

ECS 188 002 WQ 2025

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You should read completely all of the material below.

Basics

- I am **Michael Neff**, <mpneff@ucdavis.edu (<mailto:mpneff@ucdavis.edu>)>.
<https://web.cs.ucdavis.edu/~neff/> (<https://web.cs.ucdavis.edu/~neff/>).
My current office hours are Thursdays 12-1pm.
My office is in **Kemper 3031**.
- Our TA for the term is **Sydney Sullivan** <scsullivan@ucdavis.edu>
She is available to help you one-on-one (online), or in small groups, with your writing. She will be helping with the grading too, especially on your written work.
- Class meets four hours per week.
 - **Tuesday and Thursday, 4:40-6:00pm Grove 1283**
 - **Discussion Thursday 6:10-7pm, TLC 3213 (NOTE: Room change!). Please note that I will be teaching the Discussion section and using it in a variety of ways. Please plan to attend. It is part of required attendance.**
 - **The final exam is Thursday March 20th at 3:30pm in the same classroom**

To emphasize: class is 80 mins on Tuesdays and 130 mins on Thursdays.

- The class [schedule is here \(https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/pages/schedule\)](https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/pages/schedule). I will post most material to Canvas. **Please check the schedule well in advance of every class and make sure you have done the reading or viewing required before the class.**
- There are no prerequisites for this class. You must be willing to read a lot, to write some, and to prepare and give a reasonable presentation. An open mind, a critical disposition, politeness in listening to others, and a genuine interest in the problems of humankind would all serve you well. I target the course toward junior/senior undergraduates in CS/CSE. I recommend taking this class *after* you have completed some upper-division writing classes. If a public-speaking class is required for your major, I recommend you take that first, too.

Goals

The premise of this course is that in order to act ethically as technologists, you must have some understanding of how technology impacts the world, both culturally and environmentally. Much of the material will focus on building that understanding. By the end of the class, I hope you will develop a personal perspective on these issues and determine your position relative to them. That is a lofty goal and requires you to engage deeply with the material, but it will inform your future life as a technologist and citizen. The course material will be broad, open-ended, and unlike anything else the begins with the letters *ECS*. You, not me, will do the vast majority of the talking.

This course pulls heavily on material from UCD Prof. Emeritus Phil Rogaway and McMaster University Prof. Emeritus Bob Hudspeth, among others. Many passages from this syllabus are borrowed from Prof. Rogaway as I believe they provide valuable information, aligned with my course structure. The specific course content and grading criteria vary significantly from the courses taught by these professors, however.

This is the summary Prof. Rogaway used of the class that aligns well with my goals: *The course aims to increase your inclination to think about, and act upon, the ethical implications of your personal and professional choices, and our collective work as technologists. It also aims to have you read a lot, to write a fair amount, and to become more comfortable participating in oral discussions and giving an oral presentation.*

Grading

The grading criteria this term is:

- attendance and participation (15%) (non-linear drop-off for missing classes)
- quizzes (20%)
- four short papers (25%)
- final project:
 - detailed proposal (5%)
 - paper (15%)
 - oral presentation (10%)
- final (10%)

Some brief details on each component:

- Attendance is mandatory (barring illness or extraordinary circumstances); please send an email to explain any absence.
- Quizzes are unannounced, but many classes, possibly most, will begin with one. Quizzes focus on the content of the reading for the current class.

- Short papers are 500 word essays and respond to a prompt based on the reading due that day in class.
- The final paper and oral presentation will be on a topic of your choice, and you will work in **groups of three** on it. The groups of three is a hard requirement as we have limited class time and it is a good learning experience to work in a group.
- The final-exam slot will be used both for student presentations and an exam.

To pass the class, you must

1. Attend almost all classes (maximum of four missed classes);
2. Take the final exam and get a passing grade on it;
3. Complete the final project and get a passing grade on it;
4. Have no unexcused absence during the first two weeks of class; and
5. Have no instance of academic misconduct in this class.

The grades I assign for this class tend to be high relative to other classes I teach: if you do all the readings, understand them, do the assigned work, and come to class, you'll do fine. On the other hand, if you have reading comprehension issues or can't write a decent sentence/paragraph/essay, this class is going to be a problem for you. Were I myself a student I would find this class difficult because I read slowly and there is much reading to do. (I took such classes as an undergraduate and they took me more time.)

