

**Geoffrey B. Elliott**  
**Sample Syllabus**  
**Ethics and Technology**

<b>Office</b>	TBD	<b>Office Phone</b>	TBD
		<b>Office Email</b>	TBD
		<b>Office Hours</b>	TBD

Note that information on this syllabus is subject to change. Reasonable efforts will be made to inform students of any such changes that occur.

Ethics and Technology is a course intended to introduce sophomore-level students to traditional Western concepts of ethics and to the application of those concepts to technological developments. Meant primarily for those in technical and professional fields of study, the course pays particular attention to ethical uses of multiple media and the development of new technologies.

The class is structured with the assumption that students enrolled in it have completed their first-year composition requirements.

### **Course Objectives/Outcomes**

Students who successfully complete the course can be expected to

- Read assigned philosophical essays and contextual materials, demonstrating understanding thereof through in-class discussion and occasional minor assignments;
- Read additional philosophical essays, demonstrating understanding thereof through the submission of summaries of the essays accompanied by appropriate commentary thereupon, following standards to be articulated in course materials;
- Argue a thesis regarding either ethical uses of multiple media or the development of new technologies, presenting the argument in a relatively short essay (1,400 to 1,750 words) that is drafted and revised several times; and
- Present the argument articulated in the short essay orally for class discussion and defense.

### **Required and Recommended Texts and Resources**

Ethics and Technology requires but one textbook: Robert Scharff and Val Dusek's *Philosophy of Technology: The Technological Condition* (ISBN 10: 0631222197; ISBN 13: 978-0631222194).

Electronic editions of the standard course text may be available. Students who opt to use them are advised that they—not the instructor, program, department, or institution—are responsible for securing access to the text during class time and for any hardware or software problems attendant upon their doing so.

In addition to required texts, the following resources will be helpful or vital in carrying out the tasks of the course:

- The institution's writing/tutorial centers
- ElliottRWI, [www.elliottrwi.com](http://www.elliottrwi.com)
- Purdue University Online Writing Lab, <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>
- Major English-language dictionary, such as those from Oxford University (preferred) and Merriam-Webster
- Access to campus email and information management systems
- Pen/pencil and paper every class meeting

Other materials may be of use, as well. The lists above cannot be considered exhaustive.

## Evaluation/Assessment

Student grades in the class will be determined according to the distribution in Table 1, below.

**Table 1: Grading Distribution**

Assignment or Category	Percent of Grade
Summary 1 (Sum1)*	10
Summary 2 (Sum2)*	10
Summary 3 (Sum3)*	10
Summary 4 (Sum4)*	10
Written Argument (WrArg)*	20
Oral Argument (OrArg)*	20
Minor Assignments (MinAss)	10
Student Professionalism (Prof)	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Indicates a major assignment.

Major and some minor assignments will be assessed in terms of their demonstrated performance in several categories (these will be discussed in more detail on the individual assignment materials). Individual categories on such assignments will be assigned a number of “steps,” individual motions through the grading scale indicated on Table 2, below; the total number of steps, positive or negative, will indicate the final assignment score.

Some minor assignments will only be offered an overall score. Such scores also conform to Table 2, below.

**Table 2: Grading Scale**

Score	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F	0
Steps	+7	+6	+5	+4	+3	+2	+1	+/-0	-1	-2	-3 or more	N/A*
Numerical Equivalent	98	95	92	88	85	82	78	75	72	65	55	0

\*Grades of zero (0) result from non-submission of assignments or from academic integrity violations.

Final grades for the term will be reported according to the standard grading scale in force at the institution.

Each of the major written assignments is expected to be submitted as a work of polished prose. “Polished prose” refers to work that has been written and revised more than once; a written assignment that has not been through cycles or revision is unlikely to receive a good grade.

Most major and many minor assignments will be submitted online, as well.

I generally grade fairly holistically. This does not mean that I shall not mark or penalize your errors, but I shall do my best to give you better and more useful feedback on the work you do than simply “fixing” your punctuation and spelling and slapping a grade on the work. Mechanical “correctness” is important, but organization, depth, and originality of thought are more so.

In this class, the fact that you or somebody else paid for you to have a seat does not entitle you to any specific grade; by registering and meeting the requirements for this class, you have earned the right to have access to higher learning and the **opportunity to earn** credit, much as you have to pay to take a martial arts class but are not assured of earning any specific belt. I do not **give** you a grade, you **earn** a grade; I report to you on the quality of the work you turn in to me, as measured against standards expressed for each assignment.

### **Student Professionalism**

Please treat the classroom with the same degree of attention and consideration as any professional space. Please show up to class prepared and on time; **this means having necessary materials, having completed the assigned readings, and having prepared any assignments upon entry into the classroom.** Silence or deactivate cell phones during class time, and refrain from private conversations outside of group/class discussion. If you are late, please be respectful of the instructor and others in the classroom by quietly and quickly finding a seat without gratuitous comment, questioning, or other obtrusive behavior (this includes interrupting lecture or discussion to explain your tardiness, ask what the class is doing, or make other comments). The same requests also apply to those who need to leave early. If you feel the need to discuss late arrival or early departure, please do so via email, during office hours, or before or after class.

