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CSCI 315E.01: Computers, Ethics, and Society

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CSCI 315E

Instructors:

Dr. Rob Smith
robert.smith@mso.umt.edu
Please email for appointment.

SS 413
Office hours: MF 3:30-4pm, W 2-3pm.

TA

N/A

Learning outcomes:

This course introduces the basics of ethical reasoning and argumentation as a basis for understanding the ethical dilemmas faced by computer scientists. The course introduces students to the professional code of ethics used by computer scientists, legal issues involved in technology, and the social implications of computers, computing, and other digital technologies.

During this class, you will:

- Understand, identify, and apply different ethical philosophies, frameworks, and methodologies.
- Identify and interpret the codes of professional conduct relating to the disciplines of computer science and software engineering.
- Analyze the local and global impact of computing on individuals, organizations, and society.
- Understand and apply the concepts and principles of moral thinking to problems relating to computing and digital technologies.
- Improve your skills writing argumentative essays and pieces, and in critical thinking, analysis, and presentation.
- Become familiar with the field of cyberethics.

This class also satisfies the [UM upper-division writing requirement](#), [ethics and human values requirement](#), and [Computer Science major requirement](#).

Tentative schedule:

WEEK	Lecture	Due Sunday @ 11:59pm
Aug 30 – Sep 3	Truth and reality	1a
Sep 6 – Sep 10	Beliefs and observations	1b
Sep 13 – Sep 17	Accuracy, honesty, opinions	1c

Sep 20 – Sep 24	Ethics and morality	2a
Sep 27 – Oct 1	Principles	2b
Oct 4 – Oct 8	Catch up	2c
Oct 11 – Oct 15	Critical thinking, logical fallacies, human bias, counterfeit reasoning	3a
Oct 18 – Oct 22	Case study: Ethics in data mining.	3b
Oct 25 – Oct 29	Case study: Automation, complexity, and unemployment	3c
Nov 1 – Nov 5	Case study: Automation, complexity, and unemployment	4a
Nov 8 – Nov 12	Case study: Automation, complexity, and unemployment	4b
Nov 15 – Nov 19	Case study: Diversity in tech	4c
Nov 22 – Nov 26	Case study: Intellectual property in tech	
Nov 29 – Dec 3	Case study: Ethics of use of technology you create	5c

Grades:

Lecture attendance (40%)

9 Essays, weighted by page length (60%) **No late submissions.**

Meetings:

This class will be offered face to face only. Dual modality instruction (face to face and remote) exceeds the 'reasonable accommodations' specified by the Americans with Disabilities Act because working with the technology to accommodate remote learning during class seriously degrades the experience of face to face students. As a result, no accommodations will be made for remote learners. If a student has a documented need for a quiet examination space, they must use the facilities provided by DSS. No alternatives for test taking will be permitted.

Text Book:

None. Here are related books I can recommend for personal enrichment: *Asking the Right Questions* by Browne and Keeley, *Rise of the Robots* by Martin Ford, and *Principles* by Ray Dalio.

Cheating:

For the purposes of this course, cheating is defined as passing off the work of others as your own. Any form of collusion or dishonesty, as interpreted by instructors, will be prosecuted to the full extent allowable by University standards and may result in an automatic failing grade in the course.

Incompletes and Late Drops:

The university empowers instructors with discretion to approve incompletes or late drops (dropping the course after 45 days). I will not approve either as a means of avoiding a low grade or as a means of protesting course policies. Valid reasons include family emergencies, work complications, or registration issues, but I reserve the right of approval on a case-by-case basis.

Disabilities:

Eligible students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course when requested in a timely way. Please contact us after class or in one of our offices. Please be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator. For more information, visit the Disability Services website at <http://life.umt.edu/dss/>.

Changes to Syllabi:

The instructors reserve the right to modify syllabi and assignments as needed based on faculty, student, and/or environmental circumstances. If changes are made to the syllabus, amended copies will be dated and made available to the class.

