

INFO 1200 / STS 1201

Information Ethics, Law, and Policy

Fall 2025



Nam June Paik, "Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii" (1995)

TEACHING TEAM

Prof. Daniel Susser

Dept. of Information Science
Office: New Bowers CIS Building #283
Office hours: Mondays 3:00-4:00

Prof. Gili Vidan

Dept. of Information Science
Office: Gates Hall #204
Office hours: Tuesdays 1:15-2:15

Grad TAs

[Ally Barone](#)
[Erin Bracamonte](#)
[Chen Jingruo](#)
[Sofia Dell'Anese](#)
[Alexandra Gonzales](#)
[Haesoo Kim](#)
[Katherine Miller](#)
[Ziyi Wang](#)

Course Manager

[Elisabeth Pan](#)

UG TAs

[Mia Barratt](#)
[Andrew Chen](#)
[Audrey Cho](#)
[Liam Daly](#)
[Shania Dhanaraj](#)

Emmy Kanarowski

[Hannah Kim](#)
[Sebastian Klein](#)
[William Lee](#)
[Isabella Reyes-Famous](#)
[Peyton Smith](#)
[Chelsey Wang](#)

EMAIL & CANVAS

Course Email

info1200@cornell.edu ← This is your primary point of contact for all course-related questions!

Canvas Site

<https://canvas.cornell.edu/courses/68464>

MEETING TIMES

Lectures

Mondays & Wednesdays 1:25-2:15 Statler Auditorium

Sections

Sec 201: Thursdays 10:10-11:00	Hollister 312	Jingruo Chen / Mia Barratt
Sec 202: Thursdays 11:15-12:05	Hollister 312	Katherine Miller / William Lee
Sec 203: Thursdays 12:20-1:10	Hollister 312	Katherine Miller / Peyton Smith
Sec 204: Thursdays 1:25-2:15	Hollister 312	Ziyi Wang / Sebastian Klein
Sec 205: Fridays 9:05-9:55	Hollister 312	Alexandra Gonzalez / Emmy Kanarowski
Sec 206: Fridays 10:10-11:00	Hollister 312	Haesoo Kim / Andrew Chen
Sec 207: Fridays 11:15-12:05	Hollister 312	Haesoo Kim / Hannah Kim
Sec 208: Fridays 11:15-12:05	Hollister 362	Alexandra Gonzalez / Audrey Cho
Sec 209: Fridays 12:20-1:10	Hollister 312	Jingruo Chen / Isabella Reyes-Famous
Sec 210: Fridays 12:20-1:10	Hollister 362	Sofia Rong Dell'Anese / Liam Daly
Sec 211: Fridays 1:25-2:15	Hollister 312	Erin Bracamonte / Chelsey Wang
Sec 212: Thursdays 9:05-9:55	Hollister 312	Ally Barone / Shania Dhanaraj

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course investigates the ethical, legal, and policy foundations of contemporary information technology. Through lectures, readings, discussions, and short assignments, we will address contemporary challenges ranging from questions of inequality and waste in computing to the contests over intellectual property and privacy in a networked world. We will cover key areas of technology law and policy such as computing ethics; intellectual property; telecommunications and network policy; competition, antitrust, and freedom of expression; privacy and security; and AI ethics. We will also address new ethical questions and controversies that law and policy has yet to sort out. Through this course you'll learn about the key frameworks, processes, and institutions that govern the contemporary world of information technology, along with key theories and methods from academic fields that shape and inform them (law, philosophy, economics, political science, communication, sociology, etc.). You will also learn core writing and analytic skills central to success in the worlds of social science, law, policy, and many other settings. But above all you'll learn to engage critically and strategically with the worlds of information and technology around you, deciding what kind of information consumer, user, producer, and citizen you want to be.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of INFO 1200 Information Ethics, Law, and Policy, you will learn to:

- Analyze the social shaping of new computational forms and practices, including the influence of organizations, institutions, law, and culture on technology development and adoption.
- Discuss and assess key ethical principles and foundations that govern individual and collective decision-making around the design and use of emerging information technologies.
- Explain your own policy positions and values, and offer reasoned arguments to support them (including in dialogue with the potentially differing positions of others).
- Apply key legal and regulatory frameworks in core information policy regimes like intellectual property; telecommunications and networks policy; antitrust and competition policy; freedom of speech; privacy and security; and AI ethics.
- Understand and explain the political principles, goals and tensions that inform core information policy regimes, including how these have arisen historically and continue to shape, evolve and adapt to new forms of computational practice.
- Identify and evaluate the key policy positions, actions, and strategies of major public and private sector actors in the information field.
- Distinguish the key processes through which tech policy is developed, such as legislative action, case law, administrative agencies such as FCC, FTC, and DOJ, and tech companies' own policies.
- Summarize, compare, and assess primary policy documents such as administrative reports, corporate policy statements, and Supreme Court judgments.
- Write concise, informed, and effective policy analyses appropriate to work in the ethics, law, and policy fields.

