

PHIL 112: Ethics and the Cybersociety

COURSE DETAILS

Course/Section: PHIL 112 –DL7, DL8	Instructor: Joseph B. Farruggia
Semester: Fall 2017	Email: jfarrugg.gmu.edu
	Office Hours (online): TBA

General Course Description

This course provides an introduction to issues in information technology ethics (or "cyberethics"). It aims to develop your familiarity with those issues and your ability to think critically about them using various types of ethical reasoning. We will pursue this aim by considering important ethical theories as well as their implications for some ethical issues raised by the use of computers and other information technologies. The specific ethical issues that we will consider are:

1. **Software Ownership and Intellectual Property** (Guiding Questions: To what extent should software be considered property, if at all? Should software be patented, copyrighted, etc.? Is "software piracy" ever morally permissible?)
2. **Computer Crimes and Cyberattacks** (Guiding Questions: When, if ever, are attacks on computer systems (e.g., computer "hacking," denial-of-service attacks, virus deployments) morally permissible? Is it possible to wage a just cyberwar?)
3. **Privacy and Regulation of the Internet** (Guiding Questions: To what extent ought one's activity on the internet be private? What exactly is privacy, and why is it important? When, if ever, is it permissible for one's activity on the internet to be monitored and/or regulated?)

You will learn to reflect on these issues using the argumentative methods and ethical theories that we will learn in this course. Your reflections will be guided by the case studies and the ethical reasoning presented in our course texts. By engaging in online discussions, taking quizzes, and writing and submitting a final course paper, you will achieve an understanding of important information technologies and the ethical issues that they raise, as well as a proficiency at engaging in critical reasoning concerning those issues.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be expected to:

- Be familiar with the vocabulary and methods of information technology ethics
- Be able to explain and critically analyze major ethical theories in the Western philosophical tradition
- Understand in detail the specific ethical issues listed above involving computers and other information technologies
- Be able to apply major ethical theories in the Western philosophical tradition to these ethical issues

- Be able to present, defend, and critically analyze arguments for specific positions that allegedly answer the course's "guiding questions" (above)

This course also satisfies GMU's IT Ethics requirement; more specifically:

- Students will understand many of the key ethical, legal and social issues related to information technology and how to interpret and comply with ethical principles, laws, regulations, and institutional policies.
- Students will understand the essential issues related to information security, how to take precautions and use techniques and tools to defend against computer crimes.

Online Course Format

IMPORTANT! PLEASE NOTE: This course will be conducted 100% online. That being so, it will be more self-directed than a typical in-person course, and it will make frequent use of Internet-based technologies. In particular, you **must** be sure that you are able to navigate our course's Blackboard page and that your official GMU email is working and being checked regularly. These are the two primary means by which we will communicate with one another, and all of your assignments will be both explained and submitted on Blackboard.

The general way that you will work your way through this course is as follows. First, you will use the **main course menu** (on the left side of our Blackboard course page) to find important content. The **main content areas** are:

1. Syllabus – Contains the Syllabus and Course Schedule
2. Course Content – Contains weekly course lectures and Course Paper Information
3. Assignments – Contains weekly course assignments
4. Assessments – Contains weekly quizzes on assigned material
5. Discussion Board – Contains topic threads for discussion of course material

The schedule (attached to the Syllabus) will tell you when you should complete the various readings and assignments. That being so, **the schedule should be one of your first points of reference whenever you are wondering about due dates or are unsure about what to do next.**

The schedule is divided into **topics**. Each topic corresponds to a week of course time. Once you know which topic you should be working on (again, by referring to the schedule and the corresponding date), you should click on the Weekly Lesson folders in the Course Content area of the main menu and find the relevant **lesson** (corresponding to the topic) listed there. You should work your way through the lesson by working through the items in the folder **in the order they are given**.

In summary: This is a largely self-directed online course in which you will work your way through the material by referring to the schedule, finding the topic that corresponds to the date, and working through the lesson corresponding to that topic on our Blackboard page. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to email me!

Course Texts and Other Materials

Video lectures and the .pdf of lecture slides and for this course will be provided on our course's Blackboard page. They may also be supplemented by other materials from websites, academic journals, magazines, and so on. There is one physical course text that you must obtain, because there are readings from it in at least three of our lessons:

Quinn, Michael J. *Ethics for the Information Age* (7th Ed.). Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley, 2015.

