

Course info and policies: CS 100, Fall 2023

3a (MW 11:10am-12:20pm CT, F noon-1:00pm CT), Olin 304

Course personnel:

Professor: Amy Csizmar Dalal (email: adalal, office: Olin 301B)

Writing Assistant (WA): Grace Werner (email: wernerg)

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Overview

We live in a technology-saturated world. We carry supercomputers in our pockets and bags, use our phones to monitor our sleep and health habits, connect and communicate with people across the globe, and rely on mysterious algorithms for everything from figuring out what movie to watch next to getting a loan or a job. But how often do we stop and question the role that technology plays, and that we allow it to play, in our lives? We tend to view technology as neutral -- but is it? What are the consequences of passively allowing technology into our lives? Who benefits, and who is harmed?

The space exploring the ethical aspects of technology is huge, much larger than we can cover in a single term. The purpose of this course is to give you a taste of the conversations surrounding technological progress and morality. We'll explore the ethics of technology through the lens of case studies (Ripped From The Headlines!) in several different broad areas. You'll likely leave this class with more questions than answers, but my hope is that this class prepares you to grapple with the difficult questions technology increasingly poses in our everyday lives, in our quest to form a more just and fair world.

Guiding questions

We'll focus on several key questions over the course of the term:

1. What does it mean for technology to be "ethical"? (Can technology be ethical?)
2. Who defines / decides what is ethical and not ethical? What lenses and frameworks do / should we use?
3. Whose voices "count" in this discussion? Whose voices are left out?
4. How does ethics intersect with race, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, religion, ethnicity, geography, and culture?

Learning objectives

The TL;DR version: you'll write a lot; you'll learn how to productively ask and answer questions as a computer science scholar does; you'll put your computer science knowledge in context with everything else you're learning; and you'll never look at technology in quite the same way again.

By the end of this course, you can expect to be able to:

1. Weigh the pros and cons of technology usage, applications, and development using appropriate tools, lenses, frameworks, and sources.
2. Construct arguments, verbally and in writing, about the ethical issues surrounding computer technology.
3. Be a more thoughtful, informed consumer, user, developer, designer, etc. of technology.

Because this is an [Argument and Inquiry seminar](#), which by definition is also a [writing-rich course](#), this course has the following additional learning objectives:

1. Understand the meaning and value of a liberal arts education.
2. Understand how scholars in Computer Science ask questions as well as find, use, and evaluate information effectively and ethically in constructing arguments.
3. Develop fundamental writing skills so you can use your writing to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for a variety of purposes

Tools, texts, and readings

(Links to the Carleton bookstore, but feel free to borrow / buy these from anywhere.)

- [Weapons of Math Destruction, by Cathy O'Neil](#)
- [Race After Technology, by Ruha Benjamin](#)
- Plus news stories, long-form journalism, PDFs of book chapters, videos, and podcasts. (These will be posted as links or PDFs on Moodle as part of the reading assignment for the day.)

If you are interested in probing further on any of the topics we cover this term, I will provide a list of additional resources (books, articles, podcasts) for each topic. **These are not required!** In many cases, these are sources that have informed my own thinking about ethical issues in technology and that I recommend for others interested in the topic.

I recognize the potential financial burden of additional course fees, supply requirements, and travel costs. If you are in need of assistance to cover course expenses, please speak with me by Friday of Week 1.

Other tools we'll use this term:

Moodle: all course related materials, assignments, projects, readings, and resources will be posted here. Unless otherwise specified, you will also turn in all assignments on Moodle.

Slack: all course announcements and changes to assignments, projects, and readings will be posted here. We'll also use Slack for some pre-class discussions about the readings, and as a way to ask and answer questions about assignments and such. I use Slack instead of email. You can access Slack in your browser, download the app or desktop version, and also set up Slack to notify you of new posts (all, or to certain channels) via email.

Class structure

This class meets 3a (MW 11:10am-12:20pm, F noon-1:00pm) in Olin 304. Olin 304 is a combination computer lab / seminar room. We will occasionally use the lab computers. You are welcome to bring your laptops / devices to class, as we will spend some time each class working on and with computers.

At any time, you can see where we are in the course, what topics we'll cover, and what's due summarized in [this grid](#).

Readings

Each day consists of one or more targeted readings.

- I'll include some reading questions, to help you hone in on the key points in the reading (and to quiz yourself, which is an excellent way to learn!). These are not graded; they are solely to help you.
- I encourage you to take notes as you read! One easy way to do this is to jot down answers to the reading questions, along with anything that strikes you as interesting or important or wrong. Bring these notes to class because they will be helpful during our class discussions (to help you remember key things from the readings).
- Each reading, unless otherwise specified, will also have an attached reading activity to check your comprehension of the reading. Most of the time, this means I'll ask you to post a question or observation about the readings on Slack, our online discussion forum, before class. You will receive a grade if you turn this in on time.
- **I expect you to complete these readings and assignments before class.** This will help you prepare for our discussions. Completing the Slack posts also helps me see what points resonated the most with the class and where the main points of confusion are, which helps me prepare better for class.

