

Computer Ethics

PHIL 3050X/CSCS 3050 – Spring 2024

Course Numbers: PHIL 3050x/CSCI 3050

Location: Beracha Hall 221

Pre-/Co-requisite: PHIL 2050

Credit(s): 3 Credits

Sections and Meeting Times:

Sec. 01 TTh 12:45–2pm

Sec. 02 TTh 2:15–3:30pm

Instructor: Chris Holland

Office Hours: By appointment

Email: christopher.holland@slu.edu

Zoom: <https://slu.zoom.us/my/clholland>

Course Websites:

<https://chrislholland.com/phil3050x/>

<https://canvas.slu.edu/>

Disclaimer

Everything on this syllabus is subject to change at my discretion. I will provide timely warnings for major changes.

1 Course Description

This course examines the moral, legal, and social issues raised by computers and electronic information technologies for different stakeholder groups (professionals, users, businesses, etc.). Students are expected to integrate moral theories and social analysis to address such issues as intellectual property, security, privacy, discrimination, globalization, and community.

2 Course Goals

To be able to analyze computing technologies for morally problematic issues and develop ethical arguments for the acceptability/unacceptability of these taking all stakeholders into account.

2.1 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- Analyze the impact of new technologies on society through the lens of human dignity and justice
- Use tools of moral disclosure and issue definition to identify moral issues raised by new digital technologies including those that affect power relationships and subject some to vulnerability and disadvantage
- Describe the ways that the ethics of respect, virtue ethics, and consequentialism can contribute to moral disclosure and cyberethical evaluation
- Compare the ways in which technologies create opportunities and impediments for well-being or flourishing in order to critically evaluate current technologies and to imagine new opportunities for creating a just society

- Evaluate whether technologies are consonant with the common good
- Articulate objections and relevant considerations posed by perspectives other than their own,
- Fashion their arguments to have broad appeal across perspectives so that each stakeholder in a technology is accorded human dignity
- Construct cogent moral arguments based on research into cyberpractices, using the framework developed in the course
- Demonstrate a good faith ability to contribute to the class as a community of inquiry

2.2 Dignity, Ethics, and a Just Society

This course is part of the Saint Louis University Core, an integrated intellectual experience completed by all baccalaureate students, regardless of major, program, college, school or campus. The Core offers all SLU students the same unified approach to Jesuit education guided by SLU's institutional mission and identity and our nine undergraduate Core Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs).

Dignity, Ethics, and a Just Society is one of 19 Core Components. The Core SLO(s) that this component is designed to intentionally advance are:

- SLO 1: Examine their actions and vocations in dialogue with the Catholic, Jesuit tradition
- SLO 3: Assess evidence and draw reasoned conclusions
- SLO 7: Evaluate the extent to which social systems influence equity and reflect innate human dignity

Component-level Student Learning Outcomes Students who complete this course will be able to:

- Analyze the cultural-institutional conditions and causes of just and unjust social systems using such concepts as social location, relationships, power, privilege, and vulnerability
- Apply such ethical concepts as human dignity, equity, well-being, justice, and the common good to critically evaluate both existing social systems and proposals for social change
- Envision and articulate systemic social changes and other ways to promote flourishing, well-being, equity, justice, and the dignity of the human person

3 Required Materials

All Required Materials will be available on-line via Perusall.

4 Major Topics

The course will be broken into a few units:

- Professional ethics and issue identification
- Application of normative ethics to computer ethics
- A dialogical approach to addressing cyberethical practices
- Defining and applying moral concepts
- Group projects and individual papers

5 Evaluation and Grading

5.1 Overview

For the first half of the course, your primary out-of-class activities will involve preparation for the next class meeting. During the second half of the course you will also be working on a group project and a final paper.

1. **Prior to class:**

- *Perusall readings.* These readings will be from *Cogent Cyberethics* by William Rehg and other materials provided by the instructor. These readings are the primary course content on computer ethics and our method for analyzing moral issues that arise in the use of computing technology. To be prepared for class, you need to go through these readings carefully as they will be the basis for what we will be doing in class.
- All course readings will be available on Perusall. As part of the reading assignment, you can discuss the readings on-line and ask questions of your classmates. To receive full credit for the readings you must actively participate in the discussion.
- *Occasional Homework Assignments.* E.g., Reflection Papers, Podcast Summaries

2. **During class:** Class time will be devoted to achieving a higher level of understanding of the materials and developing skills in ethical argumentation through examining case studies. We will be doing a variety of discussions, individual and group work during class to work towards our goals. It is imperative that you come to class prepared to fully engage the material.

3. **Exams:** We will have one take-home midterm exam during the first half of the semester.

4. **Group Presentation:** One 40-minute presentation of an evaluation of a technological practice.

5. **Final Papers:** You will write one term paper on an ethical issue in computing technology.

