TEXAS
The University of Texas at Austin

I 303: Ethical Foundations for Informatics

28525, 28530, 28535, 28540

Spring 2026

CLASS MEETS: Plenary: Asynchronous, online via Canvas; Sections: Fridays, 10-11 am or 11 am – 12 pm

Instructor: Dr. Kenneth R. Fleischmann (Ken)
Pronouns: he/him/his
Email: kfleisch@ischool.utexas.edu

Course Description

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Survey the ethical foundations for informatics, incorporating non-Western and feminist perspectives. Apply these ethical foundations to contemporary problems in informatics. Examine confrontation of ethical dilemmas in the workplace, including recognizing value trade-offs, affected stakeholders, and potential solutions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Gain awareness of a wide range of ethical theories and how they apply to key problems in informatics
2. Learn how to identify ethical challenges in informatics and how to consider diverse perspectives
3. Improve your ability to articulate your own values and to understand and appreciate others' values

TEXAS
The University of Texas at Austin

How Will You Learn?

STATEMENT OF LEARNING SUCCESS

- You will learn from the readings, which will cover ethical approaches and their application to informatics
- You will learn from the asynchronous online videos, which will cover course content via multiple formats
- You will learn from the online quizzes, which will allow you to reflect on your learning from the videos
- You will learn from the class discussions, which will cover reading topics as well as academic writing
- You will learn from the ethical dilemma paper by exploring an informatics issue from multiple perspectives

TEACHING MODALITY AND KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Each week, you will need to complete assigned readings, quizzes, and videos prior to the section meeting
- Each week, you will attend a section meeting to discuss the topic for the week as well as the writing studio
- Over the semester, you will iteratively develop an ethical dilemma paper with instructor and peer feedback
- Please make sure to complete all readings/quizzes/videos prior to class and all assignments by the deadlines
- Please make sure to come into class discussions with an open mind, and to develop your own perspectives
- Please make sure to be respectful during all class discussions, and to appreciate others' perspectives
- Please be prepared to give, receive, and address constructive feedback on the ethical dilemma paper

COMMUNICATION

The course Canvas site can be found at utexas.instructure.com. Please email us through Canvas. You are responsible for ensuring that the primary email address you have recorded with the university is the one you will check for course communications because that is the email address that Canvas uses.

ASKING FOR HELP

Please email both the lead and section instructors via Canvas if you have any questions or need any help.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES

For a list of important university policies and helpful resources that you may need as you engage with and navigate your courses and the university, see the University Policies and Resources Students Canvas page. The page includes the language of the University Honor Code, Title IX legal requirements for Texas employees, and information about how to receive support through the office of Disability & Access.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

All course materials (readings, videos, quizzes, and assignments) will be available via the course Canvas site.

REQUIRED DEVICES

You need to have access to high-speed internet and a suitable device to view videos and complete assignments.

TEXAS
The University of Texas at Austin

Course Requirements and Grading

CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS

Class attendance Because the vast majority of the learning in this class will occur in the classroom and via Canvas, you are required to attend class regularly and to complete all Canvas assignments including all videos. Attendance will be taken during each class period. Absences will only be excused in situations following university policy (illness, family emergency, religious holy days, participation in University activities at the request of university authorities, and compelling absences beyond your control) with proper documentation and timely notification (prior to class for non-emergencies). Excessive tardiness may be considered as an unexcused absence except in situations following university policy.

Class participation Class participation is a critical element of this course. The effectiveness of the course will be significantly impacted by the quality of your participation. Class participation is not merely attendance, but rather factors in your overall contributions to the collaborative learning environment, based on both the quantity and quality of your interactions in all aspects of the course. Discussion of class participation with the instructor is encouraged in order to ensure that you are making the most of the classroom experience and the accompanying opportunities for learning. You are expected to participate in all aspects of class discussion. You should come to class prepared to discuss the required readings, as well as your perspectives on these readings. You should strive for balance in your contributions, and your participation will not be based on who speaks the loudest or the longest, but on consistent participation of significant quantity and, most importantly, quality.

Behavior expectations Creating and maintaining a learning environment that accommodates and includes a diverse range of learners and learning styles is an important shared responsibility. Our class relies upon having open and supportive dialog. As such, we have a zero-tolerance policy toward any kind of personal attacks, discrimination, or hate speech. Please contribute to the shared responsibility to create an environment that is open and welcoming to everyone, and which helps everyone to be respected and appreciated.

Professional Standards Learning to cite sources appropriately is an important part of becoming a professional. When you are unsure about citation, you are encouraged to ask your instructor what is appropriate in the context of your assignment. Consultants at The University Writing Center can also help you determine whether you are citing sources correctly—and they have many helpful guides online. Reviewing those skills will help you feel confident that you are handling sources professionally in your writing. Plagiarism is a serious form of academic dishonesty that can result in severe penalties. Depending on the circumstances and severity, plagiarism may result in not getting credit for the assignment, or for the course. You can read the University's definition of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty in Sec. 11–401 of the Student Conduct Code.

