INFO 6210/COMM 6211: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETAL VALUES
Version 8/23/22 8:12am

FALL 2022: TTH 1:00 - 2:15 PM
Bloomberg 161/Gates 405
Instructor: Helen Nissenbaum
NB: Please see new Zoom instructions for Thursdays with Guest Speakers below.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This year's version of INFO 6210 will focus on philosophical and analytical approaches to addressing some of the pressing societal implications of digital technologies. While cognizant of the value of other disciplinary and methodological approaches for reckoning with these same issues, the course will acquaint students, specifically, with the power of philosophical and analytical thinking. Students will grapple with work in political philosophy, ethics, and legal philosophy that tackle some of the general concepts arising in relation to contemporary challenges confronting digital societies. These concepts include fairness, justice, autonomy, privacy, responsibility, free speech, trust, and more. In addition to general philosophical readings, the course will including works that demonstrate the application of philosophical thinking to issues raised by digital technologies and their deployment.

At the outset of the course, the instructor will provide a set of kernel readings whose aims are twofold: (1) to serve as models of the type of reasoning and argumentation that is characteristic of philosophical approaches to defining and addressing problems; and (2) to acquaint students with rigorous thinking about concepts of interest, such as fairness, privacy, etc. However, the aims are not merely that students will become acquainted with these readings; they are that students will acquire and improve their capacities to analyze and to construct arguments around issues of concern. Given the diverse backgrounds of IS PhD students, I anticipate that students will each bring different background experience and important strengths, and may each have different learning goals.

Beyond the initial readings and discussions, the precise path of the course has not been fully determined but will be responsive to:

(a) Students research interests and projects. With guidance from the Instructor, students will lead discussion sessions on both general readings and on topics and readings they propose, based on their course research projects. Students might even advocate for the inclusion of issues that are not currently included in the syllabus, or the replacement of one with another.

(b) DLI Seminars. Several of the course meetings on Thursdays, coincide with DLI Seminars. In service to the course, invited speakers were selected for their philosophical work from a variety of Western traditions. The course has been planned around a rough (mutual) mapping between basic readings and the work of Invited Seminar speakers.

Students will be asked to apply these philosophical works to issues in the broad domain of Information Science, selecting topics in which have personal interest, or are actively pursuing research. Students may offer to augment the course bibliography with specialized readings, which they may choose to present (see below, Assignments and Grading.) These mini-areas of specialization will occur in consultation between students and Instructor.

I recommend against taking this class merely to fulfill a core requirement. The class is most likely to suit students who are, (1) interested in grappling with abstract (and sometimes abstruse) philosophical argumentation, (2) willing to be active in seeking out supplementary materials for your chosen application area, and (3) eager ty try their hand at formulating analytical argumentation. This course is not for everyone and may even frustrate students who are primarily excited by empirical, sociological, or technical approaches, or who are at early exploratory stages of their studies. There are other ways to fulfill the ELP core with a broader methodological approach, better suited to your learning styles, learning interests and research needs.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students are expected to abide by Cornell's Code of Academic Integrity at all times. Please note that the Code specifically states that a "Cornell student's submission of work for academic credit indicates that the work is the student's own. All outside assistance should be acknowledged, and the student's academic position truthfully reported at all times."

*For this class, one further principle will be in effect: students must have read any publication that they cite and/or appears in a list of references.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about appropriately acknowledging others' work in your submitted assignments. You should expect that I will rigorously enforce the Code.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Readings responses. As a general rule, students will be expected to take notes when preparing for class. They will extract ~1 page from these notes, including key questions, or most interesting observations, or discussion starters, etc. and post these to Canvas discussion board.

Summaries and critical responses to DLI Seminars. Each student will produce two critical summaries and responses of at least 1,500 words. Within the first one or two weeks, students will collectively and collaboratively select Seminars they wish to select as their responses. These will need to be posted within one-week of the Seminar.

Research paper proposal. 1-2 page abstract, outline, and bibliography (must include a selection of course readings. Students will present proposals for class feedback.

Research paper. Depending on how advanced students are in their respective projects, their papers may range from draft research papers of 16-20 pages to 3-5 page abstracts with annotated bibliographies. Students will discuss their proposals with Instructor. Time will be allocated during class for students to discuss their ideas.

Attendance and participation. 100% attendance at all class sessions (except with valid excuse TBD). Grades will be affected, at Instructors discretion.

READINGS

Weekly reading assignments will not be excessive because articles and book segments are often quite dense. It may take several passes through an article to grasp its meaning and overarching arguments. This is key to benefitting from this class and making it worth your while.

Course Canvas includes a raft of readings, which are listed in the Course Bibliography. As a living document, this Bibliography will be augmented with readings suggested by invited guest speakers and by suggestion of students enrolled in the class. HOWEVER, not all of these readings are required. Please see Weekly Schedule for the required reading/activities for that week. Readings will almost all be available on Course Canvas, or will be linked from Course Canvas.

==DLI SEMINARS== (Please Note: For Thursday Seminars involving Guest Speakers, Ithaca students are asked to use the following Zoom: https://cornell.zoom.us/j/94971390717?pwd=a2xvS2hRUG9ydEIzMlRmZGtLaXdsZz09)

Thursday, 29 September, Daniel Susser, Penn State University, *Exploitation and Platform Power*

Thursday, 6 October 2022, John Basl, Northeastern University, *What We Owe to Decision-subjects: Beyond Transparency and Explanation in Automated Decision-Making*

Thursday, 13 October 2022, Kathleen Creel, Stanford University, *Picking on the Same Person: The Ethics of Algorithmic Monoculture*

Thursday, 20 October 2022, Judith Simon, Universität Hamburg, *Dis/Trusting Artificial Intelligence?*

Thursday, 27 October 2022, Seth Lazar, Australian National University, *Governing the Algorithmic City*

Thursday, 3 November, Niva Elkin-Koren, Tel Aviv University, *TBD*

Thursday, 10 November, Erin Miller, University of Southern California, *Quasi-State Action in First Amendment Theory*

Thursday, 16 November, Michal Gal, Center for Law and Technology, University of Haifa, *TBD*