

## **Course Outline**

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<b>COURSE:</b>	<b>LAWS 3501 A – Law and the Information Society</b>
<b>TERM:</b>	<b>Winter 2026</b>
<b>PREREQUISITES:</b>	<b>1.0 credit in LAWS at the 2000 level</b>
<b>CLASS:</b>	<b>Day &amp; Time: Fridays 8:35 – 11:25am</b> <b>Room: Please check Carleton Central for current Class Schedule</b> <b>(In-person course)</b>
<b>INSTRUCTOR:</b>	<b>Dr. Michael Christensen</b>
<b>CONTACT:</b>	<b>Office Hrs: Fridays 11:35am – 12:30pm</b> <b>Telephone:</b> <b>Email: <a href="mailto:Michael.christensen@carleton.ca">Michael.christensen@carleton.ca</a></b>
<b>BRIGHTSPACE:</b>	<b><a href="https://brightspace.carleton.ca/d2l/home/366348">https://brightspace.carleton.ca/d2l/home/366348</a></b>

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### **CALENDAR COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Legal responses to challenges of the information society. Topics may include privacy, surveillance and monitoring, access to information, freedom of expression, control of objectionable content, Charter and human rights issues, and security.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course explores some of the social, political and legal challenges that have emerged with the rise of our contemporary information society. As more social and political processes are moved online or become guided by algorithms processing ever greater amounts of personal data, scholars have been forced to rethink the basic legal principles related to privacy, inequality, identity, public speech, and political autonomy. While levels of online engagement vary, the lives of all Canadians are increasingly shaped by data and information regimes that regulate the criminal justice system, the financial sector, education, and other areas of Canadian civil society.

The key learning objectives of the course will put students in a better position to understand contemporary and future issues within legal studies. Firstly, students will learn basic facts about the actors, systems and platforms that collect and use personal data. Understanding how these

systems work is a step towards developing a critical analysis of big data and algorithmic regulation, as well as debates about future applications of artificial intelligence and machine learning. Secondly, students will become familiar with the scholarly literature that has uncovered and challenged the actions of governments, large media companies and fringe political actors that have exploited the lax regulation of personal data to anti-democratic ends. Thirdly, students will learn to engage in these debates by completing assignments that ask students to collect and analyze social media data, and to write a critical research paper about a contemporary legal issue related to challenges posed by the emerging information society.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

All readings will be posted on Brightspace (Students are not required to purchase textbooks or other learning materials for this course).

### **EVALUATION**

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Department and of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Department and the Dean.

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Due Date</u>	<u>Weight</u>
Perusall Comments	Comments on the Readings	<b>BEFORE</b> each lecture	10%
Participation	Attendance/Class Discussion	Each week	5%
Information Audit	3-5 pages	January 30	10%
Social Media Group Project	5-7 pages	March 6	20%
Critical Research Paper	10-12 pages	April 8	25%
Final Exam	On lectures AND readings	TBD	30%

### **COURSE COMPONENTS**

#### *Perusall Comments (10%)*

We will be using the Perusall online platform to promote discussion comments about the readings. All readings will be uploaded to Perusall (accessed through Brightspace) and students will be expected to contribute comments or questions on the readings each week. **Two comments per reading** must be posted *before* class each week and will be evaluated based on quality over quantity. Each week, a student's comments will be assigned a grade of either 1 point (good engagement with the material), .5 points (satisfactory engagement), or 0 points (unsatisfactory/no engagement). 10 points is the maximum grade for the term.

*Participation (5%)*

Students will be expected to attend class and participate in discussions each week. The in-class participation grade constitutes the sum of this participation and is based on attendance, as well as a wholistic evaluation of students' ability to contribute to class discussion. [Note: this grade is meant as a low-bar incentive to attend and participate in class. Students who regularly attend and talk at least a little bit in class will get the full 5%]

*Information Audit and Reflection (10%)*

Students are required to conduct an audit on their own information consumption and write a brief reflection on what they find. Reflections should be **3-5 pages** (12-point font, double-spaced with appropriate margins), and should follow the questions listed on the assignment sheet (instructions will be posted on Brightspace). Audit worksheets and reflections will be due on **January 30**.

*Social Media Analysis Group Project (20%)*

The goal of this exercise is to provide students with some practical experience organizing and conducting a content analysis of social media data. For this exercise, you will be using the Communalytic web software to collect data from social media platforms. This will be a group project, and your group will write a report based on your analysis. Groups should be small, ideally 2-3 people and no more than 4 people. The paper should be **5-7 pages** (12-point font, double-spaced with appropriate margins), and should follow the instructions outlined in the assignment sheet (instructions will be posted on Brightspace). Groups will also give a short presentation on the day the papers are due (**March 6**).

*Critical Research Paper (25%)*

To help students apply what they learn about law and the information society, they will be required to write a critical research paper on a topic related to big data, algorithms, AI, social media, privacy or another topic related to the course content. The paper should be **10-12 pages** (12-point font, double-spaced with appropriate margins), and should follow the instructions outlined in the assignment sheet (instructions will be posted on Brightspace). The papers will be due on **April 8**.

