Expository Writing 20: Privacy and Surveillance
Fall 2022

COURSE OVERVIEW

Most of us are vaguely aware that our online activities are extensively monitored by corporations in search of profits and that the government may be watching or listening to our communications in the name of national security. It is easy to decry this state of affairs as Orwellian or, on the other hand, to reassure ourselves that surveillance only harms those with something to hide. In this course we will seek to move beyond these simplistic responses by considering the rights underlying privacy claims and by closely examining how surveillance operates in practice.

In the first unit, we will explore the powerful, but surprisingly elusive, concept of privacy. Are we concerned only about the possibility that information gathered about us will be abused? Or is there something more fundamentally troubling in the government reading people's emails, or in corporations having records of our internet browsing histories? We will read three accounts of privacy, by federal judge Richard Posner, legal academic Neil Richards, and philosopher Stanley Benn, that offer different answers to these questions.

In the second unit, we will consider government surveillance, specifically the National Security Agency’s power to monitor the content of calls and emails originating from non-American citizens who are outside the United States. We will start with excerpts from the government-commissioned reports explaining the extent of this surveillance. We will then read both academic and popular articles discussing the issues it raises. Do non-citizens have any privacy rights vis-à-vis the U.S. government? Are there adequate legal protections for American citizens whose communications—both dangerous and innocent—are swept up in surveillance that is targeted at foreigners?

In the final unit we will examine what privacy rights we have with respect to private entities such as corporations, universities and charities. In this unit, you will write a research paper on a topic of your choosing about privacy rights and non-governmental actors.
class, in order to provide a starting point for your research, we will address some of the key questions in this area. We will discuss whether there is a right to be forgotten online, or whether truthful information about private citizens should be available via internet search engines indefinitely. We will also examine empirical research about Americans’ understanding of their privacy rights online: can internet users be regarded as having given meaningful consent to privacy agreements that they have not read and would in any case likely not fully understand?

Over the course of the semester, you will write extensively about the meaning and scope of privacy. In class, we will cover the fundamentals of good academic writing that you will then put into practice in your own work. We will focus in particular on the elements of academic writing that are common to many disciplines—such as thesis, evidence and analysis—but will also examine how different disciplines and types of assignments may call for different approaches to writing. The writing assignments for each unit build on each other, so that as the course proceeds you will write papers addressing more complex questions and drawing on a wider range of sources. Course readings will be made available on the course website or handed out in class.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

WRITING AND REVISING

You will write three essays over the course of the semester, one for each unit. For each of these essays, you will go through the following process of drafting and revision:

i. **RESPONSE PAPERS** – Before you compose an initial draft of each essay, you will complete one or two response papers that focus on particular writing skills or topics that are important for the essay.

ii. **DRAFTS AND COVER LETTERS** – You will submit a draft of each of the three essays, accompanied by a cover letter in which you tell your readers what aspects of the essay you are struggling with, briefly describe the process of writing the essay, and set out whatever other comments or questions you might have. I will provide written comments on each draft essay.
ii. **Conferences** – For your essays in Units One and Three, in addition to providing you with written comments, I will hold conferences to discuss your work, either individually or in a small group. Individual conferences each last 20-30 minutes. You will sign up for conferences using a sign-up tool on the course website. If you have time constraints, be sure to sign up early! These conferences are an extremely valuable opportunity to discuss how you can most effectively revise your draft. I will send you my written comments on your draft before your conference and will expect you to have carefully reviewed these comments before we meet. You should plan on taking notes during the conference itself. Conference weeks are extremely busy; if you miss or come unprepared for your scheduled conference, you will not be able to reschedule.

iv. **Essay Revisions** – After reviewing my comments in each unit, you will submit a revised version of your essay. This is the only version of the essay that will be graded. You are expected to revise the paper thoroughly and to submit significantly improved work. In Units One and Three, you will have a week after your conference date to submit a revised version of the paper. In Unit Two, since there will be no conferences, I will return everyone’s draft essay with my written comments on the same day; revised papers will be due a week after this date.

Please note that all writing you do for this class is *public*, in the sense that it may be shared with your classmates and may be chosen as an example for us to consider in class.

**Class Preparation and Participation**

One of the benefits of Expos is its small class size. That benefit is best realized when *every student* participates fully in the class; you will learn much more from articulating and defending your own ideas than from simply listening to others do so. You are expected to come to class having done the reading and any assigned exercises for that day and prepared to engage with the ideas of your peers.

After each draft essay is due we’ll have a draft workshop in which we discuss one or more papers by students in the class. We will focus on strategies for revision that all writers can use. You will be asked to
review and constructively comment on your peers’ work in class and in peer comment letters.

**Grades**

The majority of your grade comes from your three essays, according to the following breakdown: Essay #1 = 25%; Essay #2 = 30%; Essay #3 = 40%. The remaining 5% of your grade will reflect the quality of your participation in the course (including contribution to class discussions, completion of response papers and constructive participation in conferences and workshops).

In calculating overall grades at the end of the semester, I use a standard four-point scale to convert letter grades into numbers. The cut-off for each grade is the halfway point to the next lower grade. For example, the cut-off for a B+ is 3.165—halfway between 3.33 (B+) and 3 (B). Please note that I do not round grades up or down, no matter how close a student’s average is to a higher or lower grade.

**Getting Help**

**Office Hours**

I will be available in my office or via Zoom during office hours (Tuesdays, 12-1pm) and by appointment. Office hours are a time to come and ask questions, talk about your work in the class and get help with any problems you are encountering as you work on your drafts and revisions. In weeks when drafts or revisions are due and significant numbers of students are likely to come to office hours, I operate a system of short appointments.

