# Data Ethics (INFO 498A)

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Format: Online, Microsoft Teams

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## Course Overview

Data ethics engages questions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, in relation to data and its attendant technologies, like classifications, labels, computation, algorithms, machine learning, and artificial intelligence. In this course, we will approach these questions from the perspective of the "non-ideal theory" approach to ethics, which eschews idealized values in favor of close attention to (among other things) facts of domination, oppression, and difference.

Accordingly, our discussions will foreground those categories by which difference and exposure to oppressive violence are predictably organized, including (but not limited to): race, ethnicity, gender, ability, class, and nationality. We will identify and critically assess tools and strategies commonly advanced as ethical responses to difference and oppression, like liberal freedoms, human rights, digital access, social and economic opportunity, and "diversity and inclusion" efforts. We will attend, in particular, to the possibilities and limits of these tools relative to the challenges posed by data science and technology and explore alternatives grounded in domains like critical race theory, feminism, reproductive justice, and critical trans politics.

## Course Objectives

Our aim in this class is not to generate some more or less complete set of directives for handling or working with data, writing and deploying algorithms, or regulating systems. Instead, students will work—alone and as a class—toward cultivating their own data ethical praxis by exploring assigned texts and engaging in discussion with an eye toward how they might reorient us toward data science and technology and how they shape the ways we live, work, and relate to one another. This work will include some small group collaboration, full class discussion, and individual learning objectives negotiated with the professor.

# Readings

We will read four books this quarter, spending two weeks on each:

- Ruha Benjamin - Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code (Polity)
- Michelle Murphy - The Economization of Life (Duke University Press)
- Louise Amoore - Cloud Ethics: Algorithms and the Attributes of Ourselves and Others (Duke University Press)
- Dean Spade - Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law (Duke University Press)

All books are available in eBook format through UW Libraries. If you would rather purchase them so you can read a paper copy, they are also available in relatively affordable paperback format via most online booksellers.

# Workload and Schedule

Per UW Undergraduate credit hour expectations, one credit is roughly equivalent to three hours of work per week (including in-class time). Accordingly, I have designed the course in a way that expects roughly 10-12 hours spent on coursework a week. During reading weeks, the bulk of that time will be dedicated to reading closely and carefully, tracking your thoughts and questions in a reading diary. During discussion weeks, some time will be spent finishing up reading but most of your time will be spent on discussion and working towards your summative learning goal (more on that in the next section). At the same time, I recognize that we all need space to breathe and process. Accordingly, I've built in two weeks of break during the quarter. You can use this time to step back and reflect, to get a head start on future readings in the class, or to process things with your professor and classmates.

| Theme | Reading | Schedule |
|---|---|---|
| #START | Course Intro Notes | Intro Week (09/30-10/04) |
| #SKIN | Benjamin - Race After Technology | Reading Week (10/05-10/11) Discussion Week (10/12-10/18) |
| #STAKE | Murphy – Economization of Life | Reading Week (10/19-10/25) Discussion Week (10/26-11/01) |
| Break I | *none* | Break (11/02-11/08) |
| #SCENE | Amoore – Cloud Ethics | Reading Week (11/09-11/15) Discussion Week (11/16-11/22) |
| Break II | *none* | Thanksgiving Break (11/23-11/29) |
| #SHIFT | Spade – Normal Life | Reading Week (11/30-12/06) Discussion Week (12/07-12/11) |

See the schedule for deadlines and more detailed information.

# Assignments

Students in this course will be evaluated by their open and good-faith engagement with the aims of the course, the readings, and their classmates. Engagement will fall into three buckets:

**Expectation Setting** (required): During the first week, students will engage introduction prompts and fill out surveys to help set and guide learning goals and expectations for the quarter.

**Reading Engagement** (variable, see Grading Contract section): For each book, students will do the reading, track thoughts and progress in a reading journal, respond to informal instructor questions when asked, and check in with their classmates as required. During designated discussion weeks, students will work with designated groups to fulfill the duties of their assigned discussion roles:

> *Firestarter:* Once during the quarter, groups will have the chance to serve as firestarters. In this role, groups are responsible for kicking off discussion by recording themselves in conversation about their assigned book.