This text is available at the GMU bookstore, on Amazon.com and elsewhere. **NOTE:** This is the newest edition of the textbook. It contains some very important updated information in Chapter 2 on Virtue Ethics as well as updated information in the case studies sections throughout the book that include current issues (such as coverage of Edward Snowden and the NSA, activities of the hactivist group Anonymous, privacy issues raised by social media apps gathering personal information from contact lists, etc.). So you should make sure you are using the **7th Edition** of the textbook and not one of the earlier editions. **DO NOT USE ANY EARLIER EDITIONS.**

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

The graded assignments for this course can be divided into three main types: Weekly Discussion Board Participation, Weekly Quizzes, and a Course Paper. These types of assignment will contribute to your final course grade as follows:

Assignment	Percentage
Discussion Board Participation	30%
Quizzes	30%
Final Course Paper	40%

The main details for these assignments are as follows.

Discussion Board Assignments

Each week a discussion board topic will be opened in which you will be asked to post an original comment on specific aspects of that week's lesson. You will be encouraged to ask questions of me or of one another, and to post comments on the board that you believe are relevant or pertinent to the topic. Please be courteous and respectful of your classmates' opinions and ideas when using the Discussion Board. You will be notified when the Discussion Board is open, and will receive specific instructions on how to use it at the appropriate time.

Quizzes

There will be 6 weekly quizzes (each consisting of 10 questions) during our course. The first will be a review quiz about the syllabus and the course schedule, and you should complete it during the first week of classes (see the schedule for the due date). The rest will cover the material in your weekly lessons, to be taken after you have worked through the lectures and reading material

for each lesson of the course. The quizzes will consist of true/false, multiple choice, and short-answer/essay questions.

Final Course Paper

You will write one final course paper that you will submit at the end of the course. It will be on a specific ethical issue involving one of the three main topics of the course (those main topics are listed above, under the General Course Description; you may pick any of these topics). In the paper, you will present your own argument in favor of a specific thesis about the topic that you have chosen to write about. You will also be asked to discuss a potential objection to your argument or thesis and to respond to it. You are welcome to peruse our course's discussion board in search of potential objections, though if you decide to use one of them in your paper, you must provide a citation for the objection, and your response to it must be your own work. You will select the topic about which you will be writing by the end of the third week of classes (again, see the course schedule), though later changes in topic are possible so long as they are approved. For a more complete description of the final course paper assignment, please see the "Course Paper Information" folder, under the "Course Content" link on our main course menu.

Grading Scale

The grading scale for our course is as follows:

Letter Grade	Percentage
A	94-100%
A-	90-93%
B+	87-89%
B	84-86%
B-	80-83%
C+	77-79%
C	74-76%
C-	70-73%
D	60-70%
F	0-59%

Late/Missed Assignments

Late assignments and re-scheduled exams will be accepted with no penalty *only* if there is a documented legitimate excuse (for example, a doctor's note or emergency room receipt if the excuse is illness; I reserve the right to determine what counts as a "legitimate" excuse here). In cases where there is such an excuse, we will determine new terms for the completion of the assignment. Otherwise, late assignments will not be accepted; they will be counted as "missed" and will receive a grade of 0.

TECHNOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS, HONOR CODE, AND ACCOMMODATIONS

Technological Requirements

Because this course is an online course, you will need access to certain kinds of computing technology. First, you will need access to a computer with Internet access; this is required for completing online assignments, viewing online readings, and so on. Second, you **may** need a microphone that will allow you to speak with me during online office hours, **if** online office hours are scheduled this semester. Third, if I do schedule online office hours, your computer may need speakers (or you may need headphones) so that you can hear what I have to say during these discussions. Fourth and finally, you will need some kind of word processing software that you can use to write your final course paper; it does not matter to me what version or brand of software this is, so long as it allows you to submit readable papers in either odt, .doc, or .pdf format. Please DO NOT submit papers in a ZIP file.

Honor Code (Academic Integrity)

This course will be conducted in accordance with the GMU Honor Code, and all students are expected to abide by it. The GMU Honor Code, as found in the University Catalog, is as follows: *To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.*

(<http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=15&navoid=1039&returnto=search#Honor>)

Details concerning the university's Honor System and Code can be found in the University Catalog (accessible online at the above link).

