DC/GAM/IT 228 Online | Ethics in Computer Games and Cinema
Winter 2016-2017
Instructor: Lisa Buscani
Office Hours: M-W 1:30-2:15 pm
Student Center 332, Online
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Spring Drop deadline: April 7, 2017
Spring Withdrawal deadline: May 12, 2017

Course Description

Societies function based on normative ethics that utilize common sense to distinguish between ethical and unethical behavior. However, most of us are not aware of the underlying theories used to arrive at ethical judgments about right and wrong. The fast pace of progress in information technologies and digital entertainment creates an environment in which ethical challenges are particularly complex, both for the professional in the field and for the casual user. Several philosophical frameworks will be covered including; Kant's First and Second Categorical Imperatives, Utilitarianism, Social Contract Theory as well as the Ethics of Virtue. Students will use these frameworks to develop a personal code of ethics. In the second half of the course we will concentrate on the application of that code of ethics to the context of digital entertainment and its impact on an individual and society. In the eyes of many, games and movies are often violent, offensive and immoral, but what are the ethical bases for these judgments? Implications of values embedded in games and movies will be discussed. The issue of balancing individual creativity vs. cultural impact, particularly on children, will be addressed. The course will culminate with the formulation of elements of an ethical code of conduct for a game or movie creator.

Learning Domain Description

DC/GAM/IT Ethics 228 is included in the Liberal Studies program as a course with credit in the Philosophical Inquiry domain. Philosophical Inquiry examines the most basic questions of human existence. It considers the fundamental beliefs and convictions that shape what it means to be human, our relationships with others, and the nature of the world itself. Its aim is to develop our critical, imaginative, and analytical abilities, and it enables students to understand various kinds of important intellectual problems from a variety of perspectives and approaches, interpret and assess historical and contemporary texts concerned with these issues, and articulate reasoned judgments about these most basic concerns of human life. Philosophical inquiry is thus committed to the task of reflecting on the ideas and events that make up the cultures, societies, and traditions within which we live and to enhancing our understanding of their significance and complexity. Courses in Philosophical Inquiry support the mission of the Liberal Studies Program by fostering deeper understanding and appreciation of the worlds of meaning and of value and of the enterprise of intellectual inquiry and social dialogue.

Learning Outcomes

1. Using multiple perspectives, students will be able to address, critically think about, and analyze philosophical questions and problems.
2. Students will be able to evaluate philosophical questions, issues and/or problems using informed judgment. Students will be able to analyze and interpret the methods used by philosophers in addressing philosophical questions, issues, and/or problems.
3. Students will be able to develop an understanding of the historical context of philosophical topics, figures, and texts.
4. Students will be able to write an analytic essay treating a philosophical question, issue and/or problem that forwards an identifiable thesis, argument, and conclusion.

5. Students will be able to address, critically think about, and analyze ethical issues, applying philosophical tools drawn from various ethical traditions to concrete cases pertinent to a variety of subject matters.

Writing Expectations:

Students will be expected to complete a minimum of 10 pages of writing for this course. This writing may take the form of essays, response papers, reading journals, take-home essay exams, critical analyses, etc. At least one assignment should involve revision, which may count (but only once, not twice) towards the 10-page minimum.

Course Management System – D2L

Prerequisites

No previous knowledge of ethics or digital entertainment is required.
Basic computer knowledge required; willingness to learn basic applications like Screencast-o-matic.com

Required Text

The Elements Of Moral Philosophy
8 Rev Ed James Rachels McGraw-Hill 2015
ISBN: 978-0078119064

Articles and links as needed

Course Policies

Assignments:

Reading assignments must be completed by the date which they are assigned in the syllabus. All assignments will be submitted online. Reasonable deadlines are given for completion of each assignment. Late work will be docked a letter grade each day it is late, until an F grade is reached and no points will be assigned.

Attendance:

Each week's class consists of lectures and screenings; participation is mandatory. For the purposes of this class, an absence is defined as failing to participate in the class discussion boards. All absences will result in a reduction of one point in the participation grade; if you are absent more than three times, you fail the course.

Examinations:

Students who do not take exams during the regularly scheduled time will receive a failing grade for exams unless they have contacted the instructor in advanced to arrange for a make-up exam.

