UBC Arts Vancouver Summer Program - Ethics of Big Data, Syllabus

Instructor
Name: Jas Heaton
Email: jasperns@mail.ubc.ca
Pronouns: she/her or they/them

Meeting Times and Location
Room: Henry Angus (ANGU) 241
Address: 2053 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2 (see here for map)
Time: 1.30pm - 4.30pm
NOTE the final class on Wednesday, August 9th, will take place from 9am - 12pm

Course Overview
The amount of data available continues to grow at an inconceivable rate, and we are getting ever more sophisticated in collecting it, analyzing it, and using it. The amount of data available creates massive opportunities for both financial gain and social good. It also creates dangers such as privacy violations, discrimination, and threats to self-determination and collective, democratic determination. This course introduces students to the legal, ethical, and personal dimensions of big data, the use of algorithms to make decisions and why these decisions may not be as "objective" as they are claimed to be, and related problems concerning misinformation and fake news.

Learning Aims
- Develop a basic vocabulary for discussing the ethical dimensions of data science and its applications
- Analyze issues and policies concerning emerging "big data" technologies through the
- application of ethical concepts
- Critique public policies, social practices, and social institutions that shape, and are
- shaped by, scientific discovery and technological design
- Discern the structure of arguments, represent them fairly and clearly, and evaluate
- them for cogency.
- Formulate original arguments, anticipate objections, and respond in a conscientious
- fashion.
- Read and discuss complex philosophical texts from both historical sources and
- contemporary works.
- Speak and write clearly and persuasively about abstract and conceptually elusive
- matters.

Assessment

For this course you will be assessed on the basis of several written assignments as well as your participation in class.

All assignments are submitted through Canvas.

Assignment Structure:

- (25%) Reading Responses. A short response (approx. 100 words) to **one** of **each day's** readings. Submitted before the class starts on that day
- (25%) Discussion Responses. A brief summary (approx. 1 paragraph) of something discussed in class that day. Submitted at the end of the day's class
- (25%) Short Writing Response (maximum 1,000 words). A short essay responding to a topic or reading of your choice. Due Wednesday July 26th by 11.59pm
- (25%) Group Presentation, presented in class on Wednesday August 9th

About Peer Review Activities

Your third assignment will also be accompanied by a peer review session. During this session you will have the opportunity to seek feedback on your work from your fellow students, and will also be asked to provide feedback on their work. Philosophy is primarily an exercise in communication, and these sessions are intended to help you express your ideas more clearly. What seems obvious and clear to you might seem opaque and confusing to others, and learning to communicate your ideas in this format will help you express them more clearly and convincingly.

Plan For Meetings

3 hours is a long time to sit and do one thing, and so our meetings will be structured around a couple of different activities and also include 2 short breaks.

A typical meeting will go as follows:

- Lecture introducing readings and content (30 mins)
- Small group discussions on short reading responses (20 mins)
- Break (10 mins)
- Small group discussions and class-wide Q&A with reading responses (25mins)
- Lecture (25mins)
- Break (10 mins)
- Activity, or Small group discussions on readings and lecture content (50mins)

PLEASE READ

Course Policies

If you have any questions or concerns about these policies please let me know.

- Email Policy

You can send me an email any time outside of class. Please put "VSP" in the subject line of any email. I will respond to emails within 48 hours.

- Classroom Policy

In this course we will cover a number of topics, issues, and real world events that may have affected the personal lives of students taking this course and the teachers teaching it. While it is important that we be able to freely pursue an academic inquiry into these issues it is equally important we be attentive and sensitive to the different ways people might be affected by these issues and by our study of them. As a student it is your right to bring your personal and lived experiences to your studies in this course. It is also your duty to be respectful of other people's experiences, no matter how different they are from your own. At its best the study of philosophy is collaborative, constructive, and respectful of individuality. I hope that throughout this course we will all do our best to embody these norms.

