

Ling 575: Societal Impacts of Language Technology

January 9, 2025

Plan for today

- Course goals
- Ground rules
- Course requirements
- Student intros
- Options: topics
- If time: Stochastic Parrots 

Today will be way
more lecture than
typical for this class

Course goals: Explore what/how/who

- **What** can go wrong, with language technology?
 - What has gone wrong?
 - How can we analyze systems to predict what might go wrong?
 - What areas of expertise are required?
 - Who should be consulted and how?

Course goals: Explore what/how/who

- **How** can we fix/prevent/mitigate?
 - What best practices exist for documentation of process & product?
 - What can we achieve via research on social impacts, either as main focus or as “ethical considerations” sections?
 - When should such research happen? (cf. IRB, pre-registered reports)
 - What is the role of ethical review at conferences?
 - What is the role of policy/regulation?
 - How do we keep the public appropriately informed?

Course goals: Explore what/how/who

- **Whose** job is this?
 - What are our responsibilities as technology developers?
 - At a company
 - In the public sector
 - What are our responsibilities as members of the public?
 - Who should be involved in crafting policy and how?

Ground rules

- Stay engaged
- Experience discomfort
- Speak your truth
- Expect and accept non-closure
- Maintain confidentiality
- Listen with the intent to learn
- Suspend judgment

Source: *The Denver Foundation*
Agreements for Courageous Conversations
and Active Learning

[http://www.nonprofitinclusiveness.org/
agreements-courageous-conversations-
and-active-learning](http://www.nonprofitinclusiveness.org/agreements-courageous-conversations-and-active-learning)

Course requirements

- KWLA paper
- Exercise 1 (10) - write an ethical considerations section
- Exercise 2 (10) - scicomm
- Participation in discussions (incl. Canvas) (15)
 - Come prepared to discuss readings — won't be the same as everyone else!
- Peer feedback on term project (5)
- Term project (45)

Term project

- 6-8 page paper, with the sections described
- Based on:
 - Demographically informed error analysis of some system
 - Value sensitive design-based analysis of existing NLP task
 - Some other project that you propose

KWLA - K & W due Monday!

- What you already know (~1 page)
- What you want to learn (~1 page)
- What you learned (~3 pages)
- How you'll apply it in your research/studies (~2 pages)

Student intros

- Name + anything you'd like us to know about how you like to be addressed/referred to (pronouns, nickname, etc)
- What do you hope to get out of this class?

Topics — options

- Next week: Foundational readings
- Value sensitive design
- Taxonomies of algorithmic harm
- Documentation and transparency
- Privacy
- Bias/discrimination
- Crowdsourcing & labor conditions
- Language variation & emergent bias
- Community control of language data
- Policy regulation & guidelines
- Synthetic media & pollution of the information ecosystem
- Anthropomorphization
- ... (see web page)

Reading questions for next week

- What do we want to get out of the “foundations” readings?

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