

LIS 201

The information society

Fall 2019

MW 2:30-3:45 (lecture), Mosse Humanities Building, Room 1111

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I. Course Overview and Objectives

We live in an information-rich world. We have easy access to the Internet, which allows us to access and spread information across much of the globe almost instantaneously. We have easy access to Global Positioning System (GPS), which allows us to navigate the world based on our precise location. Governments, corporations, health care providers, insurers, employers, and others can (and often do) create relational databases that allow them to understand how we act, work, play, travel, learn, spend, and socialize. We can communicate in a variety of media, about a variety of subjects, with a variety of people, and for a variety of purposes (work, leisure, education, economic, political, criminal, tortious). Machines grow increasingly “intelligent” and can do more and more work that humans used to do. We often hear that such ready access and easy communication are the foundation of our current “information society.” The implication is that information proliferation, ease of access, use, control, and ownership are an inevitable and fundamental feature of our world.

But...so what?

Well, several things. This vast array of information communication technologies (ICTs) has, and will continue to have, profound implications for humans’ well-being. Ways in which ICTs are deployed affect how people exercise fundamental rights, such as free expression (for good and ill). Information and related technologies alter the way democracies function. Information technologies make tenuous long-valued goods, such as privacy. They alter conceptions of ownership and property, and much more. In other words, information and ICTs reflect and affect things of value, and they are therefore morally important. The aim of this course is to examine ways in which information and information technologies function in society and to critically evaluate moral, democratic, and legal questions that arise at the intersection of information and society.

With that in mind, there are three key objectives for this course.

1. Students will understand important social, legal, and historical contexts of information technologies.
2. Students will be able to critically evaluate important moral, political, legal, and social questions that arise in the context of information technologies.
3. Students will be able to research, articulate, and discuss complex issues and arguments surrounding important social, moral, political, and legal questions as they pertain to information and information technologies.

Moreover, this is a Communications B requirement-fulfilling course. One of the most valuable skills you can have is the ability to communicate ideas orally and in writing. It is important as a facet of understanding complex ideas: the ability to communicate ideas is closely related to one’s understanding of those ideas. It is important professionally: research demonstrates again and again that the ability to communicate effectively is important to any employer and organization, and it is a skill that many professionals lack. If you can communicate effectively your opportunities as a professional and as a participant in civic life will be much, much greater.

II. Required Texts

All required readings and course materials will be available via the course's Canvas page.

In addition, you will be required to acquire (either by library loan or purchase) a book for the book review project. You will decide on that book based on research during the semester.

Finally, the other instructors and I will frequently share news items and other readings with you via Canvas. These will help form the background material for lecture and discussion.

III. Assignments, Evaluation, and Grading

How the Credit Hours are Met

This class meets for two 75-minute class periods plus a single discussion session each week over the semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying, etc) for about 3 hours out of the classroom for every class period. The syllabus includes more information about meeting times and expectations for student work.

Your final grade will be based on a combination of quizzes, short writings, presentations, longer papers, and participation, as outlined below.

Participation (10%)

A key component of this course is your regular, active, and thoughtful participation in discussion sections and in lecture. We will not grade on mere attendance during our large lecture meeting. However, we will formally take attendance during discussion and track participation in both lecture and discussion. You will be graded on quality of contributions during both lecture and discussion.

NOTE: Attendance is closely correlated with academic performance, so regardless of participation "points," it is important to show up.

Memos – 10% total (2% each memo)

You will write five short memos (roughly one page, double-spaced, or 300 words) on questions I pose about the course readings. You will use these during discussion sections to work on writing. The first several will go through peer review and then be graded by your TA or instructor.

*You will turn memos in via Canvas **AND** bring a paper copy to discussion section for peer-review.

For more specific instructions, consult the "Memo Assignment Specifics" document (Canvas).