> *Reactor:* Once during the quarter, groups will have the chance to serve as reactors. In this role, group members will record individual reactions to the firestarters' conversation, complicating and extending the conversation for the class.

> *Commentariat:* All students will serve as part of the commentariat each week (even students who are also serving as firestarters or reactors). In this role, students will discuss the reactions, respond to questions, and generally engage the conversation as framed by the firestarters and reactors. Students will choose between fulfilling their commentariat duties synchronously or asynchronously.

**Summative Learning Objective** (required): At the start of the quarter, students will indicate to the professor how they are best able to demonstrate that they've read and learned something from the assigned books. The professor will draw on students stated strengths and preferences to negotiate a suitable summative learning objective - something that both challenges and engages the student, while also demonstrating rigorous and good faith engagement with each book.

# Grading Contract

**Choosing Your Level of Engagement**
At the start of the quarter, you choose the grade you want based on that grade's specified requirements. You can rest assured that whatever grade you choose at the start is the grading you are getting, so long as you keep up with the specified parameters!

Grade tiers are specified as follows:

| Grade | 4.0 Scale | Requirements |
|-------|-----------|--------------|
| A | 4.0 | Expectation Setting: Complete #START week prompts and surveys<br><br>Reading Engagement: Engage with all four books by…<br><br><ul><li>Reading instructor notes and tips</li><li>Responding to any instructor prompts and progress surveys</li><li>Maintaining your reading journal</li><li>Being at least minimally present during designated reading weeks</li><li>Fulfilling requirements of your assigned role during designated discussion weeks</li></ul><br><br>Summative Learning Objective: Complete individualized assignment for four books |
| B | 3.1 | Expectation Setting: Complete #START week prompts and surveys<br><br>Reading Engagement: Engage with three books by…<br><ul><li>Reading instructor notes and tips</li><li>Responding to any instructor prompts and progress surveys</li><li>Maintaining your reading journal</li><li>Being at least minimally present during designated reading weeks</li><li>Fulfilling requirements of your assigned role during designated discussion weeks</li></ul><br>Summative Learning Objective: Complete individualized assignment for three books |
| C | 2.1 | Expectation Setting: Complete #START week prompts and surveys<br><br>Reading Engagement: Engage with two books by…<br><ul><li>Reading instructor notes and tips</li><li>Responding to any instructor prompts and progress surveys</li><li>Maintaining your reading journal</li><li>Being at least minimally present during designated reading weeks</li><li>Fulfilling requirements of your assigned role during designated discussion weeks</li></ul><br>Summative Learning Objective: Complete individualized assignment for two books |

**Exceptions and Flexibility**

It's a stressful time and we all need a little bit (or a lot) of flexibility. You can fall short on some requirements without it negating your contracted grade as follows:

- A Grade: You may fall short on one Reading Engagement bullet point for two books.
- B Grade: You may fall short on one Reading Engagement bullet point for one book.
- C Grade: You may fall short on one Reading Engagement bullet point for one book.

If students fall short on one Reading Engagement bullet point for more books than specified above, their final grade will be reduced by 0.5 from their contracted grade. (For example, if a student who contracted for an A falls short on one bullet point for more than two books, they will receive a 3.5 instead of a 4.0.)

If students are falling short on multiple bullet points for any given book, they will need to renegotiate their contract with the professor. If at any time you feel like you need to reevaluate your grading contract, message me and we will talk it through.

In terms of deadlines and late work, reading engagement deadlines are relatively inflexible given weekly schedules (reactors depend on timely work from firestarters, the commentariat depends on timely work from firestarters and reactors, etc...). Accordingly, deadlines for these duties will only be modified under exceptional circumstances. Summative learning objective deadlines are negotiable, however. If you feel you need to negotiate a different deadline for any given objective, message the professor and she'll work with you to set something suitable.

