DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
DIGITAL HUMANITIES
Western University
Philosophy 2078G/Digital Humanities 2126G:

Ethics for a Digital World
Lecture: Tuesdays 3:30 – 4:30
Middlesex College, room 110

Professor: Dr. Ryan Robb rrobb@uwo.ca
Office: Stevenson Hall, 4126
Office Hours: Tuesdays 4:30 – 5:30

DESCRIPTION:

We spend a considerable portion of our lives in the digital world. What moral considerations ought to guide our conduct as digital citizens? This class will engage materials that explore the following sorts of questions: What's the relationship between our virtual identities and our physical identities? How is social media changing our relationships? What are our rights and responsibilities in the digital world? How do we trade off anonymity and accountability? How do we balance copyright claims against demands for open access? Is piracy always wrong? Does a hacker's code of ethics make any sense? How should we respond to sexism, racism, homophobia and other forms of hate and exclusion in online communities? Is cyber bullying worse than other forms of bullying?

MATERIALS:

All the readings for this course will be made available through OWL

Method of Evaluation:

Online Quizzes: 15%
Online Discussion Posts: 30% (three 300 – 500 word posts, worth 10% each)
Online Discussion Participation: 10%
One 1000 – 1250 word term-paper: 20%
Final Exam: 25%

OBJECTIVES:

The primary objective of this course is to help students improve their critical thinking skills. Specifically, students should expect to improve their abilities to track the arguments made in the readings, and respond with arguments of their own in their online discussion posts, their online participation, and their term papers.

The secondary goal of the course is to familiarize students with the dominant attempts by scholars to identify and address the ethical issues that emerge in our increasingly digital lives. This goal will be satisfied by testing student comprehension of the materials with online quizzes, and on the final exam.

In combination, satisfying these two goals should help students recognize, and (hopefully) better respond to, the ethical challenges that arise in their computer use and online interactions.

TENTATIVE TOPIC SCHEDULE:

Unit 1 (Weeks 1 to 3, January 8th – 28th):

Introduction – What is Philosophy (How to write an essay), What is Ethics?

Unit 2 (Weeks 4 and 5, January 29th – February 11th):

Virtual Persons and Virtual Friends

Unit 3 (Weeks 6 and 7, February 12th – March 4th):

Truth, Anonymity, and Privacy in the Digital World

Unit 4 (Weeks 8 and 9, March 5th – 18th):

The Ethics of Open Access, Piracy, and Hacking

Unit 5 (Weeks 10 to 13, March 19th – April 11th):

Big Data, Gender and the Internet, and the Problem of Cyber-Bullying

POLICIES/REGULATIONS:

General – The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

Plagiarism Checking – All submissions are subject to review for textual similarity to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (http://www.turnitin.com)

Late Penalties – Late online discussion posts will be lose 0.5 (out of 10) marks per day for each day they are late; after 19 days (weekends included), a grade of 0 will automatically be recorded. Late term papers (due on Monday, April 9th 2018) will lose 5% (out of 100) for each day they are late. In accord with UWO Senate guidelines, no term papers will be accepted after the last day of classes, i.e., Wednesday, April 11th 2018.

Extensions: **Students are <u>NOT</u>** to contact Professor Robb or their T.A.'s to request an extension for a discussion post, online quiz, or their term paper. Any request for an extension must be taken the student's academic councillor, along with documentation that establishes the legitimacy of the request.

AUDIT:

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

HEALTH:

Students who are in emotional/mental health distress should refer to Mental Health@Western: http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.