

Data Ethics in Social Media

Spring 2024

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Course Description

From sharing our life experiences to reading the news, social media permeates our daily lives. It affects how we communicate, what we buy, and who we vote for. It also generates an immense amount of data, which is eagerly collected by individuals, corporations, and governments. In this course we will investigate some of the threats (and promises) of this data. We will ask questions like: What is the value of privacy online, and how might it be protected? Are we being manipulated by algorithms? Are the algorithms that generate and moderate content biased? What are some of the ways online data can be used for good? Students will investigate these questions through practical and theoretical approaches. Course materials will be drawn from diverse sources including philosophy, data science, sociology, legal theory, and the Internet. Visiting speakers will enrich our discussion by offering academic and professional perspectives on the uses and misuses of data.

This course will be partly student-led. There will be flexibility for incorporating topics of student interest, and students will give two group presentations on topics of their choice. There will be several visiting speakers during the semester. Students will be required to attend these events, which will also be open to the public.

Learning Outcomes

1. Develop an understanding of some central concepts and theories in contemporary data ethics, how they interrelate, and how they might apply to social issues.
2. Gain the philosophical skills to critically evaluate these theories, construct arguments, and identify potential contributions.
3. Produce philosophical writing that meets the field of philosophy's expectations regarding clarity, argument, and citation practices.

Course Materials

All course readings will be available on the course webpage.

For writing guidelines, please consult:

Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"
<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Williams and Bizup, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, 11th Edition, (other editions acceptable as well)

Assignments

- Weekly reflections: Each week you will write a short reflection on the reading, worth 40% of your grade in total. These will be graded as *full credit*, *half credit*, or *no credit*.
- Presentations There will be two rounds of in-class presentations, worth 15% of your grade each.
- Final paper: A final paper that builds on you weekly reflections (5 pages), **due during finals week** and worth 30% of your grade.

Weekly reflections:

By **noon each Wednesday** you will submit a 200–300 word reflection through Moodle on that week's readings. Your reflection should either identify something you found **interesting** in the reading (and explain why you found it interesting, perhaps connecting it to your own life or other courses you've taken) or something you found **confusing** (and explain why you found it confusing, with an attempt to make sense of what the author might mean).

Grading Policies

1. Attendance is expected.
2. The grading standard for this course is that a "B" reflects a minimal but satisfactory engagement with the material of the course. Anything above a "B" will reflect the quality of work submitted by the student.
3. Extensions can be granted on assignments, but you should ask at least a day in advance. If you do not make arrangements beforehand, late papers will be downgraded by 1/3 letter grade per day.

Technology in the Classroom

Please minimize your technology use in the classroom. Students should take notes using a notebook and either bring the readings printed to class or consult their notes. If you choose to use a laptop, please disable your wifi during class. **Please refrain from looking**

at your phone during class. If you need an exception to this policy for person reasons, please let me know before class by email or in person.

If you are a student with a disability that has a technology accommodation, please let me know as soon as possible.

Accessibility

Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Access Services. Students can call 610-526-7516 to make an appointment with the Director of Access Services, Deb Alder, or email her at dalder@brynmawr.edu to begin this confidential process. Once registered, students should schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible to share the verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website. (<http://www.brynmawr.edu/access-services/>)

Any student who has a disability-related need to record this class first must speak with the Director of Access Services and to me, the instructor. Class members need to be aware that this class may be recorded.

Title IX

Bryn Mawr/Haverford College is committed to fostering a safe and inclusive living and learning environment where all can feel secure and free from harassment. All forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic violence, and dating violence are violations of Bryn Mawr/Haverford's policies, whether they occur on or off campus. Bryn Mawr/Haverford faculty are committed to helping to create a safe learning environment for all students and for the College community as a whole. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination, harassment, or violence, know that help and support are available. Staff members are trained to support students in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more.

The College strongly encourages all students to report any incidents of sexual misconduct. Please be aware that all Bryn Mawr/Haverford employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors, clergy, and healthcare providers) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the Bi-College Title IX Coordinator.

Information about the Colleges Sexual Misconduct policy, reporting options, and a list of campus and local resources can be found on the Colleges website:

<https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/policies-guidelines-handbooks/title-ix>

Notes on Academic Integrity

I regard plagiarism as a very serious matter. In this class, plagiarism consists of work taken partially or entirely from an uncited source (online content, a peer, a published article, etc.) and assumed as your own. Any use of AI to write for you is also considered plagiarism and is easily detectable. If I have reasons to suspect plagiarizing, I will ask that you report yourself to the Bryn Mawr Honor Board. See the Bryn Mawr Honor Code and Honor Board Hearing Process in the Student Handbook for more information.