Plagiarism Detection Software

All assignments in this course may be processed by TurnItIn, a tool that compares submitted material to an archived database of published work to check for potential plagiarism. Other methods may also be used to determine if a paper is the student's original work. Regardless of the results of any TurnItIn submission, the instructors will make the final determination as to whether or not a paper has been plagiarized.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The creation of artificial intelligence tools for widespread use is an exciting innovation. These tools have both appropriate and inappropriate uses in classwork. The use of artificial intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT) in this class is limited to ideation. Just as copying and pasting from Wikipedia is plagiarism and a violation of the Student Code of Conduct (representing the work of others as one's own work), direct use of verbatim text from any artificial intelligence tool is also representing the work of others as one's own work and a violation of the Student Code of Conduct. Like Wikipedia, ChatGPT is a great way to start the ideation phase of a project, and an unacceptable way to generate text for a paper. If you use ChatGPT or any similar AI-based tools, please write a note explaining which tool you used and how and stating you did not directly use any text generated by the tool.

DEADLINES AND LATE WORK

Discussion questions are due by Wednesday. Online quizzes and components of the ethical dilemma paper are due by Thursday. Late assignments will be assessed a late penalty of ten points per day beyond the specified deadline (except in extraordinary circumstances such as severe and unavoidable technical difficulties (e.g., documented internet outage) or emergency situations (e.g., documented illness)). We will allow each student to drop your lowest Discussion Question and Quiz grades from your overall average at the end of the semester.

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment 1: Attendance and Participation

Your attendance and class participation grade will be calculated by multiplying the numerical assessment of your class participation by the percentage of classes that you attend (with exceptions for documented, university-recognized absences). Please note that regular attendance and active participation in each class session are critical for receiving a good grade in this course. For example, by actively participating in each class, you will receive a full letter grade higher than if you were to skip half of the classes or to be half-awake for every class.

Assignment 2: Online Quizzes

Plenary content for the course will be delivered asynchronously, online, allowing you to access the content at a time and location of your choosing. To measure your attendance and participation in the online plenary content, as well as to evaluate your attentiveness to and understanding of the course content, most videos will include embedded quizzes that will evaluate your comprehension of the content covered in the video. These are not designed to be trick questions, but rather should be fairly straightforward and easy to complete if you have been paying careful attention to the video and completing the class readings. Please make sure to completely watch all videos prior to the corresponding class meeting, and to answer all quiz questions embedded in videos.

Assignment 3: Discussion Questions

Each week, you will prepare and submit to Canvas a discussion question about the assigned reading for that week. The discussion question should be focused on either or both of the required readings and should make it clear that you have read and thought about the assigned material. Your instructor will select a few of the discussion questions to guide the discussion of the week's readings in the discussion section. Discussion questions are an opportunity for you to bring your own particular point of view and interests to the material we

cover in class, and you are encouraged to connect the material to current events and prior learning both in this class and other courses you may have taken. Discussion questions should be conversation starters. It might help for you to look for an idea or assertion in the reading that you found interesting and would like to talk to your peers about in class. Discussion questions should invite an interesting conversation, not just end in a simple yes or no answer.

Assignment 4: Ethical Dilemma Paper

Throughout the semester, you will choose an informatics ethical dilemma and apply three ethical perspectives covered in the class to explore potential solutions to your selected dilemma. You are required to apply readings from the course as well as readings from outside of the course. We will devote approximately half of the class time each week to collectively brainstorming how to develop and improve everyone's papers. You are ultimately responsible for your own paper, but there will be many opportunities to get formal and informal feedback on your ideas and writing. Please take full advantage of this mini writing studio component.

(a) *Paper Proposal*: Your paper proposal must include the proposed **title** of your paper as well as a one-page description of the **informatics ethical dilemma**. At this stage, you are not required to have settled on your ethical theories yet. Please make sure to include your **strategy for finding appropriate outside readings**. Paper proposals will be graded according to the following criteria: suitability of the dilemma, creativity of the dilemma, and appropriateness of the plan for finding outside readings.

(b) *Paper Outline*: Your paper outline will typically include **bulleted lists**, filling in as much detail as you have ready at this point, and **incorporating feedback from the paper proposal**. Your paper must be broken into sections, and you need to include your three planned ethical theories as part of your paper outline. You also need to include a list of at least **10** potentially relevant references, including at least **5** references that are peer-reviewed journal articles, refereed conference proceedings papers, or academic books or book chapters from beyond the course syllabus. Citations must follow APA Style (there are many useful online resources available; we recommend: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/). Paper outlines will be graded according to the following criteria: suitability of the dilemma, suitability of the ethical theories, clarity of the plan; appropriateness of the plan; and appropriateness of the references.

(c) *Paper Rough Draft*: Your rough draft must be at least a **half-complete version of your final paper** and must **incorporate feedback from the proposal and outline**. You may choose to what extent and in what ways you develop the paper; for example, you can provide the first half of the paper, or half of each section of the paper. The more complete your rough draft is, the more useful the feedback you receive from the instructor and your peers will be. The rough draft should be **1,000-2,500 words**. You must cite at least **10** sources, including at least **5** outside scholarly readings, and **all citations must follow APA Style**. Paper rough drafts will be graded according to the following criteria: clarity of the dilemma, quality of the analysis, suitability of the writing, creativity of the writing, and overall coherence and clarity of writing.