GRADES OVERVIEW

How Grades Work in INFO 1200

Our grading system is designed to provide flexibility by default, offering you multiple ways to demonstrate engagement with and mastery over course material. Final grades are determined by an accumulating points system—instead of starting at 100% and deducting, we start at zero and add points as you complete assignments. You can get points by attending lectures and section meetings, completing written assignments and exams, presenting a narrative analysis, etc. The table below shows all of the points opportunities, and each type of assessment is explained in more detail in the following sections. Below the table we've listed the overall number of points for the semester required to earn each letter grade. As you'll see, there are more opportunities to accrue points than are needed to get an A for the course (unlike other courses, you only need to earn 87% of the total available points to get an A), so no single assessment is make-or-break.

Points System

Lecture reading quiz	2 points per quiz / 54 points possible
Section participation	1 point per meeting / 14 points possible
Section writing assignment	2 points per assignment / 28 points possible
Narrative analysis	10 points possible
Prelim	25 points possible

Final Exam	25 points possible
Total	156 points for the course

Letter Grade Conversion

135-156 = A	115-119 = B-	95-99 = D+
131-134 = A-	111-114 = C+	89-94 = D
126-130 = B+	105-110 = C	< 89 = F
120-125 = B	100-104 = C-	

GRADE COMPONENTS

Lecture Reading Quiz

Lectures are a central component of this course and serve a variety of purposes: we'll use them to introduce basic problems, concepts, and cases, to situate them in historical and philosophical context, to connect disparate issues and ideas, and to lay the groundwork for the skills you will cultivate in discussion sections. To prepare for lectures, you are required to carefully read assigned texts in advance (reading assignments are listed in the Schedule below). Each lecture will include a short reading quiz that you'll complete using PollEverywhere. You get 1 point just for trying and 1 point for answering the quiz question correctly. If you are late to class or leave early and miss the quiz you will not receive credit for it—there are no make-ups for reading quizzes.

Discussion Section Participation

Discussion sections will offer more in-depth engagement with core course materials (often built around individual cases, questions, or key principles), and opportunities to clarify, challenge, and apply ideas introduced in lectures. Each section will be led by a graduate TA with the support of an undergraduate TA. We expect everyone to actively participate in discussion and activities, and you will only receive credit for attending (1 point) if you engage meaningfully in the meeting. If you are more than 5 minutes late to section you will not receive credit for that day. There is no way to make up missed section participation points—you either attend and participate or you don't.

Discussion Section Writing Assignment

Each discussion section meeting will involve an in-class writing assignment, either to be completed individually or in groups. These assignments will ask you to wrestle with concrete ethics, law, and policy problems and to try applying theories and concepts from our readings to real-world cases. Importantly, these exercises will mirror the kinds of questions you'll encounter on the prelim and final, so working through them during section meetings will provide valuable opportunities to prepare for your exams. If you miss a discussion section meeting, you can make up the writing assignment in-person at your grad TA's next available office hours. You are allowed up to 3 make-ups—if you have to miss more than 3 weeks of discussion section, you need to meet with Prof. Susser or Prof. Vidan to discuss whether you can successfully complete the course.

Narrative Analysis

Throughout this course, you'll learn to identify intuitive but often misleading narratives that frame public conversations about new technologies, and to subject those narratives to critical scrutiny. Once during

the semester, you'll put that skill on display in a short presentation for your discussion section. You'll find that many of the issues we discuss are regularly in the news—information ethics, law, and policy are live problems! We encourage you to track these public debates by reading tech news, blogs, and analysis, and to note news stories that relate to themes, questions, and concepts from that week's readings and lectures. For your narrative analysis, you and a partner will select a relevant news story, examine the technology narratives it exemplifies, and deliver a 5-minute presentation explaining your findings. You will be assigned a partner and choose a date for your narrative analysis at the first discussion section meeting. There are no make-ups for missed presentations. If a scheduling conflict arises, it is your responsibility to find another team willing to trade slots, and to notify your grad TA of the change at least 24 hours in advance.

Exams

We will hold an evening prelim/midterm exam (10/23) and a final exam (during the course's scheduled exam slot, as assigned by the registrar during exam period, 12/12-20). These will be in-person, closed book exams, designed to test your knowledge of key concepts, principles, terms, and cases, and will draw on lectures, assigned readings, section exercises, and discussions. The exams will include both short exercises that ask you to define key terms, explain their significance to information ethics, law, and policy, and provide examples that illustrate your understanding of the terms in practice, as well as longer essays that ask you to analyze concrete cases in detail, using concepts and frameworks from our readings and discussions. More details on format and guidance on how to prepare will be shared in advance of each exam.