Tentative Schedule of Readings

Note: Please complete the reading and be prepared to discuss on the day it is listed.

Week 1: Introduction

Monday

No reading; Introduction to course

Wednesday

1. Russ Schafer-Landau, Introduction to *The Fundamentals of Ethics*
2. Perry et al, “Logical Toolkit”

Week 2: Privacy

Monday

1. James Rachels, “Why Privacy Is Important”
2. Jon Keegan and Alfred Ng (*The Markup*), “Gay/Bi Dating App, Muslim Prayer Apps Sold Data on People’s Location to a Controversial Data Broker”

Wednesday

1. Julia Angwin, “What They Know... Now: The surveillance economy is getting creepier and more personal”
2. Try out the Electronic Frontier Foundation’s “Cover Your Tracks” tool at <https://coveryourtracks.eff.org/>

Week 3: Privacy and Authenticity

Monday

1. Andrei Marmor, “Privacy and Social Media”

Wednesday

1. Erica R. Bailey, Sandra C. Matz, Wu Youyou, and Sheena S. Iyengar, “Authentic self-expression on social media is associated with greater subjective well-being”
2. Somogy Varga, “Authenticity”

Week 4: Privacy and Doxing

Monday

1. David M. Douglas, “Doxing: A Conceptual Analysis”
2. Bella Rios, “Doxxing or Due Diligence?” (Case Study)

Wednesday

1. Emma Betuel (for The Markup), “Should Doxing Be Illegal?”
2. Vegas Tenold, “To Doxx a Racist”

Week 5: Manipulation

Monday

1. Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, Chapters 11 and 12
2. Rae Langton, “Duty and Desolation”

Wednesday

1. Zeynep Tufekci (MIT Technology Review), “How social media took us from Tahrir Square to Donald Trump”
2. Leon Yin and Alfred Ng (*The Markup*), “Facebook Said It Would Stop Pushing Users to Join Partisan Political Groups. It Didn’t”
3. By Robinson Meyer (*The Atlantic*), “Everything We Know About Facebook’s Secret Mood-Manipulation Experiment”

Week 6: Manipulation and Gamification

Monday

1. C. Thi Nguyen, “How Twitter Gamifies Communication”
2. Thomas Davidson, “Audience Engagement and the Dynamics of Online Activism: Far-right Mobilization on Facebook”

Wednesday

1. Harris, T. “How Technology Hijacks Peoples Minds”
2. James Grimmelman, “The Platform is the Message” Georgetown Law Technology Review

Week 7: Presentations

Monday In-class presentations

Wednesday In-class presentations

Week 8: Spring break

Have a nice break!

Week 9: Bias

Monday

1. Louise Antony, “Bias: Friend or Foe?” Excerpt

Wednesday

1. Batya Friedman and Helen Nissenbaum, Excerpt from “Bias in Computer Systems”
2. Optional: Buolamwini, Joy, and Timnit Gebru. 2018. “Gender Shades: Intersectional Accuracy Disparities in Commercial Gender Classification.” In Proceedings of Machine Learning Research, 81:1–15.

Week 10: Memes and Race

Monday

1. Aria Dean, “Poor Meme, Rich Meme”
2. Manuel Arturo Abreu, “Online Imagined Black English”

Wednesday

1. Jess Kung for NPR’s Code Switch, “What internet outrage reveals about race and TikTok’s algorithm”

Week 11: Justice and Fairness

Monday

1. Excerpts from Nozick and Rawls

Wednesday

Anna Lauren Hoffman, “Where fairness fails: data, algorithms, and the limits of antidiscrimination discourse”

Week 12: Echo Chambers and Trust in Others

Monday

1. C. Thi Nguyen, “Escape the echo chamber” (Aeon)

Wednesday

1. Karen Frost-Arnold, “Social Media, Trust, and the Epistemology of Prejudice”

Week 13: Speech moderation on social media

Monday

1. The *Harper’s* “A Letter on Justice and Debate”
2. Mark Bray, “So Much for the Tolerant Left!': ‘No Platform’ and Free Speech”

Wednesday

1. Natasha Uzcátegui-Liggett and Tomas Apodaca (The Markup), “Demoted, Deleted, and Denied: There’s More Than Just Shadowbanning on Instagram”
2. Alexandra Schofield and Thomas Davidson, “Identifying Hate Speech in Social Media”
3. OPTIONAL: Thomas Davidson et al, “Automated Hate Speech Detection and the Problem of Offensive Language”

Week 14: TBD (Topic of student interest)

Monday

TBD

Wednesday

TBD

Week 15: Presentations

Monday In-class presentations

Wednesday In-class presentations