Netiquette

Netiquette is a set of recommendations for interacting in a digital community.

Tone: When you're posting in a discussion board or emailing someone in your course, the text you send isn't accompanied by a facial expression, a tone of voice, or other non-verbal cues. Before you send text, read it carefully and think about how your audience will interpret what you're saying.

Font: The font you use adds meaning to your text. ALL CAPS feels like shouting, but other font features like **bold** and *italics* can help convey meaning.

Email: Include a subject that clearly states the purpose of your email. It's also a good idea to create a closing email signature with your name and pertinent contact information.

Time: When you post to a discussion topic or send an email, you might not get a response right away. Even though many people have smartphones or other devices that keep them connected to email, they might not be able to respond immediately.

Length: No one likes to receive an email that looks like an essay. In digital writing, brevity is valued: paragraphs are often shorter and more direct. The prompt for a discussion topic may ask for an in-depth response, but using shorter paragraphs will make your response easier to read.

Office Hours:
I'm available both online and in person in Student Center 332 during the indicated office hours, but you can reach me anytime via email. I return emails within 24 hours, 48 hours on the weekend.

Plagiarism:
Plagiarism on assignments or cheating on tests are serious offenses and earn the student a failing grade for the class. There are no exceptions to this rule. If you are in doubt about the definition of plagiarism, consult your student handbook.

Course Lectures/Reading Assignments:
Lecture presentations will occur weekly. The independent reading supplements the lecture presentations. The instructor will reference both the lecture content and the readings in examinations. BOTH SOURCES ARE NEEDED.

Grading

Syllabus Quiz	10 points
Exam 1	30 points
Exam 2	30 points
Assignment One: Peer Review Paper One	10 points
Assignment Two: Best Plan Paper	10 points
Assignment Three: Violence Paper	10 points
Assignment Four: Team Presentation	15 points
Analyses	10 points
Participation	10 points
TOTAL:	135 points

A= 125-135, A-=122-124, B+ = 119-123, B=111-118, B-= 108-110, C+ =102-109, C= 98-108, C- = 95-98, D+=91-94, D= 84-90, D-=81-83, F= 0-80. A indicates excellence, B indicates good work, C indicates satisfactory work, D work is unsatisfactory in some respect, F is substantially unsatisfactory work.

Sexual Harassment:
The policy as specified in the student handbook will be adhered to in this program.

Student Interaction:

Certain assignments require students to collaborate or critique each others' work. Students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner; commentary should be respectful. Students are required to communicate with their partners frequently and execute their assignment responsibilities in a timely manner.

<u>Course Outline</u>

Week 1
Introduction to the course material and review of the syllabus.

What is Morality?
The Problem of Definition
Reason and Impartiality
The Minimum Conception of Morality, Cultural Relativism

Reading: Rachels
Chapter 1 "What is Morality"
Chapter 2 "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

Participate in Introduction Discussion Boards on D2L
Take Syllabus Quiz. Details on D2L.
Due Monday, April 3 at 11:30 pm

Participate in Week 1 Discussion Boards on D2L due on April 6 at 11:59 pm.

Week 2
Subjectivism in Ethics; proofs in ethics and moral facts. Morality and Religion, Divine Command Theory and the Theory of Natural Law; Psychological Egotism, Ethical Egotism.

Reading: Rachels
Chapter 3 "Subjectivism in Ethics"
Chapter 4 "Does Morality Depend on Religion?"
Chapter 5 "Ethical Egoism"

Assignment One Peer Review. See D2l for details.
Due: Monday, April 10 at 11:30 pm.

Participate in Week 2 Discussion Boards on D2L due on April 13 at 11:59 pm.

Week 3
The Utilitarian Approach; The revolution in ethics; the debate over utilitarianism, the resilience of the theory, the defense of utilitarianism.
Are there absolute moral rules? Kant and the Categorical Imperative, Kant and the respect for persons.

Reading: Rachels
Chapter 7 "The Utilitarian Approach"

Chapter 8 "The Debate over Utilitarianism"
Chapter 9 "Are There Absolute Moral Rules?"
Chapter 10 "Kant and The Respect for Persons"

Online Analysis One: Review at least three of your classmates' peer review papers and post them on the Peer Review One Discussion on D2L. Were they successful in addressing the assignment? Why or why not? If a student has three or more peer reviews listed, please read someone else's paper. Let's share the love. See D2l for details. Due: Monday, April 17 at 11:30 pm.