*Note:* Expectation Setting and Summative Learning activities are required. You must complete these for the specified number of books in order to receive the contracted grade. Failure to do so will require a grade renegotiation with the professor.

# Discussion Role Requirements

Over the course of the quarter, we will read and discuss four books relevant to attending to the ethics of data science and technology. Each book will have a Reading Week and a Discussion Week. During Reading Weeks, there is no formal discussion, but I expect students to be present on Teams to 1) respond to any prompts or polls I post, 2) record thoughts in their reading diaries, and 3) engage in informal chatter with their classmates (either with their groups or the full class).

Our more active, structured discussions will take place during the Discussion Week. Different groups will have formal roles during discussion weeks, as indicated on the course schedule. Those roles are:

*Firestarter:* Firestarters are responsible for kicking off discussion of a book. They will play a big role in framing discussion and prompting classmates to think critically or differently about what they read.

Format: I want discussion to actually *feel* like a discussion - not just a series of reports or static forum posts. Therefore, I'm asking Firestarters to record themselves having a brief conversation

about the book. Conversations should be between 17-20 minutes and each group member should contribute.

Structure: To guide your discussion, I want you to use the TQE method: thoughts, questions, epiphanies. Using this method, group members should first share with each other some of their overall <u>thoughts</u> and reactions to the book, what it is about, and what it is trying to do. Wherever possible, please refer to direct evidence in the texts in the form of quotes, arguments, or examples. From there, students should share any <u>questions</u> they have - for example, what didn't you understand? What do you want to know more about? What would you like your classmates to discuss? You may have other kinds of questions and that's great, just make sure they are questions that open up, rather than shut down discussion. Finally, conversations should close with each group member sharing an <u>epiphany</u> that they had while reading the book. An epiphany is a sudden revelation, a lightning bolt of insight where something you hadn't understood suddenly becomes clear - or where something you once assumed or believed suddenly shifts. Epiphanies may be mind-blowing moments or quieter realizations, but they should nonetheless demonstrate how your thinking or understanding has grown.

Submission: Recordings may be in video or audio format and will be shared with the entire class. You can record video or audio here on Teams, or on a platform like Zoom. You are also welcome to play with other tools or formats as needed, as long as there is a discussion-like tone - we want to avoid having individual TQEs just spliced together. You are also welcome to be creative with it (think TikTok or YouTube vlog-style editing), but it's not required. Submissions will be sent to the professor by 8 AM (Pacific) on the Tuesday of discussion week (either as an attachment or by link to a downloadable file). The professor will review and subsequently post the video to the entire class.

Exceptions: I do recognize that under current circumstances a group may be unable to record a conversation - time zones, bandwidth issues, unsuitable recording space, and other vagaries of remote learning might get in the way. If this is the case, the group should contact the professor as soon as possible to work out a suitable alternative. Such alternatives will, however, be the exception - not the rule.

*Reactor:* Reactors are responsible for modeling reactions to the firestarters' conversation for their classmates, building on their insights and extending the discussion for everyone.

Format: Unlike firestarter conversations, reactions will be individually recorded (though group members are welcome to coordinate what they are going to say). Accordingly, you can think of them as the equivalent to students reacting to an in-class lecture or presentation.

Structure: For reactions, you should use the 3CQ method: compliment, comment, connection, question. Compliments should emphasize something you liked about what a firestarter said or what the group discussed. Comment should reinforce, but deepen an idea they shared. Connections should connect what the firestarters talked about to your own unique thought or reaction, extending the discussion to new ideas, examples, or concepts. Finally, questions should open up space for class discussion. They may question something the

firestarters discussed, raise a question based on a book's own questions, complicate an existing example or idea, or direct us to think about something in the book they overlooked.

