

Syllabus for PHIL 112 – Ethics and the Cybersociety

Fall 2022 Semester

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This course is taught remotely, I do not have an office at GMU, and thus no office hours. You can contact me anytime at the above e-mail address.

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 of the issues raised by the use of computers and other information technologies. The specific issues that we will consider are:

Intellectual Property and Software Ownership (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?)

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?)

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?)

Networked Communications (Social Media) (Guiding Questions: To what extent ought one's activity on social media platforms be deemed "freedom of expression"? When, if ever, is it permissible for the owners of social media platforms, or the government, restrict or terminate public use of these platforms?)

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 the course text. By engaging in online discussions and taking quizzes, 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 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

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 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 lecture videos and lesson slides
3. Assignments – Contains weekly course assignments (always refer to this folder first each week, and do the assignments in the order in which they are given)
4. Assessments – Contains weekly quizzes on assigned material
5. Discussion Board – Contains topic threads for discussion of course material

The course schedule at the end of this syllabus tells you when you should complete the weekly assignments. Generally, the start date for each lesson is on Mondays and the due date for weekly assignments is at 11:59 p.m. on the following Sunday.

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 Text and Materials

Video lectures and an Adobe Acrobat .pdf of the lecture slides are posted in the weekly folders under Course Content on the course Blackboard page. NOTE: There are no videos for the last two weeks' lectures, only lecture slides.

The physical textbook is **Ethics for the Information Age (8th Edition)** by **Michael J. Quinn**. It can be ordered from the GMU Bookstore's website, gmu.bnccollege.com. NOTE: The physical textbook is NOT available online from any other source – the only online resource is an eText access card, which cannot be activated by students without a corresponding access code from the instructor. I do not have that code and do not have access to the eText edition of the book, so please don't try to order it – you will just be wasting money. There are earlier editions of the textbook available online, but they are out-of-date. So please be sure to order the 8th edition from the GMU Bookstore. You won't need the textbook until Week 3 of the course, so if you order it now, you should get it in time.

Assignments and Grading

Your final grades will be based on the following assignments.

7 Weekly Quizzes – 75%

7 Discussion Board Items – 25%

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. NOTE: You will only be graded on your initial response to the question, and you are not required to comment on other students' posts, although you are encouraged to do so.

Quizzes

There will be 7 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.

Late or Missed Assignments

Because this course is entirely online and you are given a full week to complete the assignments, you should have no problem completing them by the due date. However, I realize that some of you may have other priorities or circumstances that may prevent completing the assignments by the due date. For this reason, all assignments are kept open until the last day of the course, so if you should miss a due date, you have some flexibility in getting caught up. If this happens, you will not be penalized in any way – just make sure that all work is finished and turned in by the last day of the course, which for the Fall 2022 Semester is Sunday, Oct. 9.

Honor Code and Accommodations

Honor Code

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.*

Details concerning the university's Honor System and Code can be found here:

<https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>

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.

The Course Schedule follows on the next page

This is the tentative schedule for our course. Please note that it is subject to change (I do not have plans to change it, but things do sometimes happen). **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 (August 22-28)	First Week (Course Orientation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8/28 (11:59pm): Read syllabus and complete syllabus quiz 8/28 (11:59pm): Post introduction on discussion board
2 (August 29-Sept. 4)	Lesson 1: Overview of Cyberethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9/4 (11:59pm): Complete Lesson 1 quiz 9/4 (11:59pm) – Discussion Board Comments Due for Lesson 1
3 (Sept. 5-11)	Lesson 2: Ethical Theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9/11 (11:59pm): Complete Lesson 2 quiz 9/11 (11:59pm) – Discussion Board Comments Due for Lesson 2
4 (Sept. 12-18)	Lesson 3: Intellectual Property and Software Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9/18 (11:59pm): Complete Lesson 3 quiz 9/18 (11:59pm) – Discussion Board Comments Due for Lesson 3
5 (Sept. 19-25)	Lesson 4: Computer Crimes and Cyberattacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9/25 (11:59pm): Complete Lesson 4 quiz 9/25 (11:59pm) – Discussion Board Comments Due for Lesson 4
6 (Sept. 26-Oct. 2)	Lesson 5: Privacy and Regulation of the Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10/2 (11:59pm): Complete Lesson 5 quiz 10/2 (11:59pm) – Discussion Board Comments Due for Lesson 5
7 (Oct. 3-9)	Lesson 6: Networked Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10/9 (11:59pm): Complete Lesson 6 quiz 10/9 (11:59 p.m.): Discussion Board Comments Due for Lesson 6 All missed course work MUST be completed by this time