Please note that excessive tardiness or early departure will negatively impact your professionalism. Please note also that egregious violations of professional conduct will result in your being asked to leave; if you are thusly asked to leave, you will be counted absent for the class.

### **Late Work**

Timeliness in submission of work is crucial to effective evaluation and revision of it; therefore, you ought to submit work when it is due, as indicated by the course calendar. Failure to do so will incur grade penalties. Major papers and major homework assignments submitted late will be penalized at the rate provided for by institutional policy. In-class and minor or daily assignments **may not** be submitted late.

Note that frequent late submission or substantially late submissions will negatively affect your professionalism score.

Students who miss in-class work or whose major papers and/or homework assignments are late because of military or legal service, university-sponsored events, or university-documented disability may be allowed to make up the work or may be excused from it on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the instructor.

### **Revision**

In some circumstances, **major (not minor)** assignments may be revised. After receiving instructor-reviewed major assignments, students may meet with the instructor to confer about what must be done to improve the paper and how much time is available for doing so. Students who have such meetings and successfully carry out the indicated adjustments to their work in the time allotted them will have their papers re-graded. (Students should note that grading on revisions is somewhat harsher than on earlier versions, as additional review carries the

expectation of higher levels of performance.) The higher of the two grades received for the assignment will be recorded and factored into final grade reporting.

**Late submissions of requested revisions will not be accepted.**

### **Attendance**

Successful completion of the class will rely in no small part on the discussions conducted during class time. Accordingly, attendance is vital, and it will be checked during each class meeting. In recognition that there are circumstances that prevent regular and complete attendance, however, a certain number of absences are permitted before grade penalties begin to accrue for absences alone (missed or non-submitted work may still impose grade penalties, however); institutional policy makes such provisions.

Except as provided for by institutional policy, the only absences which do not count against the regularly allotted number (i.e., “excused absences”) are those incurred by military or legal service. Such absences will require documentation **prior to the absence** to be excused. Illnesses, deaths in the family, outside employment, and transportation problems **are all counted among the allowed absences**. Only rare exceptions will be permitted, and those only by explicit approval of institutional authorities.

### **Tardiness/Early Departure**

Every effort should be made to be in class on time and for the full class time. Those arriving egregiously late (usually more than ten minutes) are subject to being counted absent. Students are additionally subject to being counted absent if they leave before a class meeting is dismissed, or if they are out of the room for protracted periods during class (usually more than five minutes), or multiple times in a given class period.

### **Discussion of Grades and Progress**

Unless otherwise provided for by institutional policy, I am always happy to discuss your progress and grades with you. I am not going to discuss your grades with your parents, your siblings, your roommates, your spouses, your children, or anyone else except as required by my superiors and the law. I am also not going to discuss your grades over the phone or through email; if you want to know your grades, come see me during office hours or set up an appointment, and we can go over how you are doing, what you have done well, and what you can improve upon.

It is your responsibility to keep up with your grades and progress in the course. The time to review them is not after they have been submitted, but throughout the semester, when there is something you can do about them.

### **Students with Special Needs**

I am, of course, happy to provide reasonable accommodation for documented special needs students may have. I need the appropriate documentation, per institutional policy, to be able to determine what accommodations are reasonable and appropriate; students desiring such accommodations must ensure that the appropriate documentation reaches me in a timely fashion.

As a note, the texts studied in the class may involve frank discussions and depictions of various acts currently considered objectionable. Sensitivity to such concerns is to be expected, but not to such a degree as forecloses open and sincere inquiry into the content and function of texts and their continued deployments in popular culture.

### **Academic Integrity**

As a course meant for sophomore-level students, Ethics and Technology is offered with the understanding that students are familiar with general and institution-specific principles of academic integrity—the more so because the course *is* an ethics course. Particulars will vary by institution, but general principles include avoidance of

- Unauthorized collaboration, unauthorized consolidation of assignments, undocumented or inappropriately documented use of primary and/or secondary materials, and overuse of appropriately documented primary and/or secondary materials;
- Purchasing the academic and/or scholarly work of others and presenting it as if it had been conducted by the student;
- Obtaining unauthorized access to testing and examination materials and/or providing such access to others; and
- Falsification of class records.

Penalties for violations of academic integrity are likely to be severe; do not provoke them.

### **Contact Policy**

Email is my preferred mode of contact outside of class time; I check my email at least once (and usually more often) each day I am scheduled to teach, usually in the morning. As a note, I do not sit up all night waiting for my email inbox to chime, and I may not have time to read and answer all emails before class.

### **Agreements**

Students who remain enrolled in the class past the add/drop date signal their understanding of and agreement to the policies and procedures outlined in this syllabus.

A form will be distributed allowing students to opt into or out of the use of their work in the course for study and professional development purposes. Opting in or out will make no difference to grading.

### **General Course Calendar**

Readings and minor assignments not already on the course calendar (Table 3, below) may be announced in class. When they are, they are to be treated as appearing on the calendar at the correct time. Also, readings may not always be discussed in class. You are still responsible for knowing the material; the readings form the bases for discussions and are likely to undergird any necessary quizzes and/or homework.