Stories Pertaining to Information and Society (SPINs)—10% total (2.5% each paper, 2.5% each presentation)

Twice during the semester you will be required to find a recent news story about an information society issue, trend, case, technology, law, practice, or related matter, and prepare a summary of the story and its relation to course content in a paper of approximately two pages, completed by the start of your discussion section that week. In addition, you will give a 2.5-minute presentation (timed strictly) describing the story and relating it to the material from the current or next most recent course unit. The news story must have been published no more than *6 months* before the presentation.

* You will turn the SPINs and a .pdf of the news story into the Canvas site **AND** bring a paper copy to class. Presentation weeks will be assigned during the discussion section in week 2.

For more specific instructions, consult the “SPINS Assignment Specifics” document (Canvas).

You will not turn in a memo during the weeks you do a SPIN.

Paper 1 (20%)

Your first paper will consider the development of a new technology or the development of a stable, widely-used technology in light of the conceptions of technological progress we consider in the first part of the course. I will distribute a document outlining in more detail the specifics of paper one via Canvas. The paper will be completed in stages:

- Proposal: Due in discussion section of week 6.
- Initial draft: Due week 7 in Canvas **and** in paper copy in class.
- Paper 1 rewrite: Due week 9 in Canvas **and** in paper copy in class.

Paper 2 (20%)

Your second paper will critically examine a new information or communication technology (ICT), a new use of an ICT, or an information law, practice, or policy of your choosing, based on your own research and on materials covered in class. This can be related to free expression, leaking, surveillance, privacy, intellectual property, automation, or labor. I will distribute a document outlining in more detail the specifics of paper two via Canvas. Like paper 1, it will be completed in stages:

- Draft: Due week 13 in Canvas.
- Peer review: Due week 14 in Canvas.
- Second paper final: Due December 13 in Canvas.

Quizzes (10% total, 2.5% each quiz)

There will be 4 short, multiple-choice/short-answer quizzes. These are designed to be easy for anyone who has kept up with the material (readings, lectures). None is cumulative.

Critical book review (20%)

Your last assignment is a critical book review presentation. I will distribute a document outlining in more detail the specifics of the book review via Canvas. The book presentation will be in the highly-structured “Ignite” format, conducted in discussion sections weeks 12 and 14. You will have the option of pre-recording the presentation.

Grade Scale

A	94 and above
AB	89-93
B	84-88
BC	79-83
C	70-78
D	60-69
F	59 and below

I round to the nearest whole point (hence, 93.5 is rounded to 94 and 93.49 is rounded to 93).

IV. Course Management

Schedule and Due Dates

The memos, SPINs, papers, quizzes, and critical book review dates are fixed; I only allow for extensions for extraordinary and university-approved excuses. The reading schedule, however, is subject to changes. I will announce changes in class and on the course Canvas page.

The penalty for late work is 5% of assignment points per day late.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

McBurney Disability Resource Center syllabus statement: "The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA."

<http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php>

Religious Observance

Any student for whom religious observances conflict with class attendances or mandatory academic requirements should let me know within the first two weeks of class so that we can make appropriate arrangements for make-up work.

Diversity & Inclusion

Institutional statement on diversity: "Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world."

<https://diversity.wisc.edu/>

Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/>

Disruptions

Please avoid disruptions (arriving late, talking in class, texting, reading non-course materials, or packing to leave before the period ends), and please turn off cell phones. I don't grade attendance. Thus, if you'd rather be doing something other than coming to class, you're free to do so.

Contacting the Instructor

I will be in my office during office hours (unless I post a note in advance on Canvas) and you can just drop by. Otherwise, email is the best way to communicate with me. Allow me a day to respond, though I'll generally respond more quickly than that. Please put "LIS 201" and a brief description in the subject line. I get a lot of email, and that will make it easier to see.

Your TAs will have their own communications preferences and office hours, which they will announce during discussion sections.

V. Course Agenda and Readings [v. 9.4.19]

How to read the agenda: Most days there is one scholarly reading (marked with an asterisk (*)) and one or more "popular" or journalistic reading. The scholarly readings will be demanding, and you should spend most of your time/effort on that reading. The popular reading will be easy and serve mostly as an example or illustration of ideas in the scholarly work we examine.

