school, to a potential employer, to a bar association, or to similar organizations.