In class

Most of the time, we'll spend our class meetings like this:

- We'll start with a warm-up activity about the readings.
- I'll give a short lecture covering the important and confusing points from the readings.
- We'll spend the remainder of class time working on case studies, having small-group and whole-class discussions, and doing other activities related to the readings.

Each group will create some sort of shareable artifact resulting from the activity -- Google Doc / set of notes, picture of whiteboard diagram, a piece of group writing, etc. These will serve as our class notes, so if you are absent for whatever reason you can catch up. I'll post these notes on the course Moodle page and/or on Slack after class each day.

Office hours

Q: Should I go to office hours?

A: Yes, and you should make it a regular habit!

Office hours are times I've set aside for **you** each week! I have drop-in hours 3 days a week (Monday, Tuesday, Friday) and schedulable hours once a week (Wednesday). You can also schedule a time during my drop-in days. The sign-up slots are at <https://calendly.com/adalal-carleton/office-hours-meeting-slot>. My office is **Olin 301B**, which is near our classroom.

Why should you come to office hours?

- Something from class or the readings interested or confused you and you want to learn more or talk about it further.
- You read or saw or heard something and it made you think about ethics in technology and you want to share it with me.
- You have questions about why Carleton is the way Carleton is, or how to Carleton.
- You want to learn more about Computer Science at Carleton.
- You have a question about a writing assignment or assignment revisions.
- You want to talk over ideas for a writing assignment or writing revisions.
- You have no idea where to begin with a writing assignment or writing revisions.
- You are stuck on a writing assignment or revisions and it's Week 6 and you're tired and homesick and have 3 exams tomorrow and AAAAAARRRRRRRRGH! help!
- You just want to shoot the breeze with a friendly face for a few minutes.
- You were in the building and just wanted to say hi.
- You need a sugary snack or a cup of tea. (I always have candy and tea in my office.)

TL;DR: There are many great reasons to come to office hours and only some of them have to do with the course material. I expect and hope that you will take full advantage of my office hours this term!

Writing assistance

My expectation is that you will visit the Writing Assistant and/or The Writing Center **at least twice** during the term.

- **Course-Specific Writing Assistants:** This course is supported by a Writing Assistant, Grace Werner (email: wernerg), whose job is to work with you on fulfilling the writing expectations for this course. They are aware of our assignments and deadlines and will use Slack to communicate with you about available appointment times. Grace is a fabulous resource and I encourage you to get to know her!
- **The Writing Center** provides a space staffed with peer writing consultants who can work with you during any stage of the writing process (brainstorming to final proofreading). Hours and more information can be found on the [writing center website](#). You can reserve specific times for conferences by using their [online appointment system](#).
- **The Term-Long Program for Multilingual Writers:** If English is not your primary or home language and you believe you might benefit from working regularly with a writing consultant this term, email Melanie Cashin, [Multilingual Writing Coordinator](#), at mcashin@carleton.edu. She can arrange once- or twice-a-week meetings between you and a specific writing consultant throughout the term.

Assessment

Your performance in this course depends on successful completion of assignments in three categories:

1. **Formal writing** You'll write 3 essays over the course of the term on various topics and for various audiences. These will be due Tuesday of Week 4, Tuesday of Week 7, and the last day of finals. These essays will be evaluated according to the specifications grading scale below. **You may revise either (or both) of the first two essays.** Learning is not a linear process, and learning involves making mistakes and learning from them. You may revise and resubmit an essay within a week after its grades have been released.
2. **Informal writing** These will be shorter writing exercises asking you to reflect on some aspect of the course or your learning process, or as a response to something related to the course (such as the A&I Convocation). Most of these will be due on Fridays, but some will be due on Tuesdays. These will be evaluated on completeness and the degree to which the writing addresses the prompt, on a three point scale: Finished, Pending, Incomplete.
3. **Daily preparation activities** This category includes things like reading posts on Slack and other pre-class exercises. I evaluate these for completion and not correctness (i.e. these are formative assessments, not summative!).

I'll be using a version of *specifications grading* this term. Each formal writing that you hand in will be evaluated against a checklist or rubric related to one or more of the course learning objectives. I will distribute the rubrics and checklists I'll use to grade each assignment so that you know exactly what constitutes each of these levels. I will rank each learning objective, and the overall submission, according to a four-point scale:

- **Not assessable:** The assignment was not turned in or does not engage with the prompt in the intended manner.
- **Developing:** The assignment demonstrates progress towards the learning objective(s), but needs further work and engagement to reach proficiency.
- **Proficient:** The assignment demonstrates achievement of the learning objective(s)
- **Exemplary:** The assignment demonstrates achievement of the learning objective(s) at a higher level: more nuance, sophistication, etc.