****The reading schedule is always subject to revision.****

Part I: Introduction, Conceptions of Technology, Values in Technology

Week 1: September 4

Introduction: What is this all about?

- Syllabus

No discussion sections.

Week 2: September 9-11

A brief introduction to moral values in technology

For Monday:

- *Edmonds, *Would You Kill the Fat Man*, pp. 1-43
- Halsey, "When driverless cars crash, who gets the blame and pays the damages?"

For Wednesday:

- *Davies, "Rawls' *Theory of Justice*"
- Wu, *The Master Switch: The Rise and Fall of Information Empires* ch. 8 "The Legion of Decency"

Due: Memo

Week 3: September 16-18

Conceptions of technology

For Monday

- *Slack and Wise, "Determinism"

- Carr, “Is Google Making Us Stupid”?

For Wednesday:

- Catch up: no new readings

Due: Memo

Part II: You’ve heard the words “free speech,” but what do they mean?

Week 4: September 23-25

Free expression in an Internet age

For Monday:

- *Warburton, *Free Speech*, Chapter 2
- White, “Don’t Use These Free-Speech Arguments Ever Again”
- *Brandenburg v. Ohio* (Excerpt)
- FBI and DHS Joint Intelligence, “White Supremacist Extremism Poses Persistent Threat of Lethal Violence”

For Wednesday:

- *Feinberg, “The Offense Principle” (**Bring copy—paper or electronic—to lecture.**)
- Gardiner et al, “The Dark Side of Guardian Comments”
- Hess, “Why Women Aren’t Welcome on the Internet”

Due: Memo or SPIN

Week 5: September 30 – October 2

Private power, speech, and privacy

For Monday:

- *Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government* ch. 2
- Hopkins, “Revealed: Facebooks Internal Rulebook on Sex, Terrorism, and Violence”
- Chen, “The Laborers Who Keep Dick Pics and Beheadings out of Your Facebook Feed”

For Wednesday:

- 47 U.S.C. sec. 230 (“Protection for private blocking and screening of offensive material”)
- Llanso, “Clearing Up Misinformation about Section 230”
- McGill and Lippman, “White House drafting executive order...”
- Electronic Frontier Foundation, “Fighting Neo-Nazis and the Future of Free Expression”
- Keller (CIS), “The Daily Stormer, Online Speech, and Internet Registrars”
- Vogel, “Google Critic Ousted from Think Tank Funded by the Tech Giant”

Quiz 1, Wednesday

Due: Memo or SPIN

Part III: Privacy: Who knows what...and who cares?

Week 6: October 7-9

Privacy 1: Government access to information

For Monday:

- *Anita Allen, "Privacy"
- U.S. Constitution, Fourth and Fifth Amendments
- Del Real and Kanno-Youngs, "U.S. Tracked Activists and Journalists as Migrant Caravans Headed to the Border"
- Balko, "Surprise! NSA data will soon routinely be used for domestic policing that has nothing to do with terrorism"

For Wednesday:

- *Solove, "Nothing to Hide"
- Swire, "The Golden Age of Surveillance"
- Ahmed and Periroth "Using Texts as Lures, Government Spyware Targets Mexican Journalists and Their Families"
- Smith, "An iPhone Is an Extension of the Mind"

Due: Memo or SPIN

Due: Paper 1 proposal (in discussion).

Week 7: October 14-16

Privacy 2: Data, and surveillance in a digital age

For Monday:

- *Rubel and Jones, "Student Data and Learning Analytics: An Information Ethics Perspective"
- Shultz, "Why Is This Wearable-Tech Company Helping College Teams Track How Often Athletes Sleep, Drink, And Have Sex?"
- Blue, "Researcher Looks at 'Digital Traces' to Help Students"

For Wednesday:

- *Waldron, "Security and Liberty: The Image of Balance"
- Grush, "A US-Born NASA scientist was detained at the border until he unlocked his phone"
- Norman, "U.S. Unleashes Military to Fight Fake News, Disinformation"
- Howard et al (Computational Propaganda Research Project), "The IRA, Social Media and Political Polarization in the United States, 2012-2018," (executive summary, p. 3)

Due: Paper 1 draft, Wednesday, Oct. 16, 2:30pm (paper AND in Canvas).