Principles of academic integrity will be taken very seriously in this course; any Honor Code violations will be referred immediately to the GMU Honor Committee. How can you respect academic integrity in this course? Essentially, **you should do your own work when asked to do so, and you should give appropriate credit and attribution to others when you rely upon their work.** To be clear about this: *all* submitted work in this course should be your own work; collaboration (or any other use of the work(s) of other persons) on submitted work is not permitted, except when the submission is intended to be the result of group work (e.g., the group assignments) or when the material you are using is drawn from scholarly sources (e.g., journal articles, books, etc.), in which case you **must** include proper attribution (e.g., quotation marks where appropriate, author's name, title of source, page number or URL, etc.). Put in more practical terms, you are free (and encouraged!) to do research and to discuss readings, philosophical issues, and other course materials with your peers, but you should not work with or copy from your peers (or others) when directly completing submitted assignments (i.e., when

determining answers to questions or completing essays or short answer assignments), except when you are working on a group assignment. Furthermore, you should always avoid plagiarism and remember to properly cite scholarly sources. If you have any questions concerning these issues or any other aspect of academic integrity, please speak with me. You may also refer to the GMU Writing Center's guidelines on plagiarism at the following link:

<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/?p=499>

When (if ever) a violation of academic integrity is suspected, I will have to comply with the university's guidelines and report the student(s) involved to the GMU Honor Committee. My recommendation to the Honor Committee will typically be at least that the assignment receive a score of 0, unless the case is resolved by the Honor Committee with a finding of "Not Guilty" (in which case it will not be penalized). Ideally, we will all avoid having to go through this process!

Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact me, and please also contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 703-993-2474. You may also refer to the website of ODS at the following URL: <http://ods.gmu.edu/>. All academic accommodations must ultimately be arranged through ODS. I am happy to comply with any such needs for accommodation.

Philosophical Writing

The GMU Philosophy Department offers guidelines and resources for writing a philosophy paper. You can find them at: <http://philosophy.gmu.edu/undergraduate/writing-standards>. I will also post some general guidelines in the Course Paper Information folder.

Tentative Course Schedule

This is the tentative schedule for our course. If there is a change to this schedule, I will post an announcement on our course's home page and also send the announcement via email.

Week	Topic	Assignment Due Dates
1 (Oct. 16-22)	First Week (Course Orientation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10/22 (11:59pm): Read syllabus and complete syllabus quiz• 10/22 (11:59pm): Post introduction on discussion board
2 (Oct. 23-29)	Lesson 1: Overview of Cyberethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10/23 (9am) – Discussion Board and Quiz Open for Lesson 1• 10/29 (11:59pm): Complete Lesson 1 quiz• 10/29 (11:59pm) – Discussion Board Comments Due for Lesson 1
3 (Oct. 30-Nov. 5)	Lesson 2: Ethical Theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10/30 (9am) – Discussion Board and Quiz Open for Lesson 2• 11/5 (11:59pm): Complete Lesson 2 quiz• 11/5 (11:59pm): Submit topic for course paper• 11/5 (11:59pm) – Discussion Board Comments Due for Lesson 2
4 (Nov. 6-12)	Lesson 3: Intellectual Property and Software Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 11/6 (9am) – Discussion Board and Quiz Open for Lesson 3• 11/12 (11:59pm): Complete Lesson 3 quiz• 11/12 (11:59pm) – Discussion Board Comments Due for Lesson 3
5 (Nov. 13-19)	Lesson 4: Computer Crimes and Cyberattacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 11/13 (9am) – Discussion Board and Quiz Open for Lesson 4• 11/19 (11:59pm): Complete Lesson 4 quiz• 11/19 (11:59pm) – Discussion Board Comments Due for Lesson 4
Nov. 20-26	THANKSGIVING RECESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NO CLASS WORK DUE
6 (Nov. 27-Dec. 3)	Lesson 5: Privacy and Regulation of the Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 11/27 (9am) – Discussion Board and Quiz Open for Lesson 5• 12/3 (11:59pm): Complete Lesson 5 quiz• 12/3 (11:59pm) – Discussion Board Comments Due for Lesson 5

7 (Dec. 10)	Course Paper Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 12/10 (11:59pm) – Course Paper Due
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