COURSE POLICIES

Student Accommodations

INFO 1200 was developed from the ground-up using universal design principles, meaning flexibility in grading and related course policies is built-in. As a result, we find that most SDS accommodation requests are already addressed by default. If you believe your individual needs and circumstances require additional consideration: (1) submit an accommodation request through the [official Cornell SDS system](#), so that we receive a formal SDS letter; and (2) schedule a meeting with Prof. Susser or Prof. Vidan to discuss whether and how course policies can be further modified to meet your needs.

If your accommodation relates to in-person exam-taking (such as need for extended test-taking time or reduced-distraction room), after we receive your formal SDS letter you will be contacted by the course manager with specific information about where and how to take your exam as we near the prelim and final exams. You do not need to schedule a meeting with the professors to discuss these accommodations.

Please note: accommodations must be arranged in advance—we will not retroactively apply accommodations to absences or late assignments. If new circumstances arise mid-semester that require new accommodations, please submit an accommodation request and schedule an appointment with one of the professors as soon as possible.

Accessing Course Materials and Submitting Assignments

Links to all reading assignments can be found in the schedule below. PDFs are stored in Google Drive and to access them you must be logged into Google through your Cornell account. You will find all other course information and you will submit all written assignments on the course's Canvas site—

[INFO1200/STS120 Information Ethics, Law, and Policy](#). In addition, all updates, course announcements, and changes to the syllabus or course schedule will be sent through Canvas to your Cornell email. Please make sure your correct email address is registered in Canvas. You are responsible for regularly monitoring your email and the course Canvas site; “I didn’t see the email” will not be accepted as an excuse for missing or misunderstanding assignments.

Electronic Devices

While this class requires that you have access to a laptop, tablet, or smartphone for in-lecture Poll Everywhere quizzes, we want you to be mindful of their impact on the quality of your learning experience and those around you, outside of prescribed quizzes and group work. Some students also download lecture slides ahead of class and take notes directly on them. However, used to access materials not related to class, they are a distraction to you and those around you. We ask that you be mindful of others and limit your use to course-related materials and activities.

Collaboration, Academic Integrity, and Generative AI

We welcome and encourage collaboration and mutual support in small groups (e.g., reading or discussion groups, note pools, study groups, etc.). Still, all written assignments must be entirely your own work, and relevant outside sources (including online ones) must be properly cited/acknowledged, as outlined in the [Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity](#).

If used thoughtfully, AI tools (such as ChatGPT) can be helpful supports—like search engines and spell check—in early-stage research. But using such tools to generate prose and submitting it as your own work for class assignments is a violation of academic integrity and will be dealt with accordingly. If you have any questions around academic integrity issues, we encourage you to contact the instructors directly and early to address them.

SCHEDULE

Below are the reading assignments you are expected to complete before each lecture, as well as other deadlines throughout the semester. Reading and other assignments for discussion sections will be provided separately by your section TA.

Part 1: Foundations		
1	M 8/25	Introduction
	W 8/27	How technology and society shape each other <ul style="list-style-type: none">- This syllabus—read the whole thing carefully!- Langdon Winner, "<u>Technologies as Forms of Life</u>" (p. 1-10)- Nancy Baym, "<u>Making New Media Make Sense</u>"

	Th/F	<u>Key concepts:</u> technology narratives; technological neutrality; technological determinism; SCOT; domestication of technology
2	M 9/1	Labor Day — No class
	W 9/3	Regulating technology regulating us <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lawrence Lessig, "Code is Law" (p. 186-191) - Philip Brey, "Values in Technology and Disclosive Computer Ethics" (p. 41-54)
	Th/F	<u>Key concepts:</u> public values; modes of regulation; Capital-P vs lower case-p policy; balancing trade-offs
3	M 9/8	When technology breaks down <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ruha Benjamin, "Default Discrimination: Is the Glitch Systemic?"
	W 9/10	Understanding and challenging the "law lag" narrative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tess Doezema & Nina Frahm, "How the State Built This AI Moment"
	Th/F	<u>Key concepts:</u> glitch; noticing technology through breakdown; "law lag" narrative
Part 2: Privacy and Surveillance		
4	M 9/15	Is privacy dead? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - USC Annenberg, "Americans Don't Understand What Companies Can Do With Their Personal Data—and That's a Problem" - Skim: Nora Draper and Joseph Turow, "The Corporate Cultivation of Digital Resignation"
	W 9/17	Does privacy matter? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Daniel Solove, "The Nothing-to-Hide Argument" - Alvaro Bedoya, "Big Data and the Underground Railroad"
	Th/F	<u>Key concepts:</u> the "privacy paradox"; digital resignation; government vs commercial surveillance
5	M 9/22	The American privacy patchwork <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Neil Richards, Andrew Serwin, and Tyler Blake, "Understanding American Privacy"
	W 9/24	The future of privacy: GDPR? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ben Wolford, "What is GDPR, the EU's new data protection law?"
	Th/F	<u>Key concepts:</u> the 4th Amendment; sectoral approach vs omnibus approach; notice and consent; GDPR
Part 3: Trust and Security		
6	M 9/29	Encryption I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Research Council, "Introduction" to <i>Decrypting the Encryption Debate</i>
	W 10/1	Encryption II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jim Baker, "Rethinking Encryption"