- Policy On Late Work

I understand that life happens in unpredictable and uncontrollable ways that can disrupt your studies. If you are struggling to complete any of the work on time for any reason, please ask me for an extension and you will be granted one. However because of the compressed nature of this course, I cannot accept late work submitted without an extension. To get an extension all you need to do is ask.

- Policy on Academic Honesty

All the assignments you submit in this course are expected to be your own work. That being said, philosophy involves sharing your ideas with others, and in this course you will be doing a lot of thinking and talking with other students. It is expected and encouraged that you will help each other with your ideas. You might find that you have the same idea about a topic or the same answer to a question as someone else. I hope the difference between sharing and stealing is clear to you all. If you are ever worried that your work might be taking from someone else's work unduly, the best thing to do is to add a citation explaining where you got your idea from.

- Policy On The Use Of A.I. (chatGPT etc.)

(1) You **ARE permitted** to use A.I. for your writing assignments **as an EDITING TOOL only!** I know some people find this software helpful especially when writing in a second language, and this kind of usage is fine. If you do use A.I. please indicate at the start of your essay how you used the A.I. and what changes you allowed it to make.

(2) Please **DO NOT use A.I. to GENERATE the text of your assignments!**

I have two main reasons for this policy. First, the A.I. does not know the difference between what is true and what is false about a topic, it only knows what has been written about that topic and the A.I. will include truths and falsehoods in its output. Second, you may not be in the position to assess the output of the A.I. — remember that one of the things we will be exploring in this course is why uncritical acceptance of the outputs of algorithms may not be a good thing.

Schedule and Readings
All readings are available online, on Canvas, or through the UBC library. Links to each reading are provided here. Please contact me if you are unable to access a reading.

WEEK 1
Topic 1 - Privacy and Identity
Tuesday, July 18th
- Dylan Curran, "Are you ready? Here is all the data Facebook and Google have on you"
- Moxie Marlinspike, "Why 'I Have Nothing to Hide' is the Wrong Way to Think About Surveillance"

Wednesday, July 19th
Activity: presentation from Prof. Rosenthal and Q&A with her
Chelsea Rosenthal, "Losing Privacy and Living the Sound Bite Life" (**READING OPTIONAL**)

Thursday, July 20th ****NOTE** - this class will end at 2.45pm**
- Gordon Hull, "Successful Failure: What Foucault Can Teach Us About Privacy Self-Management in a World of Facebook and Big Data"

Friday, July 21st
- Paul Lewis, "'Our minds can be hijacked': the tech insiders who fear a smartphone dystopia"
- Timothy Aylsworth and Clinton Castro, "Is There a Duty to Be a Digital Minimalist?"

WEEK 2
Topic 2 - Algorithms, Objectivity, and Bias
Monday, July 24th
- Michael Kearns and Aaron Roth, "The Ethical Algorithm" - chapter 2 (audiobook)
- Bruce Schneier, "Data and Goliath" - chapter 2 (audiobook)

Tuesday, July 25th
Activity: peer review for Short Writing Responses
- Gabrielle Johnson, "Algorithmic Bias: on the Implicit Biases of Social Technology"

Wednesday, July 26th
DRAFT OF ESSAY DUE BY 11.59PM
Activity: peer review for Short Writing Responses
- Heather Douglas, Rejecting the Ideal of Value-Free Science (chapter 6 of the book)

Thursday, July 27th
- Julia Angwin, Jeff Larson, Surya Mattu and Lauren Kirchner, "Machine Bias"

WEEK 3
Topic 3 - Freedom and Misinformation
Monday, July 31st
– Thi Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"

Tuesday, August 1st
– Julia Serano, "Refusing to Tolerate Intolerance"
– Neil Levy, "Why No-Platforming is Sometimes a Justifiable Position"

Wednesday, August 2nd
- Dawn Nunziato, "Protecting Free Speech in the Internet Age"

Thursday, August 3rd
Activity: preparation for Group Presentation

Friday, August 4th
Activity: preparation for Group Presentation

WEEK 4
Wednesday, August 9th ****NOTE** - this class takes place from 9am-12pm**
Activity: Group Presentations