*Final Exam (30%)*

There will be a final exam on the content covered in class and in the readings. The exam will be held during the final exam period in April and will be a proctored exam. The date, time and location of the exam will be provided by Scheduling and Exam Services sometime in February.

## **LATE PENALTIES AND REQUESTS FOR EXTENSIONS**

Late assignments will only be accepted in consultation with the instructor. As soon as you know that you will not be able to turn in an assignment on time, please contact me. All other late assignments will be assessed with a standard late penalty of 5% per day.

The granting of extensions is at the discretion of the instructor, who will confirm whether an extension is approved and its duration. For information about requesting short-term or long-term extensions, deferrals for final exams, or academic consideration due to illness, injury, or other extraordinary circumstances, please visit the Academic Consideration Policy page and complete the relevant forms as required. All requests must be submitted to the instructor before the assignment due date or, in the case of exam deferrals, directly to the Registrar's Office. Full details and instructions can be found here: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-consideration-policy/>.

## **SCHEDULE**

### **January 9:** Course Introduction and Syllabus Review

- No readings due

### **January 16:** The World of Data and Algorithms

- Lessig, Lawrence. 2008. *Code: And Other Laws of Cyberspace, Version 2.0*. New York: Basic Books.
- O'Neil, Cathy (2016) *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*. New York: Crown. Pgs. 1-31.

### **January 23:** Information Infrastructure

- Mwema, Esther, and Abeba Birhane. 2024. "Undersea Cables in Africa: The New Frontiers of Digital Colonialism." *First Monday* 29(4):1–28.
- Bridges, Lauren E. 2024. "Competing Digital Capacities: Between State-Led Digital Governance and Local Data Center Tradeoffs." *Information, Communication & Society* 27(10):1906–23.

### **January 30:** The Architecture of Social Media and its Regulation

- Helmond, Anne (2015) "The Platformization of the Web: Making Web Data Platform Ready." *Social Media + Society*. 1(2). Pgs. 1-11.
- van Dijck, Jose., & Thomas Poell (2013) "Understanding Social Media Logic." *Media and Communication*, 1(1). Pgs. 2-14.

### **February 6:** Inequality and Information Online

- Noble, Safiya Umoja (2018) *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York University Press. Pgs. 15-63.
- Brown, Simone (2012) "Race and Surveillance" in Bell et al. *Routledge Handbook*

*of Surveillance Studies*. New York: Routledge. Pgs. 72-79.

**February 13:** Legal Gray Areas of Internet Culture: Trolling and Disinformation

- Phillips, Whitney (2015) *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Pgs. 1-36.
- DiResta, Renée. 2024. *Invisible Rulers: The People Who Turn Lies into Reality*. PublicAffairs. Chapter 2.

**February 20: No Class (Winter Break)**

**February 27:** The Problem of Privacy

- Solove, Daniel J. 2021. "The Myth of the Privacy Paradox." *George Washington Law Review* 89(1):1–51.

**March 6:** Do AI Solutions Increase Inequality?

- Eubanks, Virginia (2017) *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police and Punish the Poor*. New York: St. Martin's Press. Pgs. 1-38
- Arnold, Carrie. 2025. "Can AI Help Beat Poverty? Researchers Test Ways to Aid the Poorest People." *Nature* 638(8052):878–80.

**March 13:** Big Data Approaches to Law and Order

- Fergeson, Andrew Guthrie (2017) *The Rise of Big Data Policing: Surveillance, Race, and the Future of Law Enforcement*. New York: New York University Press. Pgs. 62-83
- Angwin, Julia, Jeff Larson, Surya Mattu & Lauren Kirchner (2016) "Machine Bias" (a ProPublica report): <https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing>

**March 20:** Fintech and the culture of Cryptocurrencies

- Henshaw, Alexis. 2023. "'Women, Consider Crypto': Gender in the Virtual Economy of Decentralized Finance." *Politics & Gender* 19(2):560–84.
- Maclean, Kate. 2025. "Crypto Dad and the Primal Horde: The Gendered Psychodynamics of Regulating Cryptocurrencies." *Journal of Gender Studies* 0(0):1–20.

**March 27:** New forms of Surveillance

- Liang, Fan, Vishnupriya Das, Nadiya Kostyuk, & Muzammil M. Hussain (2018) "Constructing a Data-Driven Society: China's Social Credit System as a State Surveillance Infrastructure." *Policy & Internet*. 10(4). Pgs. 415-438.
- Crawford, Kate. 2021. *The Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Chapter 2 Pgs. 53-88.

**April 8:** Exam review Class**POLICY ON PERMISSIBILITY OF SUBMITTING SAME WORK MORE THAN ONCE, PERMISSIBILITY OF GROUP OR COLLABORATIVE WORK, AND PERMISSIBILITY OF USING GENERATIVE AI**

Students are strictly prohibited from submitting any work that has been previously submitted for academic credit in another course. Any such submission will result in an academic integrity violation, and the student will be referred to the university's academic integrity office for review. Re-using any portion of previous work, regardless of its extent, will be treated as a violation of academic integrity, unless the student is given permission by the instructor.