“Readings Due” indicates that the readings listed are assigned **to be completed before the beginning of class** on the day listed, unless otherwise noted. “Assignments Due” indicates that the activities listed are to be completed and submitted at the time and in the manner indicated. Due dates for major assignments are already noted by week.

In the event that a given class day has neither reading nor activity listed, class will still meet normally. The only times class does not meet as scheduled will be announced in advance (if possible) or posted on the door to the classroom.

**Table 3: Course Calendar**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings Due</b>	<b>Assignment Due</b>
1	<b>Introduction to the course</b>	Syllabus (in class)	
2	<b>Historical background of ethics studies</b>	Scharff and Dusek, pgs. ix-24 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductory materials;</li> <li>• Plato, “On Dialectic and ‘Techne’”;</li> <li>• Aristotle, “On ‘Techne’ and ‘Episteme’”</li> </ul>	
3	<b>Historical background of ethics studies, cont’d.</b>	Scharff and Dusek, pgs. 25-80 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bacon, “On the Idols, the Scientific Study of Nature, and the Reformation of Education”;</li> <li>• Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View”;</li> <li>• Comte, “The Nature and Importance of the Positive Philosophy”;</li> <li>• Rousseau, “On the Sciences and Arts”;</li> <li>• Marx and Engels, “Capitalism and the Modern Labor Process”</li> </ul>	Sum1 (online before the beginning of the week’s first class)
4	<b>The specific point of studying ethics as applied to technology</b>	Scharff and Dusek, pgs. 170-186 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductory materials;</li> <li>• Bunge, “Philosophical Inputs and Outputs of Technology”;</li> <li>• Ellul, “On the Aims of a Philosophy of Technology”</li> </ul>	
5	<b>The specific point of studying ethics as applied to technology, cont’d;</b>	Scharff and Dusek, pgs. 187-205 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shrader-Frechette, “Technology and Ethics”;</li> <li>• Jonas, “Toward a Philosophy of Technology”</li> </ul>	WrArg, first version (online before the beginning of the week’s first class)

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings Due</b>	<b>Assignment Due</b>
6	<b>How technology is, can be, and should be defined</b>	Scharff and Dusek, pgs. 206-220 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductory materials;</li> <li>• Kline, “What Is Technology?”;</li> <li>• Gehlen, “A Philosophical-Anthropological Perspective on Technology”</li> </ul>	Sum2 (online before the beginning of the week’s first class)
7	<b>How technology is, can be, and should be defined, cont’d.</b>	Scharff and Dusek, pgs. 221-244 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pinch and Bijker, “The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts”;</li> <li>• Winner, “Social Constructivism; Opening the Black Box and Finding It Empty”</li> </ul>	
8	<b>Technology’s interaction with the living world and its effects</b>	Scharff and Dusek, pgs. 485-506 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductory materials;</li> <li>• Mitcham, “Three Ways of Being with Technology”</li> </ul>	
9	<b>Technology’s interaction with the living world and its effects, cont’d.</b>	Scharff and Dusek, pgs. 507-535 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ihde, “A Phenomenology of Technics”;</li> <li>• Habermas, “Technical Progress and the Social-Life World”</li> </ul>	Sum3 (online before the beginning of the week’s first class)
10	<b>Technology’s detached existence and its effects</b>	Scharff and Dusek, pgs. 536-570 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductory materials;</li> <li>• Heim, “Heidigger and McLuhan <i>and</i> The Essence of Virtual Reality”;</li> <li>• Ross, “Hacking Away at the Counterculture”</li> </ul>	WrArg, second version (online before the beginning of the week’s first class)
11	<b>Technology’s detached existence and its effects, cont’d.</b>	Scharff and Dusek, pgs. 571-584 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Borgmann, “Information and Reality at the Turn of the Century”;</li> <li>• Dreyfus, “Anonymity versus Commitment: The Dangers of Education on the Internet”</li> </ul>	

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings Due</b>	<b>Assignment Due</b>
12	<b>Technology's effect on and control of generation and spread of information and consequences of the same</b>	Scharff and Dusek, pgs. 585-611 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductory materials;</li> <li>• Foucault, "Panopticism";</li> <li>• Glendinning, "Notes Toward a Neo-Luddite Manifesto";</li> <li>• Winner, "Luddism as Epistemology"</li> </ul>	Sum4 (online before the beginning of the week's first class)
13	<b>Technology's effect on and control of generation and spread of information and consequences of the same, cont'd.</b>	Scharff and Dusek, pgs. 612-665 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mesthene, "The Social Impact of Technological Change";</li> <li>• McDermott, "Technology: The Opiate of the Intellectuals, with the Author's 2000 Retrospective";</li> <li>• Feenberg, "Democratic Rationalization: Technology, Power, and Freedom"</li> </ul>	WrArg, final version (online before the beginning of the week's first class)
14 and 15	No new topic	No readings due	OrArg (during class)

Dates to remember will vary by institution and term, largely due to institutional closures and the instructor's conference schedule.