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SI 410 Ethics and Information Technology

SUMMARY SYLLABUS

Schedule: T/Th 4:00 pm to 5:30 pm + Wed 8:30 am to 10:00 am (Required Lab/Discussion)

Credits: 4

Instructor: Paul Conway, Associate Professor, School of Information

Course Overview

Ethics and Information Technology concerns the ethical dilemmas that exist where human beings, information objects, and social computing technologies interact. The course explores emerging ethical models from historical and cross-cultural perspectives and then applies these models to a variety of new and emerging technologies that are inherently social in their construction and use. Initial examples of issues that the course covers in discrete modules include: the integrity of digital content in a networked world; identity and avatars; and interpersonal engagement through online games and virtual environments. Students explore the technological underpinnings of associated technology systems, experiment with individual and group interaction with technologies, and examine the mechanics of ethical and unethical behaviors. The course satisfies the LSA Upper Level Writing Requirement, so significant writing assignments reinforce learning through collaborative editing, reflection on personal identity, and an essay on the notion that traditional ethical norms may or may not be relevant in the new technology environment.

Course Objectives

Learning outcomes

- Demonstrate knowledge of current models of information and computer ethics.
- Apply ethical theories to interpret personal and group behavior when using a variety of information technology tools.
- Evaluate the nature of ethical choices made by self and others when serving various roles that expose social and multicultural differences.
- Construct written arguments in a variety of formats on the evolving nature of ethical norms relating to new technologies.

Instructional objectives

- Integrate opportunities for direct hands-on technical experiences, in order to enhance understanding of ethical challenges presented by new information technologies.
- Foster intense participation in course learning activities via in-class discussions, posts submitted to an online discussion boards, and longer written assignments; in order to encourage multimodal contributions by students.

Reading

The domain where ethics and technology intersect is rich with thoughtful writing from a variety of disciplines; part of the purpose of the course is to sample some of this literature. There is no textbook for this course. Many readings are drawn from the primary research journal in the field, *Ethics and Information Technology* and from a recently published compilation of articles by some of the best philosophers and technologists working in the area: Kenneth Einar Himma and Herman T. Tavani (eds.). *The Handbook of Information and Computer Ethics*. New York: Wiley, 2008. All of the required readings are located either on CTools, available through University Reserves, or available through the University Library gateway.

Avatar Purchase

One of the three technology-based assignments for the course requires the use of specialized tools for the creation and manipulation of avatar characters. The tools are provided by “evolver.com.” Each student is required to purchase two characters to support the lab assignments, at a cost of \$20.00 per character or \$40.00 in total. Payment may be made by cash or checks (payable to University of Michigan).

Grading Overview

See separate documents for details on assignments and expectations for grading.

- Overall participation in class 15%
- Essay on Philosophy and IT (Personal) 20%
- Create MediaWiki Content (Collaboration) 25%
- Reflection on Avatars/Identity (Peer) 25%
- Ethical Game Scenario (Team) 15%

Attendance at all classes is mandatory; the essay is graded individually before and after revisions; MediaWiki contributions are evaluated collaboratively; the personal reflection is graded individually after revisions; the game scenario is peer graded by teams.

Academic Integrity

All students in this course will be held to high standards of scholarship and integrity. Personal responsibility and integrity are assumed, and all forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct are prohibited. Academic dishonesty may be understood as any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the class. The instructor will not tolerate any conduct, without regard to motive, that violates the academic integrity and ethical standards of the University community. Issues of academic integrity will be handled according to the policies established by LSA. <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/procedures/index.html>

Students with Disabilities

The University of Michigan provides reasonable accommodations for all students with disabilities. To ensure that your needs are met in a timely manner, please contact me with any requests for

accommodation as early in the term as possible. For additional information on services and support, visit the UM Services for Students with Disabilities web site: <http://www.umich.edu/~sswd/>.

Classroom Technology Etiquette

Students are encouraged to bring notebook computers to class and to use them actively as learning tools. Students should:

- use laptops for taking notes, conducting research required for activities, and other specific classroom tasks as assigned by the instructor. During class, students should not check e-mail, chat, IM, play games, or perform other off-task activities.
- engage in class activity as actively as they would in any other class. The computer should not become a barrier to one-on-one interaction, but instead should help facilitate the exchange of ideas and engagement in classroom contact. If you know you are not good at multi-tasking, minimize the use of your notebook in class.
- show sensitivity to others. Students should not display screen images and multimedia content that might be distracting or offensive to other members of the class, including wallpapers, screen savers.

Office Hours

I encourage you to take advantage of at least one office hour session during the course. I am available and willing to provide advice on all aspects of the course, including course readings, writing assignments, laboratory exercises, grading and assessment generally, as well as the topical substance of the course itself.

Course Evaluation

There is no final examination in the course. Instead, part of the final class period will be used for summative evaluation of the course by students, discussion on perspectives on ethical issues in general, and the administration of a post-test instrument on ethical judgments.

Staff members from the Center for Research on Teaching and Learning have been involved in the design of the course and will assist at points through the course in evaluation activities. CRLT staff will observe selected class segments and provide feedback, and will moderate the summative evaluation of the course. CRLT involvement in the course is supported by funds from the Provost's Office.