Collaboration is permitted in specific instances where the instructor allows it. For example, group projects or collaborative assignments may be part of the course, in which case students are encouraged to work together and divide the tasks evenly. In all other cases (such as individual assignments), students must complete their work independently.

Students may use AI tools like ChatGPT, but only in specific, limited ways. AI tools can be used to assist with tasks such as gathering ideas, researching initial sources, or proofreading a final draft for grammar and style. However, students are not allowed to use AI to organize or communicate their core ideas. The focus of the course is on developing original thought and critical thinking skills, so AI should not be relied upon for creating the main content of an assignment. Any use of AI must be clearly documented and cited, including the prompts used and how the tool assisted in the process.

<b>Winter 2026 Sessional Dates and University Closures</b>	
<i>Please find a full list of important academic dates on the calendar website:</i> <a href="https://calendar.carleton.ca/academicyear/">https://calendar.carleton.ca/academicyear/</a>	
<b>January 5, 2026</b>	Winter term begins.
<b>January 16, 2026</b>	Last day for registration and course changes (including auditing) for Winter courses.
<b>January 31, 2026</b>	Last day to withdraw from full winter courses and the winter portion of fall/winter courses with a full fee adjustment.
<b>February 16, 2026</b>	Statutory holiday. University closed.
<b>February 16-20, 2026</b>	Winter break. No classes.
<b>March 15, 2026</b>	Last day for academic withdrawal from Winter courses.
	Last day to request Formal Examination Accommodations for April full winter, late winter, and fall/winter final examinations from the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities. Note that it may not be possible to fulfil accommodation requests received after the specified deadlines.
<b>March 25, 2026</b>	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in full winter term or fall/winter undergraduate courses, before the official April final examination period.
<b>April 3, 2026</b>	Statutory holiday. University closed.
<b>April 8, 2026</b>	Winter term ends.
	Last day of winter and fall/winter classes.
	Classes follow a Friday schedule.
	Last day for take home examinations to be assigned.
<b>April 9-10, 2026</b>	No classes or examinations take place.
<b>April 11-23, 2026</b>	Final examinations in fall term courses and mid-term examinations in fall/winter courses will be held.
<b>April 23, 2026</b>	All final take-home examinations are due on this day, with the exception of those conforming to the examination regulations in the Academic Regulations of the University section of the Undergraduate Calendar/General Regulations of the Graduate Calendar.

**UNIVERSITY AND DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES****PLAGIARISM**

The University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.*” This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, artworks, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT);
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one’s own; and
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course’s instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of “F” for the course.

**STATEMENT ON STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH**

As a University student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. For more information, please consult <https://wellness.carleton.ca/>

Emergency Resources (on and off campus):

- <https://wellness.carleton.ca/get-help-now/>



**Carleton Resources:**

- Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>
- Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>
- Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>
- Academic Advising Centre (AAC): <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>
- Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): <https://carleton.ca/csas/>
- Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

**Off Campus Resources:**

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>
- Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>
- Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>
- The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: <https://walkincounselling.com>

**ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS**

Carleton is committed to providing academic accessibility for all individuals. You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. The accommodation request processes, including information about the Academic Consideration Policy for Students in Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances, are outlined on the Academic Accommodations website ([students.carleton.ca/course-outline](https://students.carleton.ca/course-outline)).

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows.

**Pregnancy and Family-Status Related Accommodations**

Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details about the accommodation policy, visit the [Equity and Inclusive Communities \(EIC\)](#) website.

**Religious Obligation**

Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, please go to: <https://carleton.ca/equity/focus/discrimination-harassment/religious-spiritual-observances/>.

**Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation.

You can find the Paul Menton Centre online at: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>

If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

### **Survivors of Sexual Violence**

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

### **Accommodation for Student Activities**

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. Read more here: <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>.

For more information on academic accommodation, please visit: <https://students.carleton.ca/services/accommodation/>.

### **Academic Consideration for Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances**

Due to medical and other extenuating circumstances, students may occasionally be unable to fulfill the academic requirements of their course(s) in a timely manner. The University supports the academic development of students and aims to provide a fair environment for students to succeed academically. Medical and/or other extenuating circumstances are circumstances that are beyond a student's control, have a significant impact on the student's capacity to meet their academic obligations, and could not have reasonably been prevented.

Students must contact the instructor(s) as soon as possible, and normally no later than 24 hours after the submission deadline for course deliverables. If not satisfied with the instructor's decision, students can conduct an "informal appeal" to the Chair of the department within three (3) working days of an instructor's decision. We have created a webform specifically for appeals to the Chair, which can be found here: <https://carleton.ca/law/application-for-review-of-refusal-to-provide-academic-consideration/>. *Note: This form only applies to LAWS courses and is not the same as a formal appeal of grade.* More information about the academic consideration can be found [here](#).