(d) *Peer Reviews of Rough Drafts*: You will be selected to peer review two papers written by peers. Please prepare one-page reviews of each paper, including a brief summary of the purpose and content of the paper as you understood it, the strengths of the paper, and constructive feedback on how to improve it. Peer reviews will be graded according to the following criteria: clarity, insightfulness, and helpfulness.

(e) *Final Presentation*: You will record a **5**-minute (+/- 1 minute) presentation of your paper using **Panopto**. You should use a visual aid (e.g., PowerPoint, Prezi, Keynote). Presentations will be graded according to the following criteria: clarity of the dilemma, quality of the analysis, conclusion, quality of visual presentation, and quality of oral presentation. Prior to the final class meeting, you will watch all of your classmates' presentations and come to class prepared to discuss each of them. Each student in the class will be assigned a "Secret Socrates" who will ask you a question about your video during class in a "lightning round" style.

(f) *Final Paper*: Your final paper must incorporate feedback from all previous stages of the paper development. Your paper must be complete, coherent, and easy to read. Please make sure to proofread your paper thoroughly prior to submission. The final paper should be **2,000-2,500 words**. You must cite at least **20** sources, including at least **10** outside scholarly readings, and **all citations must follow APA Style**. The final paper will be graded according to the following criteria: clarity of the dilemma, quality of the analysis, conclusion, suitability of the writing, creativity of the writing, and overall coherence and clarity of writing.

GRADING FOR THIS COURSE

The following table represents how you will demonstrate and how we will assess your learning.

Assignments	Percent of Total Grade	
1. Attendance and Participation	20%	
2. Online Quizzes	20%	
3. Discussion Questions	10%	
4. Ethical Dilemma Paper	50%	
a. Paper Proposal		(5%)
b. Paper Outline		(5%)
c. Paper Rough Draft		(10%)
d. Peer Reviews		(5%)
e. Final Presentation		(10%)
f. Final Paper		(15%)

GRADING

Grades for essays, quizzes, participation, and weekly discussions will be posted in Canvas. It usually takes us one week to finish grading each assignment that was submitted by the deadline, with larger assignments graded within two weeks. Please let us know if you have any questions.

GRADING POLICY

Grades will be assigned based on the following grade cutoffs. All informatics majors must earn a grade of at least a C- or higher to fulfill the requirement. Students earning a D+ or lower will be required to retake the course.

GRADE CUTOFFS

Required for Informatics majors

TEXAS
The University of Texas at Austin

Course Outline

All instructions, assignments, readings, rubrics and essential information will be on the Canvas website at utexas.instructure.com. Check Canvas regularly. **Changes** to the schedule may be made at our discretion if circumstances require. We will announce any such changes in class and we will also communicate them via a Canvas announcement. It is your responsibility to note these changes when announced, and we will do our best to ensure that you are notified of changes with as much advance notice as possible.

Week	Class Meeting	Class Topic	Out of Class Activities	Assignments Due
1	1/17/25	Introduction Choosing an Ethical Dilemma	Class Syllabus	Attendance & Participation (AP)
Unit 1: Ethical Foundations				
2	1/24/25	Hindu Ethics and Classical Chinese Ethics Writing a Paper Proposal	Readings Videos	Discussion Questions (DQs) Quizzes AP
3	1/31/25	Buddhist Ethics and Islamic Ethics Peer Feedback on Proposals	Readings Videos	DQs Quizzes **Proposal** AP
4	2/7/25	Kantian Ethics and Consequentialism Organizing a Paper	Readings Videos	DQs Quizzes AP
5	2/14/25	Distributive Justice and Virtue Ethics Searching for Literature	Readings Videos	DQs Quizzes AP
6	2/21/25	Ethics of Care and Ubuntu Peer Feedback on Outlines	Readings Videos	DQs Quizzes **Outline** AP
7	2/28/25	Codes of Ethics and Professional Conduct Considering Ethical Dilemmas	Readings Videos	DQs Quizzes AP

Unit 2: Applying Ethical Theories to Informatics				
8	3/7/25	Intellectual Property Applying Ethical Theories	Readings Videos	DQs Quizzes AP
9	3/14/25	Privacy Drawing Conclusions	Readings Videos	DQs Quizzes AP
10	3/28/25	Security Writing Peer Reviews	Readings Videos	DQs Quizzes **Rough Draft** AP
11	4/4/25	Digital Inequity Peer Feedback on Drafts & Revising Based on Feedback	Readings Videos	DQs Quizzes **Peer Reviews** AP
12	4/11/25	Algorithmic Bias Giving a Presentation	Readings Videos	DQs Quizzes AP
13	4/18/25	Research Ethics Finishing the Paper	Readings Videos	DQs Quizzes **Presentations** AP
Unit 3: Final Presentations				
14	4/25/25	Discuss Final Presentations	Watch Presentations	**Final Paper** AP