Dropping the Class

We are drastically over-enrolled. If this is not the class for you, please drop before the 10th day of instruction (Jan. 17th) so that others may get into the class.

Reading

Most classes require a reading to be completed in advance of the class. The reading will form the basis of the discussion in class, so you must have read it to participate. Readings will also be the subject of quizzes and short papers. I will link all readings from the schedule.

You may have to purchase some inexpensive books and films as the course progresses. I have seen that people try to avoid these purchases, even when they are, like \$3.99. This is silly. There is no reason you should let such a small sum determine what you are reading or watching, or how.

Each day, **you must bring that day's reading(s) to class**. You can bring it either as a hardcopy or

on an e-reader. You may not use a conventional laptop or smart phone during class. You will want to mark up readings as you read them. If you do not have convenient access to a printer, or if you think the university is charging you too much to make printouts, then I suggest that you buy a printer and a ream of paper. Alternatively, you may want to buy an e-reader.

Do your reading in a distraction free location. Reading requires focused thought. Do not try to multitask while reading. There is ample evidence that multitasking does not work.

When you read, make sure you know the author's name and at least a little bit about who they are. Know roughly when the piece was written. Make sure you genuinely understand the ideas the author is saying, whether you agree or not.

And the same for films. If we watch a film together, or I ask you to do this on your own, give it just as much attention as you would a close reading. Don't multitask.

Writing

Write, rewrite, then rewrite some more. Read the prompt carefully and make your writing responsive to it. Attend to everything: depth of ideas, clarity, coherence, organization, diction, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and typesetting. Make it pretty—at every level. Do not turn in a first draft. While you won't write *that* much for this class, I expect you to write in a manner consistent with being an upper-division student at a quality university.

As the amount of writing experience students in the class have may vary widely, I have written a guide to writing a [five paragraph essay \(https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/files/26202530?wrap=1\)](https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/files/26202530?wrap=1) ↓ (https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/files/26202530/download?download_frd=1) . It is formulaic, but works well. I suggest you follow it for the short papers.

A final thought: i.e. is short for “that is” and “e.g.” for “for example”. Both are Latin. Do not mix them up; their meaning is quite different. If in doubt, write them out.

Attendance – Arrival – Classroom Conduct

For a discussion-based class like ours, attendance—indeed active attendance—is key. Please consider attendance to be mandatory, missing a class only when there is an excellent reason for this.

That said, if you really are sick, please stay away. If you suspect that you might be getting sick, wear an N95 mask, and wear it properly.

For an absence or two due to an illness, you do not need to provide any documentation beyond an email saying that you were sick. If you must miss a class for personal reasons, please let me know in

advance what is going on. Sometimes I excuse those and do not count it as an absence.

Arriving late is disruptive; please arrive on-time. For purposes of marking attendance, you are counted as half-present for the day if you arrive even a little late. I often give quick quizzes at the very start of class. If you arrive late, you will still need to turn in the quiz with everyone else. If you arrive very late, or if you leave early and don't tell me about it (before or in an email just after), I'll record it as absent.

Before walking into our class, mobile phones must be turned off or silenced, not left to vibrate. The prohibition against using phones in the classroom starts the moment you walk into the door, not when class starts. If some emergency arises such that you need to consult your phone, quietly excuse yourself from the room and return when you are done.


Similarly, you may not use a conventional laptop in class. E-readers are fine. Tablets and laptops folded flat like a tablet are a boundary case; if you can configure it so that all you see is the reading we are discussing, that should be okay.

Interaction

Please listen closely when other people speak. Be polite, even when you strongly disagree with something said. Give everyone a chance to talk. Sometimes this means leaving a longer "whitespace" than you are used to. Don't monopolize, but do speak up.

We will be discussing contentious, emotional, and personal topics. Within our class it is *totally fine* to express a political opinion, to say something politically incorrect, to use profanity, to harshly criticize a professor or public figure, to harshly criticize what someone else just said, to reveal a personal fact or story, and so on. Consider our class a safe place for engaging in free speech. To make this work, cut others some slack if they say something that offends you. Also, focus on ideas, not people.

