IPAF 4900: Research Experience Opportunity

Project Title: Privacy as Cultural Structure in Canada   **Term:** Summer 2020

Supervisor: Dr. Michael Christensen   **Unit:** Law and Legal Studies

Description of project:

Given the rapidly changing landscape of privacy regulation in an era of surveillance capitalism, social scientists and policy scholars have asked how new regulations might protect the data consumers produce through their online interactions. Many have attributed the difficulty of this problem to the so-called "privacy paradox" whereby consumers value privacy, yet fail to take steps protect their privacy. However, the privacy paradox assumes consumers have ready access to the information or tools that could inform decisions about the array of privacy-related choices we make every day. The vast scale of these choices required on a social level has meant that current regulatory initiatives for privacy rights based on individual responsibility have been ineffective. The problem, according to some legal scholars (e.g. Solove 2008, 2020), is that countries such as the United States and Canada have been operating with an overly narrow concept of privacy. This research project examines privacy through a broader socio-legal lens by comparing formal regulatory debates in Canada with cultural narratives about privacy communicated in the current media ecosystem. The Research Experience Opportunity (REO) outlined below will primarily focus on establishing the key themes of the formal privacy discourse in Canada.

Number of students required: 1

Research duties:

- A review of reports published by the Government of Canada on the topic of privacy and personal data. This will include reports of Parliamentary subcommittees, the Computer Security Establishment, and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. This should be submitted in the form of a literature review. Number of hours: 15
- Coding and analysis of case summaries published by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada related to the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) since January 2016 (~50 case files). Thematic coding will be completed using the qualitative analysis software NVivo 12. A summary analysis of the coding will be written up in a report highlighting the most relevant cases and themes. Number of hours: 50

Learning and reflection activities:

- The student will be asked to include analytical reflections in each of the two reports outlined above. Each of the tasks will require the student to synthesize material in a focused way and will be the primary forms of evaluation.

Learning outcomes:

- Privacy and digital technology is a popular subject for many students, but this REO will give the student an opportunity to learn how privacy regulations are designed and applied by a government agency. The learning outcome will therefore include: (1) an understanding of current policy debates about privacy and technology in Canada, (2) a practical understanding of PIPEDA and how it is enforced, (3) a capacity for critical analysis of policy outcomes from a socio-legal perspective, (4) and skills related to qualitative text analysis using coding software (NVivo 12).

Evaluation Criteria:
- The literature review will be due on May 29, 2020. It will be worth 25% of the overall mark.
- The summary report, along with the coded data will be due on August 7, 2020. This report will be worth 75% of the overall mark.

Skills or knowledge required:
N/A

Any required health and safety training:
N/A

Application instructions:
Participants are selected on the basis of merit and fit with the research project. Please submit a CV, transcript, and cover letter indicating why you are interested in and qualified for this research experience to the undergraduate administrator of the unit listed above. The application deadline is normally April 30th (for IPAF 4900 opportunities in the summer or fall term), August 15th (for fall and winter term opportunities) and November 15th (to take IPAF 4900 in the winter or summer term). Only students with a GPA of 9.5 or higher and at least third year honours standing will be considered.