

EC ENGR 88S: THE INTERNET AND FREE SPEECH



LOCATION + TIMES

To be held in-person in **Boelter 5422** every **Monday**
from **4-5pm**
and on Zoom as necessary



A WARM WELCOME

Hello and welcome to EC ENGR 88S! My name is Elsa, and I am a fourth-year bioengineering student, acrobat, sex educator, and now: USIE seminar leader! I can't emphasize enough how I **excited** I am for this upcoming quarter. The last two years of pandemic, activism, and turbulent political climate have been the most disruptive time in recent human history, so I congratulate you on surviving.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This seminar takes a detailed look at how the internet has changed political discussions surrounding free speech--from censorship to content moderation--as well as examines many proposed solutions. Taught from an engineering and technology background, this class will look at both the *how* and the *why* of these issues, and will equip you with a new understanding of engineering and public policy. **Note: No background in the subject matter is required! It is my goal that everyone who leaves this class feels more knowledgeable and confident in their own civic engagement surrounding free speech, privacy, and Big Tech.**

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Some topics in this course can be highly political in nature and difficult to discuss without bias. As an instructor I will distinguish factual information from my opinion and cite my sources consistently. This course is discussion-based, so **grant your peers the ability to have opinions different to your own and be courteous.**

I am firmly committed to creating an anti-discriminatory environment where everyone feels safe and welcome. **Hate speech, harassment, or bullying of any kind will not be tolerated.**

ENG88S: THE INTERNET AND FREE SPEECH

COURSE TOPICS

The first four weeks of the quarter will discuss how the internet has become "the modern public square", define free speech and examine it worldwide, examine both current and historical technologies created for speech surveillance, and will take a hard look at censorship, from what it is to how it is enacted.

The second half of the quarter will tackle content moderation, ask difficult questions like "Who decides what goes on the internet?" and alternatives to current content moderation policies that can leave a lot of underrepresented groups shut out of many public online spaces.

We will use many topical examples, like Donald Trump's ban from social media and the precedent it sets, COVID-related misinformation, BLM protests and the need for online organization, and current online threats to democracy.

We will also analyze how massive content moderation algorithms disproportionately impact minorities, because all too often these groups are not included in conversations about tech. My aim is not to shy away from touchy subjects, but to engage with them earnestly in hopes of developing realistic solutions to issues that impact everyone.

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

During the last two weeks of the quarter, you will be expected to host one 10-15-minute presentation and discussion on a potential solution to an issue discussed in class. Details will be discussed Week 8.



GRADING

This course will be graded on a P/NP basis. Receiving a 75% or higher will result in a P.

The grade breakdown is as follows:

- 40% Meaningful In-Class Participation**
- 20% Regular Slack Contribution**
- 40% Final Presentation**

SLACK

As UCLA transitions away from CCLE, all of our course communications will take place on **Slack**. It is my hope we can foster a familial environment where we can discuss course content casually as well as engage interpersonally more easily than a CCLE forum. Professional behavior online is required.

Join the Slack [here](#).

By joining, you will be automatically added to all channels.

#announcements is reserved for important course-related updates, all things logistics, and emergencies. I'd appreciate it if you react (with any emoji) when you have seen my messages so I can know who has read them.

#readings contains all of your weekly readings and articles. I will post the next week's class readings within one hour of class ending so you have the entirety of the week to read them.

#discussion will contain weekly prompts to be answered before class as well as a general discussion hub for our current topics. You will be expected to make one Slack contribution per week in this channel.

And possibly most importantly, **#memes**. Enough said.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this class, students should be able to:

- **Understand and evaluate** key language of free speech public policy
- **Analyze** how specific technologies have contributed to or detracted from civil rights
- **Propose** concrete solutions to major online free speech issues

ATTENDANCE POLICY

As we are discussion-based, **attendance is mandatory**. One unexcused, no-questions-asked absence will be permitted for the quarter.

Of course, extenuating circumstances happen and will be excused. Please do not come to class if you are feeling ill (and this includes mentally!), and let me know as soon as possible you can't make it.

COVID-19 POLICIES

Mask wearing will be enforced unless *actively* drinking or eating. Masks should be worn over the mouth *and* nose. **Improper masking will result in lost participation for the day.**

Additionally, completion of the Daily Symptom Monitoring Survey is required for attendance to class. Please answer the survey *honestly*. If you are not cleared to come to campus and attend class despite it, you will receive an NP and be reported to the Dean of Students.

RESOURCES

An enormous list of campus resources for UCLA students can be found [here](#).

Students needing accommodations based on a disability may contact the [Center for Accessible Education \(CAE\)](#), and I highly recommend you make an appointment if you suspect you qualify (please note: mental illness is under the disability umbrella). When possible, please contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the quarter to ensure timely processing with accommodations.

The [UCLA Community Programs Office \(CPO\)](#) is another wonderful resource on campus that addresses financial needs, food insecurity, computing resources, and is a great hub for cultural resources as well.

[Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) are an on-campus mental health resource. The office phone number is (310) 825-0768, with after-hours crisis counseling available. Please get in touch with me if you'd like help understanding mental health resources available to you at UCLA. I'd be happy to help you the best I can.

Title IX prohibits gender discrimination, including sexual harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. If you have experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence, you can receive confidential support and advocacy from [UCLA CARE](#), in addition to the Title IX policy listed on the course website.