5.2 Grading

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Perusall Readings/Homework	30%
Attendance/In-Class Activities	20%
Midterm	20%
Group Presentation	10%
Final Paper	20%

Perusall Readings and Homework (30%)

Perusall readings and homework assignments will be graded on a two-point scale. The lowest 20% of these assignments will be dropped.

Make one good comment or question on every reading unless otherwise noted. Perusall can be accessed on the sidebar of Canvas.

Attendance/In-Class Activities (20%)

Only Authorized Absence Activities will be excused at the end of the semester, and please do not notify me about absences of any other type. They are not excused, but I don't count your first six absences.

Each in-class activity will receive a grade of "credit," "partial credit," or "no credit." To receive credit you must be actively engaged in the exercise. The lowest 20% of in-class activities will be dropped. You cannot make these points up. In the event of serious illness, I will not count your attendance score and your asynchronous activities will be worth 60% of your grade.

Exams, Presentation and Paper (50%)

These will be critically evaluated to judge your mastery of the course material.

There is one midterm exam. It will be a take-home midterm that you will have seven days to complete. The typical length of the midterm is 9–11 pages double-spaced. It will be accompanied by 50 pages of material to introduce you to the case.

You will give a group presentation using a method taught in class. This presentation will be about 40 minutes long to leave room for questions.

Your paper will be an argumentative research essay concerning some topic related to (but not identical to your presentation.) I will approve your topic and guide this process.

5.3 Grading Scale

A	(4.0)	93–100%	B–	(2.7)	80–82.99%	D	(1.0)	60–69.99%
A–	(3.7)	90–92.99%	C+	(2.3)	77–79.99%	F	(0.0)	below 60%
B+	(3.3)	87–89.99%	C	(2.0)	73–76.99%			
B	(3.0)	83–86.99%	C–	(1.7)	70–72.99%			

6 Policies and Guidelines

6.1 Communication

Occasionally, I will need to communicate important time-sensitive information outside of class. With this in mind, I expect you to check your school-supplied email at least once a day.

The best way to reach me is by email. I'll do my best to respond within 24 hrs. If a matter is urgent, include the word URGENT in the subject line.

Your email should include:

- An informative subject line with your course and section number
- A greeting/salutation (e.g., “Hello Mr. Holland,” or “Chris,”)
- A thorough description of what you are trying to inform me of or ask me about
- A signature with your first and last name.

6.2 Attendance

Attendance is mandatory, and we will take attendance. University-authorized absences are excused and require documentation (see the [university's attendance policy](#) for more information). Other excused absences are granted at my discretion.

Please do not come to class sick. If you are sick tell me as soon as you can (before or after class). Your first “sick day” will be automatically excused, additional sick days may require a doctor's note. I may also provide excused absences for various emergencies (again please contact me as soon as you can).

In the event that you miss several classes and are unable to meet the course objectives, you should contact me and your academic advisor to discuss a course extension (see the [Incomplete Course](#) policy) or withdrawal (see [Course Withdrawal](#) policy).

6.3 Distance Education Etiquette

Your actions in distance education contexts are just as important as in on-ground, classroom-based educational contexts—and sometimes require additional attention and commitment, as some distance education technologies might be less familiar to us. Accordingly, all students should follow the guidelines below:

Non-Video & Asynchronous Contexts (Canvas, Online Chats, Discussion Boards, etc.)

1. When using the “Chat” or “Discussion Board” (or similar) features of your course management system, remember that your course-related communications to the instructor or other students should be considered “professional” (they are not like texts to your friends). Remember that course context and all related written work—including chat and discussion board transcripts—can be recorded and retrieved.
2. Be cautious when using humor or sarcasm; without the context of facial expressions or other body language, your tone or intent could be missed or misunderstood by others.
3. Respect and be attentive to the diversity of your classmates and instructor. Before communicating, consider your message in the context of the class’ diversity in race, ethnicity, religion, disabilities, gender, sexual orientation, age, social class, marital status, geography, etc. Consider the diversity you can see or know—as well as that you cannot.
4. Respect others’ time and life circumstances, which often don’t allow for an immediate response to a question or comment.

Synchronous Video Contexts (Zoom, etc.)

1. Mute your microphone when you are not speaking. Remember to “un-mute” yourself just prior to speaking. Identify yourself when you begin speaking.
2. Expect a few seconds of delay in getting a response from the instructor or another class member to a question; wait before repeating your question or assuming it was not heard.
3. If possible, position your camera such that your video feed does not capture too much of your surroundings or other activity/sound from your home/location. Be conscious of posters, art, or other surroundings that others might find offensive or inappropriate for an educational context.
4. Use the “Raise Hand” and “Chat” (or similar) features of your video-conferencing tool. This limits verbal interruptions and the confusion generated when multiple people try to speak at once.
5. Just as in an on-ground, face-to-face class, limit side conversations, multi-tasking (on your computer or otherwise), and use of your cellphone.
6. Temporarily turn off your video feed and mute your microphone when engaged in any non-class conversation or activity.
7. Respect and be attentive to the diversity of your classmates and instructor. Before communicating, consider your message in the context of the class’ diversity in race, ethnicity, religion, disabilities, gender, sexual orientation, age, social class, marital status, geography, etc. Consider the diversity you can see or know—as well as that you cannot.
8. Remember that video-based class sessions (including chat transcripts) may be recorded and retrieved for later viewing.

