Frankenstein, Robocop, Big Data

10 credits

English 178
Frankenstein, Robocop, Big Data

Philosophy 101
Introduction to Philosophy

Library Information Studies 351
Introduction to Digital Information

Main Course

This is a FIG about memory. We will consider the relative frailty of human memory in comparison to the unforgetting nature of digital storage. Humans forget; computers do not.

The main seminar in this FIG, English 178: “Frankenstein, Robocop, Big Data” will begin by considering the relationship between memory and human identity. In many ways, we are who we are because we remember who we are day to day. However, human memory is fragile. We forget things; we misremember events.

By contrast, all online activity leaves a trace that can be collected to form a version of the user. This version is not identical to the human user and yet is often a frighteningly accurate image of the user whose behaviors may be tracked and predicted. Importantly, this digital version of the user is produced by a form of memory (or more precisely a storage of information) that does not forget. You may not remember “liking” that photo on Facebook at 3 am, but Facebook does.

The course will draw its reading and viewing list from a variety of literary and non-literary sources. Our central texts will include, Frankenstein (1818), Robocop (1987 and 2014), and current debates around National Security Agency surveillance, social media literacy, online persona, and online privacy.

Our primary project will be to develop a digital portfolio of work in collaboration with the UW’s DesignLab. The other two courses in this FIG will help develop a greater understanding of the place of memory in human experience and a critical perspective on our place in twenty-first-century digital culture.

Linked Course

Library Information Studies 351: “Introduction to Digital Information” — In this hybrid course that meets online (lecture) and face-to-face in a weekly discussion (lab), students will learn to create websites and understand how they work across digital devices; understand and build databases; learn how search engines work behind the scenes; tackle information overload by learning tricks and tools to help people organize their digital stuff; work with a real client to learn project management and build communication skills.

This FIG is well suited for students interested in a certificate in Digital Studies and majors in English, Computer Science, Communications, Journalism, Law, and Philosophy.

Linked Course

Philosophy 101: “Introduction to Philosophy” — The purpose of this course is to give you a better sense of what philosophy is, how it relates to other disciplines, and what it is good for. We will proceed by considering possible answers to a number of key philosophical questions.

• Do we have free will?
• What is knowledge and what sorts of things can we know?
• What is the fundamental nature of reality?
• Does God exist?
• Is truth relative or objective?
• Is life absurd and meaningless?
• What, if anything, determines that an action is morally wrong (for instance, intentionally killing an innocent person)?

As will soon become clear, much of philosophy consists in formulating and evaluating arguments.
Enrolled in a FIG and you change your mind?

FIG courses are designed to be taken together. When you enroll in a FIG, you are signed up for these courses as a whole group, not as separate courses.

**If you change your mind, dropping one FIG course means ending your enrollment in all of the courses in the FIG.**

So, here's what you should know if you want to drop the FIG:

- You can drop all the courses on your own through your Student Center at my.wisc.edu. Any non-FIG course will not be affected.
- After classes begin (Tuesday, September 6, 2016), if you need to drop a single course within the FIG, please contact Kari Fernholz (see below) to review your situation. If necessary, she will provide the required authorization to drop the course.
- **Wednesday, September 14, 2016** is the last day to drop courses without it appearing on your college transcript.
- **Friday, September 16, 2016** is the last day to add a course without first getting departmental approval.