Part IV: Security: Of what? For whom?

Week 8: October 21-23

Security

For Monday:

Catch up: No new readings.

For Wednesday:

- Mayers, "Catching a Chinese IP Thief: How the FBI Tracked and Caught Sinovel"
- U.S. Department of Justice, "Court Imposes Maximum Fine on Sinovel Winder Group for Theft of Trade Secrets"

Guest lecture, Oct 23

Josh Mayers

Quiz 2, Monday

No discussion sections: Schedule paper 1 conference with TA.

Part V: Big data, algorithms, and automated decisions...what's all the fuss about?

Week 9: October 28-30

Big Data

For Monday:

- *O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction* (excerpts)
- Angwin, "Machine Bias"
- Liptak, "Sent to Prison by a Software Program's Secret Algorithms"

For Wednesday:

- *Sweeney, "Discrimination in Online Ad Delivery"

Due: Paper 1 final, Wednesday, Oct. 30, 2:30pm (paper AND in Canvas).

Week 10: November 4-6

Algorithms and you...

For Monday:

- *Alfano, Carter, and Cheong, "Technological Seduction and Self-Radicalization"
- Lewis, "'Fiction is outperforming reality': how YouTube's algorithm distorts truth"

For Wednesday:

No new readings. Catch up.

Due: Memo or SPIN.

Week 11: November 11-13

Attention economy/noxious markets

For Monday:

- *Pham and Castro, "Is the Attention Economy Noxious?"

Guest Lecture: Adam Pham

For Wednesday:

- *Meg Leta Jones, [Ctrl+Z] chapter 2
- Google, *Search removal request under data protection law in Europe* ("Right to be Forgotten Form")

Due: Memo or SPIN.

Part VI: Property. What does ownership mean when everything is copy-able?

Week 12: November 18-20

Ownership in an Information Age

For Monday:

- *Spinello, "Intellectual Property in Cyberspace" (cont'd)
- Doctorow, "Tattoo artist asserts copyright over customers' bodies"
- Naughton, "Why American Farmers are Hacking Their Own Tractors"

For Wednesday:

- *Vaidhyathan, "Copyrights and Copywrongs" (excerpts)
- Risen, "When Jack Daniel's Failed to Honor a Slave, an Author Rewrote History"

Quiz 3, Wednesday

Due: critical book review (for some) presentation in discussion section.

Part VII: Automation and labor. It ain't all robots yet.

Week 13: November 25-27 [Thanksgiving... but have class on Wed.]

Automation and labor

For Monday:

- *Sarah Roberts, *Behind the Screen* (excerpt)
- Taylor, *Principles of Scientific Management*, pp. 5-14
- Parenti, "Big Brother's Corporate Cousin"

For Wednesday:

- Screening “Citizen Four”

Due: Paper 2 draft (Canvas).

No discussion sections.

Week 14: December 2-4

Automation and labor

For Monday:

- Scheiber, “How Uber Uses Psychological Tricks to Push Its Drivers’ Buttons”
- Dvoskin and Timberg, “Justice Department Opens Criminal Probe Into Uber”
- Isaac, “How Uber Deceives the Authorities Worldwide”

For Wednesday

No new readings. Catch up.

Due: critical book review (for some) presentation in discussion section.

Due: Paper 2 peer review (Canvas).

Week 15: December 9-11

Review and summary, student presentations

Quiz 4, Monday or Wednesday

No discussion sections.

Exam week: December 13

Due: Second paper, final version (Canvas only).