6.4 Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors. The mission of Saint Louis University is “the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity.” Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service through which SLU fulfills its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern. The full University-level Academic Integrity Policy can be found on the Provost’s Office website at: <https://www.slu.edu/provost/policies/academic-and-course/academic-integrity-policy.pdf>.

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites.

Course Specific

Do not use Large Language Models to compose for this course.

The first violation of the academic integrity policy will result in a failure for the assignment, and the second will result in a failure for the course.

7 Support and Services

7.1 University Writing Services

University Writing Services offers one-on-one consultations with trained writing consultants who help with everything from brainstorming, outlining, and proposing research questions to documenting sources, revising, and implementing feedback. These consultations can take place in-person, asynchronously, or via Zoom and can be scheduled through EAB Navigate—Student. Getting feedback benefits writers at all skill levels on different writing projects (including but not limited to class assignments, conference papers, cover letters, dissertations, group projects, multimedia assignments, personal statements, senior capstone projects, short answer questions on applications, speeches, and theses). For additional information, visit <https://www.slu.edu/life-at-slu/student-success-center/academic-support/university-writing-services/index.php> or send an email to writing@slu.edu.

7.2 Disability Accommodations

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations must formally register their disability with the University. Once successfully registered, students also must notify their course instructor that they wish to use their approved accommodations in the course.

Please contact the Center for Accessibility and Disability Resources (CADR) to schedule an appointment to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Most students on the St. Louis campus will contact CADR, located in the Student Success Center and available by email at accessibility_disability@slu.edu or by phone at 314.977.3484. Once approved, information about a student's eligibility for academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors by email from CADR and within the instructor's official course roster. Students who do not have a documented disability but who think they may have one also are encouraged to contact to CADR. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

7.3 Student Success Center

The Student Success Center (SSC) supports students in reaching their goals in and out of the classroom. Providing a variety of resources, the Student Success Center houses both the Center for Accessibility and Disability Resources (CADR) and Academic Support, which includes Tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, University Writing Services, and Student Success Coaching. The Student Success Center is located in the Busch Student Center, Suite 331, and students can make an appointment with any SSC resource via EAB Navigate. To learn more about the Student Success Center and its resources, please visit: <https://www.slu.edu/life-at-slu/student-success-center/index.php>.

7.4 University Counseling Center

The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers free, short-term, solution-focused counseling to Saint Louis University undergraduate and graduate students. UCC counselors are highly trained clinicians who can assist with a variety of issues, such as adjustment to college life, troubling changes in mood, and chronic psychological conditions. To make an appointment, call 314-977-8255 (TALK), or visit the clinic on the second floor of Wuller Hall. For after hours needs, please press #9 after dialing the clinic number.

7.5 Wellness

All students experience stressors and challenges at some point, and seeking support is beneficial. Such challenges may be the result of academic concerns (such as those related to particular assignments or content in a course), or they may be more personal in nature (such as concerns related to relationships, mental health, loss, identities, alcohol or drugs, housing or food security, or finances, among other things). If you experience these or other difficulties, please consider seeking support from the resources available to you.

- For concerns related to this course, please feel free to contact me. I am invested in your success and will support your success in the ways I can.
- Additionally, you have access to the many resources SLU provides in support of your personal wellness. You will find a list of available resources on [the Well-being page of the SLU website](#).

If you or someone you know is experiencing a crisis: please consult [the Crisis Support and Warning Signs on the University Counseling Center website](#).

In the spirit of *cura personalis*, the University sees your academic success as connected to your health and well-being and provides resources to support your holistic wellness.

7.6 Basic Needs Security

Students experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, and any other challenges that are impacting their personal and/or academic wellbeing are encouraged to contact the Dean of Students Office for support. Students can submit an [intake form](#), email deanofstudents@slu.edu, or call 314-977-9378 to connect with their office. Students may also communicate directly with their instructors about any challenges they are experiencing to receive support and resource referrals.

7.7 Title IX

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual harassment, including sexual assault, stalking, domestic or dating violence, we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident that involves a Title IX matter, **that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX Coordinator that you shared an experience relating to Title IX**. This is true even if you ask the faculty member not to disclose the incident. The Title IX Coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

Anna Kratky is the Title IX Coordinator at Saint Louis University (DuBourg Hall, room 36; anna.kratky@slu.edu; 314-977-3886). If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK or make an anonymous report through SLU's Integrity Hotline by calling 1-877-525-5669 or online at <http://www.lighthouse-services.com/slu>. To view SLU's policies, and for resources, please visit the following web addresses: <https://www.slu.edu/about/safety/sexual-assault-resources/index.php>.