Participate in Week 3 Discussion Boards on D2L due on April 20 at 11:59 pm.

Week 4
The idea of the social contract, introduction of social contract theory of Morals, Feminism and ethics, the implications for moral judgment, the ethics of virtue; the advantages of virtue ethics. What would make a satisfactory moral theory that you could live with in the entertainment industry?

Reading: Rachels
Chapter 6 "Social Contract Theory"
Chapter 11 "Feminism and the Ethics of Care"
 Chapter 12 Virtue Ethics"
Chapter 13 "What Would a Satisfactory Moral Theory Be Like?"

Assignment One Rewrite. Post your final version of the Assignment One Paper on D2L.
Assignment Two: Best Plan Paper. Write a two to three page "Best Plan" paper explaining your view of a "Satisfactory Moral Theory. See D2l for details:
Due: Monday, April 24 at 11:30 pm.

Participate in Week 4 Discussion Boards on D2L due on April 27 at 11:59 pm.

Week 5
Does media influence Society? Does influence imply responsibility?
The ethical implications of the portrayal of violence and sex in entertainment and the effect such portrayal has on the viewer. Documentary and reality programming. What is reality? How does the director's decision about what to include and what not to include effect the finished work?

Reading: Ferguson, "Blazing Angels or Resident Evil: Can Video Games be a Force for Good?"

Examination 1: See D2l for details. Available: Monday, April 24 at 11:30 pm. Due: Monday, May 1 at 11:30 pm. Late exams will not be accepted.

Participate in Week 5 Discussion Boards on D2L due on May 4 at 11:59 pm.

Week 6

Children's programming. How are cartoons and violence different in the age of digital entertainment? Was violence in cartoons the same as violent video games today?

 Reading: Devane and Squire, "The Meaning of Race and Violence in Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas"

Assignment Three: Violence Paper. Write a two- to three-page paper discussing a particularly violent children's game or movie that you grew up with. Details on D2L. Due: Monday, May 8 at 11:30 pm.

Participate in Week 6 Discussion Boards on D2L due on May 11 at 11:59 pm.

Topics will be picked this week for the final project where you will give an online presentation during the last week of class.

Week 7
Sex and Cinema, Reality TV

Reading: Shaw, "Putting the Game in Games: Cultural Production and GLBT Content in Video Games"

Topics will be picked this week for the final project, where you will give a presentation during the last week of class. I will assign teams of two. Go to Week 10 and choose a topic that interests you and an alternate topic, just in case yours gets picked. Due Monday, May 15 at 11:30 pm.

Participate in Week 7 Discussion Boards on D2L due on May 18 at 11:59 pm.

Week 8
Reality: How does the media bend or ignore it? How much is too much?

Reading: Calvert and Richards, "Free Speech and the Entertainment Software Association"

Examination 2: See D2l for details. Available Monday, May 15 at 11:30 pm. Due: Monday, May 22 at 11:30 pm. Late exams will not be accepted.

Participate in Week 8 Discussion Boards on D2L due on May 25 at 11:59 pm.

Week 9
Piracy, MDCA, Fair Use, Computer generated images, Intellectual Property.

Reading: Dibbell, "A Rape in Cyber Space"

Week 10
Digital artifacts in MMOGs as "real" property.

Reading : "League of Legends"

Assignment Six: Team Presentations   **Due: Monday, May 29 at 11:30 pm. See D2l for details.**

Participate in Week 9 Discussion Boards on D2L due on June 1 at 11:59 pm.

Final Exam Week
Team Presentation Analysis   **Due: Monday, June 5, 11:30 pm See D2l for details.**
Extra Credit   **Due: Monday, June 5, 11:30 pm See D2l for details.**

THERE IS NO FINAL EXAM IN THIS CLASS.

Changes to Syllabus

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be thoroughly addressed during class, posted under Announcements in D2L and sent via email.

Online Course Evaluations

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in CampusConnect.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/. If you have any questions be sure to consult with your professor.

Academic Policies

All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the University Academic Calendar. Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found at: cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment.

Students with Disabilities

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential.
To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at: csd@depaul.edu.

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