N.B.: During conference weeks I will not hold regular office hours.

**Email**

Rather than take up class time with announcements and administrative arrangements, I will use email to communicate most of that information. Please check your email daily. (Emails will be archived on the course website.) Likewise, I will check my email regularly for questions from you. I will answer most questions within 24 hours.

**Writing Center**
At any stage of the writing process—brainstorming ideas, reviewing drafts, working on revisions—you may want some extra help with your essays. The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. This is an extremely useful resource. Visit the Center’s website to make an appointment.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you think you will require some flexibility in deadlines or participation in the course for reasons of a documented disability, please schedule a meeting with me early in the semester so we can discuss appropriate accommodations. (To be eligible for such accommodations, you need to have provided documentation to the Accessible Education Office ahead of time. Please let me know if you are unfamiliar with that process.) The Accessible Education Office works closely with Expos courses, and we will develop a plan that is appropriate for your needs. Please note that it is always your responsibility to consult with me as the need for those accommodations arises.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance and Lateness

The Writing Program attendance policy is intended to make sure that you get everything you can out of your Expos course. Because Expos has fewer class hours than some other courses; because the course is largely discussion-based; and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential to your learning in the course.

While I of course encourage you to be present every day in class, you are allowed two unexcused absences for the semester with no consequence. Some absences (religious holidays and medical situations) are automatically considered excused; some family circumstances may also be counted as excused absences. If you miss two unexcused classes, I will ask you to meet with me to discuss any issues that may be keeping you from attending, and to advise you on your plan for catching up on the missed work. If you miss a third class, you will be required to meet with your Resident Dean about
those absences, so that your Dean can give you any support you may need to help you get back on track in the class. Missing four classes--the equivalent of two full weeks of the semester--puts you at risk for missing crucial material necessary to complete your work. Unless there is a medical or other emergency issue preventing consistent engagement with the class, students who miss four classes will receive a formal warning that they are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

In the case of a medical problem, you should contact me before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours. In the case of a medical absence, you may be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official to confirm that absence as excused; protracted or repeated illness will require such documentation. Absences because of special events or extracurricular involvement are not excused absences. If such circumstances lead you to want to have more than two unexcused absences, you must petition the Associate Director of the Writing Program for permission.

**Deadlines and Completion of Work**

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course (not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind). If you are unable to complete your work on time due to medical or family issues, please contact me before the deadline to discuss both the support you might need as well as a possible new arrangement for your deadline. Communication about your situation is essential so that we can determine how best to help you move forward. If we have not already discussed your situation and you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements and asking you to meet with me and/or your Resident Dean to make a plan for catching up on your work. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and if you have not documented a medical problem or been in touch with your Dean about other circumstances, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

In addition to the special provision described above for anyone facing medical or family issues, each student is allowed ONE automatic
24-hour extension on a response paper, draft or revision during the semester. To use this extension without penalty, you must contact me to let me know you are availing of it before the original deadline for the piece of work. Otherwise, essay drafts or revisions turned in after the deadline will be penalized a third of a letter-grade on the final essay for each day they are late.

Collaboration

As in many academic situations, our Expos class will be a setting that involves frequent collaboration—we will develop ideas together through class discussion, peer review, and draft workshops. The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). It is a form of academic integrity to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay; you can do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the Student Handbook, “Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

Academic Integrity

One of the essential elements of the Expos curriculum is the work we do on effective source use, appropriate acknowledgement of sources, and expectations for citing sources in academic writing. In each unit, we will work on strategies for working with the ideas of other authors and sources, and how to develop your own ideas in response to them. Most forms of academic writing involve building on the ideas of others, contributing ideas of your own, and signaling clearly for readers where each idea comes from. This complex relationship with sources is part of our work through the whole semester, and you should always feel free to ask me questions about this material.

As we become familiar with the expectations of an academic audience, we will also work on strategies to avoid errors in citation and unintentional plagiarism. As with all your courses, the expectation in Expos is that all the work that you submit for this course must be your
own. That work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.

**Course Materials**

The work we do together in class—discussions, exercises, workshopping essays—is intended for the members of our class. Students are not allowed to record class and are not allowed to post video or audio recordings or transcripts of our class meetings. (Students needing course recordings as an accommodation should contact the Accessible Education Office.) While samples of student work will be circulated within the course (and all work you do may be shared with your classmates), you may not share fellow students’ work with others outside the course without their written permission. As the *Handbook for Students* explains, students may not “post, publish, sell, or otherwise publicly distribute course materials without the written permission of the course instructor. Such materials include, but are not limited to, the following: video or audio recordings, assignments, problem sets, examinations, other students’ work, and answer keys.” Students who violate any of these expectations may be subject to disciplinary action.

**Submitting Written Work**

You will turn in drafts and revisions to the dropbox on the course website. The document must either be in Microsoft Word or be easily compatible with Word (your file should end in .doc or .docx). You are responsible for submitting versions that I can open. It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty.

All essays (drafts and revisions) should adhere to the following format:

- double-space in a reasonable font, with one-inch margins
- number all pages and paragraphs
- include your name, the course title, my name, the date and your essay title on the first page (don’t use a title page)
- proofread thoroughly for typographical, grammatical, and punctuation errors (I strongly advise you to print your essay in order to proofread it).
And a word to the wise:
In order to avoid computer disaster, you should both regularly save your work and periodically print working drafts as you write. In other words, you should never be in the position of having worked on an essay or revision with nothing to show for it if your computer crashes.