Chatham House Rule

You may not audio record, video, or photograph anything during class. Outside of class, do not reveal who said what to anyone else. This is known as the [Chatham House Rule](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chatham_House_Rule)  (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chatham_House_Rule). We will follow it. It can be summarized as: *participants may use any information or ideas learned in class, but neither the identity of the speaker(s), nor the identity of any other participant, may be revealed.*

Academic Misconduct

In a course in ethics, it would be particularly ironic if people commit acts of academic misconduct. But

it is rampant across UCD, and in the CS Department in particular. Make sure you are familiar with [UCD's rules on academic misconduct \(https://supportjudicialaffairs.sf.ucdavis.edu/code-academic-conduct\)](https://supportjudicialaffairs.sf.ucdavis.edu/code-academic-conduct) and the CS Department's [Academic Misconduct Policy \(https://cs.ucdavis.edu/policies\)](https://cs.ucdavis.edu/policies) (the Misconduct-implies-F policy). I follow this policy strictly.

Academic misconduct includes violations of the various rules I've been talking about. Beyond this: All writing you do must be entirely yours. You may not use ChatGPT, or any similar system, for any course-related purpose. You may ask a friend or a writing instructor to proofread your work and make suggestions, but it shouldn't go beyond that—and even that should be acknowledged. Your presentation must likewise be entirely your own work (you may not rework some related talk that you find). Acknowledge all ideas and quotations; use proper referencing. Obviously you may not purchase your term paper or presentation. All non-assigned materials you make significant use of must be referenced. For your final project, if you have done a related project before, or if you will use your project for some overlapping class, you need to discuss that possibility with me. If I pass around a sign-in sheet, it's academic misconduct to sign-in for someone else, or to ask someone to do this for you. It is academic misconduct to claim that you missed a class because of an illness if you weren't sick. It is academic misconduct to get your attendance recorded and then slip out of class (e.g., during the showing of a film). End of obligatory and obvious nonsense.

Emotional Support

What we discuss in this class can be depressing. I would like you to look both inward and outward, and you might not like what you see. I would like you to care about where we are headed, which is harder than non caring. Some mental-health resources, if you need them, include the [Student Health and Counseling Services \(https://shcs.ucdavis.edu/\)](https://shcs.ucdavis.edu/) and the [Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs \(https://ossja.ucdavis.edu/case-management-student-support\)](https://ossja.ucdavis.edu/case-management-student-support). The U.S. has established a Suicide and Crisis Lifeline that can be reached by calling 988. I will give out my own phone number in class.

Final Thoughts

If everyone comes to class having done the reading (or watched the video or whatever), prepared and eager to discuss it, the class works well. As with any seminar-format class, you and I share the responsibility for making the class work. I can't do it on my own. Please take your responsibility as seriously as I do.

The class is a rare opportunity: where else are you invited to stop, step back, and explore the (often grave) ethical issues that we face as human beings and as co-creators of all this technological

wizardry.

Course Summary:

Date	Details	Due
Thu Jan 9, 2025	 Reading 1: Franklin Chapter One (https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1378913)	due by 4:30pm
Thu Jan 16, 2025	 Reading 2: Ellul (https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1378919)	due by 4:40pm
Thu Jan 23, 2025	 Barbour Reading (https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1386289)	due by 4:40pm
Tue Jan 28, 2025	 Pacey reading (https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1386196)	due by 4:40pm
Thu Feb 6, 2025	 Smil Reading (Environment) (https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1390914)	due by 4:40pm
Thu Feb 13, 2025	 Communication Technology (Harari) (https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1388524)	due by 4:40pm
Fri Feb 14, 2025	 Group Proposal (https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1378918)	due by 11:59pm
Thu Mar 13, 2025	 Group Paper (https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1378917)	due by 11:59pm
	 AI (https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1388526)	
	 Attendance and Participation (https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1378904)	

**Group Presentation**

(<https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1378916>)

**Quiz Jan 14**

(<https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1378905>)

**Quiz Jan 16**

(<https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1378902>)

**Quiz Jan 21**

(<https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1378906>)

**Quiz Jan 9th**

(<https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1378903>)

**Surveillance**

(<https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/968118/assignments/1388525>)