	Th/F	<u>Key concepts:</u> the "going dark" debate; escrowed encryption; end-to-end encryption (E2EE); Apple v. FBI
7	M 10/6	Deep and synthetic content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Claire Leibowicz, "Why Watermarking AI-generated Content Won't Guarantee Trust Online"
Part 4: Intellectual Property		
7	W 10/8	Copyright 101 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jessica Litman, "Copyright Basics" and "The Art of Making Copyright Laws" in <i>Digital Copyright</i>
	Th/F	<u>Key concepts:</u> digital watermarking; the balancing act of copyright; DMCA
8	M 10/13	Fall Break — No class
	W 10/15	Fair Use <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patricia Aufderheide & Peter Jaszi, "How to Fair Use"
	Th/F	<u>Key concepts:</u> Fair Use doctrine; the "Four-Factor Test"
9	M 10/20	Regulation by contract, regulation by machine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Margaret Radin, "Regulation by Contract, Regulation by Machine"
Part 5: Free Speech and Content Moderation		
9	W 10/22	Free speech and the First Amendment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - John Vile, David Hudson Jr., and David Schultz, "Introduction" to the <i>Encyclopedia of the First Amendment</i>
	Th/F	<u>Key concepts:</u> "Law of the state" vs "law of the firm"; contracts of adhesion; DRM; automated enforcement; the First Amendment; marketplace of ideas
Exam		Prelim - Thursday 10/23
10	M 10/27	Platforms, publishers, and intermediaries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jeff Kosseff, "Introduction" and "Chris and Ron Do Lunch" in <i>The Twenty-Six Words That Created the Internet</i> - Tarleton Gillespie, "Platforms Are Not Intermediaries"
	W 10/29	The NetChoice cases <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gautam Hans, "How the Supreme Court's Latest Big Tech Case Pits Cancel Culture Hysteria Against Corporate Power" - Zephyr Teachout, "A NetChoice Win Would Be a Loss for Democracy"
	Th/F	<u>Key concepts:</u> The First Amendment; Section 230; publishers; intermediaries; NetChoice cases
Part 6: Markets, Competition, and Antitrust		

11	M 11/3	Laws, markets, and new technologies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Julie Cohen. "Introduction: Transforming Institutions" in <i>Between Truth and Power: The Legal Construction of Informational Capitalism</i>
	W 11/5	Why is tech so big? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - John Kwoka and Lawrence White, "Introduction" and "The Economic and Legal Context" in <i>The Antitrust Revolution: Economics, Competition, and Policy</i>
	Th/F	Key concepts: co-production of law, economy, and technology; double-movement; network effects; abuse of dominance
12	M 11/10	The fall (and rise?) of antitrust law <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lina Khan, "Amazon's Antitrust Paradox" [Excerpted—Part I]
	W 11/12	Can the platform economy be competitive? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lina Khan, "Amazon's Antitrust Paradox" [Excerpted—Part II]
	Th/F	Key concepts: consumer welfare; Amazon's antitrust paradox; monopoly leveraging; two-sided market
Part 7: Governing AI		
13	M 11/17	The human labor powering AI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mary Gray and Siddharth Suri, excerpts from <i>Ghost Work</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skim: "From Piecework to Outsourcing: A Brief History of Automation's Last Mile" - Read: "Algorithmic Cruelty and the Hidden Costs of Ghost Work" - "Open letter to President Biden from tech workers in Kenya"
	W 11/19	Innovation or arbitrage? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rebecca Smith and Maya Pinto, "Rewriting the Rules: Gig Companies' Drive for Labor Deregulation"
	Th/F	Key concepts: ghost work; deskilling; employee vs independent contractor; regulatory arbitrage
14	M 11/24	Automated decision-making I: Technology's "early adopters" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Virginia Eubanks, "The Digital Poorhouse"
	W-F	Thanksgiving — No class/section
15	M 12/1	Automated decision-making II: Fairness and algorithmic bias <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solon Barocas and Andrew Selbst, "Big Data's Disparate Impact" (Read pp. 673-693, skim pp. 694-711)
	W 12/3	AI and the law <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alondra Nelson, "The Right Way to Regulate AI"
	Th/F	Key concepts: technology's "early adopters"; algorithmic bias; proxy variables; disparate treatment; disparate impact
16	M 12/8	Wrap-up

Exam

Final Exam - time/place TBD (12/12-20)