Submission: Individual reactions should be around 5 minutes and may be in video or audio format. You can record your reaction to the using any tool you wish (video or audio recording software on a computer, a camera-equipped mobile phone, external video camera, etc...). You are welcome to be creative with it (think TikTok or YouTube vlog-style editing), but it's not required. Reactors should post their own reactions to the corresponding Teams channel as standalone posts by 2 PM (Pacific) on the Wednesday of discussion week.

Exceptions: Same as above, I understand that in some circumstances, video or audio recording may be difficult to impossible. If this is the case, individuals should contact the professor as soon as possible to work out a suitable alternative. Such alternatives will, again, be the exception - not the rule.

*Commentariat:* Once firestarter discussions and reactions are posted, all students will become the commentariat - that is, all students will engage in commenting, discussing, asking questions, and extending our thinking about each book. This includes students who also already served as firestarters and reactors. Everyone is responsible for carrying on the conversation!

Format: For async participants, all commenting will take place on Teams (with specific instructions posted on the Wednesday of each discussion week). For sync participants, some engagement with the async discussion will occur, but a significant chunk of discussion will take place during the live session on the Thursday of discussion week.

Structure: The professor will provide some light framing on the Wednesday of discussion week, but commentariat discussion will generally be a bit more free form. If you need some inspiration, I recommend using the 3CQ model listed above. You don't have to hit all of those points in every comment, but can us the idea of compliments, comments, connections, and questions to guide you.

Exceptions: There will be few exceptions granted here, but if something is preventing you from engaging discussion, contact the professor to work out a suitable alternative.

# Working Groups

Working groups will have different designated roles for each book (as specified on the Schedule page). All members of the group are expected to engage their role fully and in good faith.

Each group will have a dedicated private discussion channel during the quarter. You can use these channels to coordinate on assigned roles, provide support and encouragement to one another, ask questions, and have informal discussions as we work through the texts. It doesn't matter if you're sync or async here - support groups can be composed of a mix of students.

The professor will also have access to the groups so she can answer questions and engage as needed. However, if a conflict arises in your group, feel free to message the professor privately - she will work with you and (where appropriate) the rest of the group to address it.

IMPORTANT: If you contracted for a B or C grade, you cannot skip the books for which your group is designated a Discussant or Respondent. You can only

Students will be sorted into the following groups: Black Canary, Vixen, Katana, Huntress, Thunder, Stargirl, Raven, Hawkgirl.

# Diversity and Access

**Diversity and Inclusivity**
At the University of Washington, diversity is integral to excellence. We value and honor diverse experiences and perspectives, strive to create welcoming and respectful learning environments, and promote access, opportunity and justice for all.

**Access and Accommodations**
It is the policy and practice of the University of Washington—as well as your instructor—to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have already established accommodations with Disability Resources for Students (DRS), please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course.

If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but not limited to; mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924 or uwdrs@uw.edu or disability.uw.edu. DRS offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions.

**Religious Accommodations**
Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW's policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at Religious Accommodations Policy. Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the Religious Accommodations Request form.

# Resources

**Student Resources**
A number of challenges from a variety of directions can affect your ability to bring your optimal attention and energy to a course. Student Resources is a set of links to campus resources that UW makes available to students in trying to mitigate and cope with some of these challenges.

**iSchool Technology Requirements**
The iSchool has a set of technology requirements for both online and residential students. We highly recommend that students adhere to these standards which are updated annually. Students who do not meet these standards may experience technology problems throughout the course.

**iSchool Learning Technologies Support Site**
Knowledge base for Canvas, VoiceThread, web conferencing systems, and other learning technologies tools.

**Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)**
This FAQ was created by the University of Washington to help students impacted by the rescission of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in the United States. Though the FAQ does not constitute legal advice, it can direct you to useful resources. In addition, the City of Seattle maintains a list of relevant workshops, legal resources, and other information for Seattle residents here.

**Novel Coronavirus & Covid-19 Resources**
For information on covid-19 and the ongoing global pandemic's effect on campus operations and teaching, students may visit the UW covid-19 facts and resources page. For information on how it might impact this class specifically, please email the professor or post to the Open Questions discussion forum.

