**Contemporary Issues in Computer Science and Engineering**

**CSE 3000 (Fall 2023)**

Eric D Berg

[eric.berg@uconn.edu](mailto:eric.berg@uconn.edu)

Office Hours In person or online: Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays by Appointment

Office Location: Humanities Institute (4th Floor of Babbage Library)

**Course Description:**

There are two philosophically loaded questions that ethics presents us:

* What are citizens of a community **owed by** that community?
* What do citizens of a community **owe to** each other?

This course will explore how these questions relate specifically to the development of technology, progress, and innovation with special consideration given to the role of “expert citizens” such as business leaders and engineers when it comes to the institutions they work with and the technology they produce.

Much of your grade will come from participation in the in-class discussions, your four reflections (600-800 words), and forum posts that engage with the material we read and discussed that week. The final will be a project – either solo or group – that will combine the expertise you have in your given field with the ethical considerations we will be exploring in the class (I will provide more detail on what this means throughout the course).

**All Readings** **will be provided on HuskyCT.**

**Learning Outcomes:**

At the end of this course you will be able to:

* Identify ethical arguments in a wide variety of settings
* Apply ethical theory to current events (politics, news stories, etc.)
* Determine the ethical implications of technology

**Course Calendar:**

Philosophy and ethics are topics that require discussion and debate to demonstrate and increase understanding of the core ideas. This class will have readings, and the discussion will be based on the readings for that day. However, philosophy is built up over time, meaning the earlier readings will be just as important to understanding later readings as the later readings themselves. **Doing all the readings and/or watching the videos throughout this course is very important.**

Aug 28 - Intro

* Overview of syllabus and course
* Introduction to philosophy, ethics, and technology

Sept 4

Labor Day (No classes)

Sept 11 – Thinking like a Hacker

* Selections from *Hacker Culture* by Douglas Thomas
* “The Mind Has No Firewall” by Timothy L. Thomas

(Optional) Selections from *Neuromancer* by William Gibson, Selections from *Snow Crash* by Neal Stevenson

Sept 18 – The Archive and Citation

* Selection from *Algorithms of Oppression* by Safiya Noble

Sept 25 – Experts and What They Build

* *Threshold* by Ieva Jusionyte (Ch 1, “Tactical Infrastructure”). TEDTalk by Liz Ogbu <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0MnGZ1gB4k>

Oct 2 – Privacy, Government, and Surveillance (One)

* Selection from The Rise of Big Data Policing by Andrew Ferguson

(Optional) Selections from *Carceral Capitalism* by Jackie Wang

Oct 9 – Privacy, Government, and Surveillance (Two)

* Selection from *The Facebook Files*
* Selection from *Technically Wrong* by Sara Wachter-Boettcher

(Optional) Watch *The Social Dilemma*

Oct 16 – Social and Behavioral Hacking (One)

* Selection from *Propaganda* by Edward Bernays
* Selection from *Games: Agency as Art* by C. Thi Nguyen

(Optional) *Principia Discordia*

Oct 23 – Social and Behavioral Hacking (Two)

* Section from A Culture of Conspiracy by Michael Barkun
* Article by Robert Evans “From Memes to Infowars: How 75 Fascist Activists Were “Red-Pilled” (<https://www.bellingcat.com/news/americas/2018/10/11/memes-infowars-75-fascist-activists-red-pilled/)>

Oct 30 – Technological Economy (Automation)

* Selection from the MIT Task Force Report on Automation. “Technology and Innovation”

Nov 6 – Technological Economy (Attention)

* Selection from *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* by Shoshana Zuboff, “The Reality Business”

Nov 13 – Censorship, Regulation, and Intervention

* “Some Information is Too Dangerous to Be on the Internet” by Vincent Muller
* Selections from *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution* by Steven Levy

Nov 20

Fall break (No Classes)

Nov 27 – Presentation of Projects

Dec 4 – Presentation of Projects and Wrap-Up

***Class Policy & Grading:***

* Participation/Discussion Posts – 20%
* 4x Reflections – 60% (15% each)
* Final Project – 20%

***Letter grade cut-offs:***

A 93% C 73% These are cut-off points.

A– 90% C– 70% decimals will not be rounded up.

B+ 87% D+ 67%

B 83% D 63%

B– 80% D– 60%

C+ 77% F below 60%

**Attendance policy:**

Philosophy is a complicated subject that builds on a base of knowledge, and learning occurs mainly through discussion and debate. If during this program there is an issue that causes a missed class, please email me so we can plan together.

**Academic Conduct:**

From the student handbook:

Students must adhere to the highest ethical standards as it relates to their academic coursework (i.e. complete their own assignments, quizzes, exams and any other academic work, etc.). Academic misconduct may result in an "F" for the course, suspension, or expulsion from the program. Students should familiarize themselves with the definition of academic misconduct as it appears in the University of Connecticut Student Code of Conduct booklet:

“Academic misconduct is dishonest or unethical academic behavior that includes, but is not limited to, misrepresenting mastery in an academic area (e.g., cheating), failing to properly credit information, research, or ideas to their rightful originators or representing such information, research, or ideas as your own (e.g., plagiarism).”

**Resources:**

College is hard, but you do not have to do it alone. There are many resources for those in need of assistance. Please avail yourself of all the services that will help your mental, emotional, and physical well-being. I am willing to listen to your needs, but please note that ***I am not a confidential source of counseling***. I will ***not*** make public anything you tell me, but I may need to bring in others like consolers, deans, or administrators depending on the sensitivity of the info.

***Copyright:*** My lectures, notes, handouts, and displays are protected by state common law and federal copyright law. Students are authorized to take notes in my class. I will inform you as to whether you are authorized to record my lectures at the beginning of each semester. If you are so authorized to record my lectures, you may not copy this recording or any other material, provide copies of either to anyone else or make commercial use of them without prior permission from me (just ask!).