

Course Syllabus Digital Media Ethics 2019
University of Florida JOU

By Angela Long, Course Leader

Where do we live these days? We live online.

And what makes a happy life? Everyone getting on.

But the debate arises when standards of behavior for “everyone” are discussed. It is the age old-question: how should I live?

This course examines digital life, and behavior, in the 20-teens. We review how the internet has changed human interaction, and what is good and bad about this. The course involves case studies, discussion, and deliberation, as well as reading and listening to fundamentals of ethical thought. Current affairs play a big part. Moral philosophy is a basis for the exploration of issues, but also important are developed and developing cultural norms. We’ll also consider how different standards can apply in different societies or communities.

Throughout this unit, students will:

- Explore traditional ethical standards, and the different problems today with vast audiences and lack of regulation on the internet
- Discuss and deliberate on appropriate action when an online ethical problem arises
- Identify ethical dilemmas in journalism, public relations, activism and other mass mobilization practices via the internet
- Explore the differences between visual, audio and written material when posting
- Make and justify decisions about ethical dilemmas
- Appreciate the challenges that Facebook, Instagram, twitter and even Linked-In pose to our ethical professional life. Appreciate the challenges that the behavior online of powerful people can create.

By the end of the semester, students will be expected to have developed these skills, all with regard to the online environment.

- critical understanding of ethics and their application to journalism and other communications professions

- appreciation of differences between communication in the online and offline environments
- knowledge and analysis of regulation of journalism/PR/video industries
- awareness of current codes of behavior for media professionals, and how these fit in the online environment

(see also *Digital Media Ethics week by week*)

DIGITAL MEDIA ETHICS 2019 (Special Study JOU) RTV4930-0204 (21026)

Lecturer: Angela Long

... Week by week ...

This is a more detailed explanation of the syllabus for this course, with a summary of the material to be covered in each of 12 sessions. The final session is for Revision.

Material is available every Tuesday [in Canvas](#).

1 (Jan 8) What does this course mean? Background, set-up. 'Cyberspace', or the digital world, which is increasingly just 'the world'. How far we have come in a short time, and how that stresses society and behavior. Comparison with offline world in terms of personal interactions, collective intelligence, social mores. Rapid evolution of the digital world and its implications for individuals, groups and power. Who calls the tune? Who is in charge? (A question we will return to later in the course.)

2 (Jan 15) Our ethical inheritance: the history of moral philosophy, or ethics, as it has been handed down in the West. Anglo-Saxon/European traditions of how to live a good life, and what that means. How appropriate are these standards today, and in a globalized world with other strong traditions. Key thinkers such as the Greeks (Aristotle and Plato), Kant, Hobbes, and much later, Rawls. Do their messages make sense? Universality of their ideas, and whether they apply now. How should the digital world change if their ideas are to be adopted – or would it need to ?

3 (Jan 22) Fake news, what it is, why it is, and how dangerous: Donald Trump did not invent the term, though he seems to think so. The internet has empowered the spread of lies and half-truths, just as it has magnified many aspects of life which used to be limited. We will look at examples of fake news and analyse its role in ignoring or destroying ethical standards.

4 (Jan 29) Trust and more modern takes on ethics: philosophers such as Onora O'Neill and writers like Sherry Turkle, and how their work can develop our ideas of digital ethics. The overwhelming importance of trust online, and its importance in developing credibility in professional and personal activity.

DISCUSSION ONE ... see details on Canvas

5 (Feb 5) Privacy A: We'll talk about this topic a lot, as it has proved to be one of the key ethical challenges of life – and commerce, and politics – online. Since Mark Zuckerberg declared that 'privacy is dead', a once-sacred part of our life has become 'old-fashioned'. This week we look at our understanding of privacy, its importance and its neglect. Note that in Plaisance, if you are using that text, privacy as a topic is covered in the chapter on Autonomy.

ASSIGNMENT ONE DUE: 1200 word paper (more details will follow)

6 (Feb 12) Privacy B: A brief session, but examining the First and Fourth Amendments to the Constitution, and how they are relevant to protection of privacy.

7 (Feb 19) Data leakage: why it matters, and how often, and badly it happens. Commercial and political actors seem to have been at fault. The Internet of Things gives so many more opportunities for this data to abound and be misused. [see also week 11 for this IoT topic].

8 (Feb 26) Free speech: the great liberation of the internet has led to hate speech, cruelty, vulgarity. Some communicators of these lurk in the Dark Net, but others are above the ground. Does anything go?

ASSIGNMENT TWO due February 28 – can be video, audio or written.

Spring Break week of March 5

9 (March 12) Who runs the internet? Anyone? Who should? We look at the theory and practice of internet freedom. Countries such as China and Turkey make no bones about regulating and controlling online activity.

10 (March 19) Images: the power of the photo, but the online world is no more immune to manipulation and false projections than were previous forms of media. The reality – or is it - that is now available to everyone. Speed and ease of video, and how anything and everything can be filmed and uploaded. The upsides and downsides of this, and how to design rules for ourselves. Verification and impact. The rise of Snapchat, Instagram, and [ethical challenges posed by the visual. Chapter 2, Section one in Davisson & Booth: "*The classroom is NOT a sacred space.*"

11 (March 26) Artificial Intelligence and Facial Recognition. The Internet of Things expands from kitchen appliances to children's toys, all recording information about us, our whereabouts, relationships and preferences. Do the advantages outweigh the drawbacks? "Those sensors don't just talk to you, they talk to the Internet," as Alasdair Allan puts it, in a nutshell, in his essay on privacy and the IoT [in your Canvas folder 11].

12 (April 2) Considering Children, plus a reminder about 'old technology': special consideration that should be given to anything involving children, who are very vulnerable online; separately, a reminder that email is a very delicate medium to wield effectively and ethically.

13 (April 9) Revision

FINAL ASSIGNMENT DUE April 15

As you have seen, there are two Discussions and three Assignments, with progressively higher points ratings. The Discussions are not onerous, and for you to develop your ideas in conversation with your peers on the course, who otherwise you might not meet. There are just a few points for these, but obviously they will help you get top marks if you contribute in a constructive way.

Let us enjoy and widen our knowledge of our world!

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