The table below summarizes what's assessed and how in this course.

Category	Description	Assessed by	Scale	Revisable?	Grace period?
Preparation	Short reading + reading post on Slack or warm-up activity	Completion, not correctness	Completed / not completed	No	No
Informal writing	Short writing exercises reflecting on your	Completion and addressing the prompt	Finished / Pending / Incomplete	Yes, once within a week of being returned	Yes, 48 hours

	progress, learning, and writing process				
Formal writing	Longer-form essays / pieces engaging deeply with course themes	Combination of process and product; via rubric	Exemplary / Proficient / Developing / Not assessable	Yes, once, within a week of being returned	Yes, 48 hours

How this translates to course grades

To earn	Complete the following		
	Formal writing	Informal writing	Preparation
C	2 of 3 at Proficient, 1 at Developing	70% at Finished	50% completed (spread throughout the term)
B	3 of 3 at Proficient	90% at Finished	70% completed (spread throughout the term)
A	1 at Proficient, 2 at Exemplary	100% at Finished	80% completed (spread throughout the term)

Revision

- Revisions are due a week after you receive a grade for an assignment.
- You can revise formal or informal writing assignments.
- Your revised grade will completely replace your original grade **as long as it's higher**. If for whatever reason your revision results in a lower grade, I'll keep the original grade.
- Along with your revision, you'll submit a Google form asking you some questions about what you chose to revise, how you responded to feedback, how the revisions improve the essay, etc.
- **Things that cannot be revised: the final reflection and the final project.** These are due at the end of the term and there is no time for revision.

Late assignments policy

For any essay in this course (formal or informal), I will extend a 48-hour grace period with no late penalty.

The exception is the final informal and formal essays, which must be handed in on time. Daily assignments should be handed in by the deadline; I do not accept these late. These assignments are frequent enough that if you miss a few over the course of the term, your grade should be fine, but try not to make it a habit. Formal essays turned in after the 48 hour grace period will not receive higher than Proficient and I probably won't be able to provide extensive feedback.

All that said: If you're staring down a deadline that you know you can't meet, or if you've fallen behind, **get in touch with me immediately and we'll work something out.** While I need to put boundaries in place for my own health and wellness, and for fairness to everyone in the class, I also want to make sure you are progressing in your learning.

Doing honest work

A big part of this class involves improving your effectiveness as writers. In the informal essays, you'll reflect on your learning and play around with ideas and writing techniques in a low-stakes way -- essentially, getting into the habit of writing frequently as writing practice. In the formal essays, you'll practice how to construct and provide evidence in support of an argument, how to analyze specific technologies, how to write in an academic voice, and how to write essays that flow well. Writing is a skill and we'll spend a lot of time working on that skill in this class!

Tools like ChatGPT, Bard, etc. are all over the news, and you may have even used them yourself before this class. These tools can absolutely help you develop better writing skills and can be useful for things like brainstorming topics, generating outlines, even writing text in a particular voice. In this class, we'll both use these tools **and** evaluate the ethics of their uses.

We will use these tools in a **limited** context within this class. In general, using ChatGPT to generate ideas or outlines is perfectly fine and encouraged. I expect these will be **starting points** that you will take and expand upon. If you are struggling with a particular paragraph or idea, by all means feed it into ChatGPT and see what it generates -- and then rewrite this in your own voice. **In each of these cases, I expect you to cite that you used ChatGPT and let me know specifically how you used it and what you did with its results.**

Generating an entire essay, or large portions of an essay, with these tools is not ok. You won't be able to practice your writing skills in the ways I want you to in this class if you rely on ChatGPT and other tools too heavily. I want you to struggle (productively!) with your writing so that you develop your own voice and techniques.

The use and capabilities of AI tools is evolving, so expect this to be a continuing conversation throughout the class. **I encourage you to ask questions about anything you're unsure about related to AI tools, at any time, even and especially during class and office hours!**

I encourage you to use Grace, your classmates, the Writing Center, and me as resources as you work on your writing. Share ideas, brainstorm together, and discuss how you're approaching a particular prompt. When you sit down to write, though, your words should be your own.

We'll talk a lot in class about how to honestly convey your ideas, and I am always happy to answer questions (especially ones that fall into grey areas!). [Carleton has some resources available](#), which I encourage you to check out. **When in doubt, ask!**

Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be turned over to the dean's office, as per Carleton policy.

Final thoughts

"Stay afraid, but do it anyway. What's important is the action. You don't have to wait to be confident. Just do it and eventually the confidence will follow." — *Carrie Fisher*