# Academic Conduct

Please review the iSchool Academic Policies which cover:
- Academic and Behavioral Misconduct
- Academic Integrity
- Copyright
- Privacy
- Concerns About a Course
- Evaluation of Student Work

# Schedule

## #START (09/30-10/04)

**Text: "**Data Ethics for Non-Ideal Times - Notes on the Course" by Dr. Hoffmann

**Introduction Week** (September 30 -  October 4)

Introductions, expectation setting, and preference surveys. Reading and discussion of introductory notes.

## #SKIN (10/05-10/18)

**Text:** *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* - Ruha Benjamin

**Reading Week** (October 5 - October 11)

Focused reading, reading diary, group check in and planning. (Firestarters and Reactors plan and prepare their submissions.) Open live discussion and reading help with professor: Oct 8, 3:30 PM-5:00 PM (Pacific)

**Discussion Week** (October 12 - October 18)

Finishing reading, active discussion of texts. Discussion Roles:

- Firestarter 1: Black Canary, reactions by Katana
- Firestarter 2: Vixen, reactions by Huntress
- Sync Commentariat: Live session, Oct 15, 3:30 PM - 5:00 PM (Pacific)
- Async Commentariat: In #SKIN channel

**Summative Learning Assignment:** individually determined, due October 21.

## #STAKE (10/19-11/01)

**Text:** *The Economization of Life* - Michelle Murphy

**Reading Week** (October 19 - October 25)

Focused reading, reading diary, group check in and planning. (Firestarters and Reactors plan and prepare their submissions.) Open live discussion and reading help with professor: Oct 22, 3:30 PM-5:00 PM (Pacific)

**Discussion Week** (October 26 - November 1)

Active discussion of texts. Discussion Roles:

- Firestarter 1: Thunder, reactions by Raven
- Firestarter 2: Stargirl, reactions by Hawkgirl
- Sync Commentariat: Live session, Oct 29, 3:30 PM - 5:00 PM (Pacific)
- Async Commentariat: In #STAKE channel

**Summative Learning Assignment:** individually determined, due November 4.

# Break I (11/02-11/08)

*Reading Break, Vibe Check, Office Hours - Nov 5, 3:30 PM-5:00 PM (Pacific)*

# #SCENE (11/09-11/22)

**Text:** *Cloud Ethics: Algorithms and the Attributes of Ourselves and Others* - Louise Amoore

**Reading Week** (November 9 - November 15)

Focused reading, reading diary, group check in and planning. (Firestarters and Reactors plan and prepare their submissions.) Open live discussion and reading help with professor: Nov 12, 3:30 PM-5:00 PM (Pacific)

**Discussion Week** (November 16 - November 22)

Active discussion of texts. Discussion Roles:

- Firestarters 1: Katana, reactions by Vixen
- Firestarters 2: Huntress, reactions by Black Canary
- Sync Commentariat: Live session, Nov 19, 3:30 PM - 5:00 PM (Pacific)
- Async Commentariat: In #SCENE channel

**Summative Learning Assignment:** individually determined, due November 25.

# Break II (11/23-11/29)

*Reading Break, Thanksgiving, No Office Hours*

# #SHIFT (11/30-12/11)

**Text:** *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* - Dean Spade

**Reading Week** (November 30 - December 6)

Focused reading, reading diary, group check in and planning. (Firestarters and Reactors plan and prepare their submissions.) Open live discussion and reading help with professor: Dec 3, 3:30 PM-5:00 PM (Pacific)

**Discussion Week** (December 7 - December 11)

Active discussion of texts.

Discussion Roles

- Firestarters 1: Raven, reactions by Stargirl
- Firestarters 2: Hawkgirl, reactions by Thunder
- Sync Commentariat: Live session, Dec 10, 3:30 PM - 5:00 PM (Pacific)
- Async Commentariat: In #SHIFT channel

**Summative Learning Assignment:** individually determined, due December 16.