Grading Scale:

A 93-100; A- 90-92; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C- 70-72; D+ 67-69; D 63-66; D- 60-62; F < 60.

COVID Addendum:

The university has policy on meeting, masks, distancing, etc. Please read at umt.edu/coronavirus/

Essay Instructions

Submit all essays **AS A .docx** in an email to me with the assignment name as the subject line. The first two lines of your document should be your name (right justified) and the assignment title (centered) as the first two lines of the document. Please make assignments single-spaced, 11 or 12 pt font. All essays will be graded using the rubric that follows these instructions.

For each assignment:

- a) Email to me and to a peer reviewer in class (assigned in class). You will get full points for submitting an assignment of the correct length that is made in good faith on the assigned topic (e.g., Lorem Ipsum will get you a zero).
- b) Email your peer review feedback to the writer, and cc me in the email. Mark up your classmate's paper as if you were grading it. Use the rubric and also make corrections on the paper. For this assignment the grading rubric is: 100 – Engaged and useful feedback; 70 – Useful feedback; 30 – Submitted something; 0 – Submitted nothing.
- c) Email your final copy to me for grading. You can choose to implement your peer feedback or not.

Essay 1 – Complexity in the modern world.

Length: 2 pages.

Topic: Take time to consider what complexity is and how it manifests in the modern world. Cogently write your synopsis of the topic, explaining how it affects and will affect your life, and what steps you will take to make the most of it.

Essay 2 – Good and bad.

Length: 4 pages.

Topic: Given the aspects of this topic discussed in class, your personal experiences, and any additional study you have conducted: What does good mean? What does bad mean? What is the process of discerning if something is good or bad? Does the qualification change from person to person? If so, how and why? If not, why not? Make a rational argument for anything you propose.

Essay 3 – A system of ethics.

Length: 4 pages.

Topic: In your own words, describe a cohesive framework relating your idea of the concepts of truth, reality, beliefs, and ethics. Your framework should include an explanation of why the study and application of ethics matters. NOTE: Your ideas of these concepts do NOT have to coincide with viewpoints shared in class.

Essay 4 – Consequences and technology.

Length: 5 pages.

Topic: Explore the relationship between technology and consequences within an ethical framework. What opportunities does technology provide for modified consequences? Are these modifications good, bad, or does it depend? What are the short and long term effects? Choose specific examples to illustrate your points.

Essay 5 – Technology: good or bad?

Length: 5 pages

Topic: In 1995, Ted Kaczynski wrote a manifesto on the effects of technology on modern society which was published in the Washington Post as a result of his sending mail bombs across the country. Read the essay here: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/unabomber/manifesto.text.htm>. The essay contains an overarching point as well as many contributing premises, each with their own arguments. Provide an introduction that summarizes his main conclusion and succinctly lists his subpremises, then spend one paragraph on each of several specific arguments you are interested in supporting or refuting. Summarize your thoughts in a concluding paragraph. There is no set number of paragraphs for this assignment; You can either deeply analyze a few points, or shallowly analyze many. Freely pull from ideas explored in this class, experiences and observations from your own life, or current events.

Writing Rubric:

Engagement - 20

20 - I would pay to read this.

10 - I would read this if it were free.

0 - I would read this if I were forced to.

Support and evidence - 50

50 - Ideas supported sufficiently; Support is sound, valid, and logical.

35 - Main points and ideas are only indirectly supported; support isn't sufficient or specific.

20 - Insufficient, non-specific, and/or irrelevant support.

0 - Clear absence of support for main points.

Structure and organization - 15

15 - Organization is sequential and appropriate; paragraphs are well developed and appropriately divided; ideas linked with smooth and effective transitions.

10 - Competent organization without sophistication.

0 - Organization was insufficiently present.

Grammar and vocabulary - 15

15 - Exceptional range, accuracy, punctuation, spelling, etc.

10 - Competent range, accuracy, punctuation, spelling, etc.

0 - Communication is inhibited due to grammar and vocabulary.