PSCI/PPOL/ECON 4396: Digital Economics and the Law
Spring 2023

Class Information

Time: Tuesday and Thursday 11:30am-12:45pm
Classroom: AD 2.232
Course Website: UTD eLearning

Instructor Information

Name: Pengfei Zhang
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Office Hours: Thursday 3:00-4:00 pm (or by appointment)

TA Information

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 10:00-11:00 am (or by appointment)

Course Description

Digital Platforms are becoming essential building blocks of modern economies, facilitating an unprecedented scale of economic transactions and activities. At the same time, an increasing number of laws and regulations are drafted, discussed, and ready to reshape the landscape of digital platforms. This course is an introduction to the economic scholarship on various legal and regulatory problems faced by digital platforms. It covers a variety of contentious topics, such as digital copyright, intermediary liability, content moderation, censorship, privacy, cybercrimes, etc. Despite the digital context, many policy questions discussed are also common in the economic analysis of law and such connections will be emphasized throughout the course. The course will be particularly helpful to students interested in either understanding the digital economy or applying economic reasoning to legal problems.

Course Objectives

After this course, you should be able to

- Understand basic concepts used in research on digital economy and internet law

- Develop the ability to apply economic reasoning to legal and regulatory problems faced by digital platforms

- Identify consistent themes in the contemporary issues regarding platform governance and regulation

- Communicate in an academic fashion on social science research

- Write clearly on policy controversy and debates

Textbook & Reading

There is no single textbook that aligns exactly with the content of this course. For the lectures on digital platforms, I will use *The Economics of Platforms: Concepts and Strategy*, 1st edition by Paul Belleflamme and Martin Peitz (short for **BP**). For the lectures on law and economics, I will use *Law and Economics*, 6th edition by Robert Cooter and Thomas Ulen (short for **CU**), which is freely available online at the Berkeley Law Scholarship Repository (https://lawcat.berkeley.edu/record/1127400?ln=en).

This is a seminar-style course. I will lecture about half the time we meet, and the rest of our class sessions will be denoted to discussion of readings that we will do together. A topic-specific reading list will be provided, and readings will be uploaded to the course website. For those who are interested in knowing more about the legal background and details, *Internet Law: Cases and Problems*, 11th edition by James Grimmelmann provides an excellent reference.

I encourage you to stay current with recent events on digital economy and internet law. Prof. James Grimmelmann maintains a great list of resources for students, which includes news outlets, newsletters, blogs, and podcasts (https://james.grimmelmann.net/files/resources). Some tech companies publish annual transparency reports that enable you to see how the issues we covered play out in the industry (e.g., Google Transparency Report).

Course Requirements and Grading

The course grade is determined by the following components:

Class Participation	10%
In-class Quizzes	20%
Group Activity: Classroom Questions	5%
Group Activity: Paper Presentation	20%
Group Activity: Annotated Bibliography	20%
Individual Final Essay	25%

Class Attendance and Participation

I expect you to attend every lecture and to show up on time. At times you may need a laptop or tablet to answer poll questions. Electronic devices are not needed otherwise, and

remember to keep your phone silenced. The materials are new to everybody. There are no stupid questions. Your active participation in classroom discussions will be instrumental in understanding the materials and brainstorming your final essay. You are responsible for any material covered, any work assigned, or any course changes made during the lecture. Discuss with the instructor and the TA whenever in doubt.

Quizzes

There will be *four* in-class quizzes in total throughout the semester. The *two* lowest scores will be dropped when calculating the final grade. Because of that, *NO* make-up quizzes will be given. Quizzes will be on the basic concepts and studies covered in the class. They will be closed book and closed notes. The purpose is to see whether you are keeping up with the course materials.

Group Activity

The best way to learn about an academic paper is to read it, present it, discuss it, and question it. The group activity provides you with an opportunity to communicate like a researcher and connect a variety of studies under a coherent theme. It is designed to let you dive into the literature and give you inspiration for the individual essay.

A group consists of three students. You can either form a group with others voluntarily or ask me to do a random matching. The last day to report a group is February 9th, after which the TA and I will perform a random matching for all the unmatched students.

Your grade for the group activity will be based on classroom questions, a paper presentation, and an annotated bibliography. In the second half of the course, each group will lead the discussion *once* based on assigned readings. I will pass around a sign-up sheet for group preference. The group will then be assigned to one of the six topics: copyright, content moderation, censorship, intermediary liability, security, and privacy. During the designated session, the group will do a paper presentation and help keep the discussion going. To encourage discussion, each group will submit at least *three* questions about the paper they will present on the course website, for which everyone should be prepared to answer during the class. For ALL the groups, the classroom questions are due on March 17th.

The second task for each group is to compile an annotated bibliography under one of the six topics of their choice. An annotated bibliography is a list of citations with each citation followed by a brief summary and analysis, called the annotation. The brief paragraph is usually between 150-200 words. The purpose of the annotated bibliography is to organize relevant sources under a common theme and describe the body of knowledge in a nutshell. This will connect the in-class presentations with broader ideas in the literature. Each group will select *five* most interesting papers in their bibliography (though you may come across much more than that). Examples of an annotated bibliography can be found in https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/common_writing_assignments/annotated_bibliographies/index.html.

I may choose to do a peer evaluation after the group activity. In that case, your individual grade for the group activity will be the group grade adjusted by a peer score. The goal of

a peer evaluation is apparently to discourage free-riding and reward students who actively participate. But I hope we are all trying hard to be good collaborators so that in the end there is no need for peer evaluation.

The TA and I may choose to hold a consultation session with each group to make sure you are making good progress. But you should be proactive and always feel free to discuss your assigned paper or bibliography with me and the TA. I would be happy to offer advice and help at any stage of the process.

Individual Final Essay

You will write an individual final essay due on the last day of week 16 (May 7th). The final essay lets you explore and engage in a policy discussion that interests you most. You will pick a question from the list I provide. The list is organized around the six topics covered in the class: copyright, content moderation, censorship, intermediary liability, security, and privacy. The final essay should be about 5-6 pages and clearly structured. It is expected that you draw sources from course materials, your group annotated bibliography, and your Google Scholar search. More details will be followed in "Guidelines for the Individual Essay".

Special Accommodation

It is the policy and practice of the University to make reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. However, written notification from the Office of Student AccessAbility (OSA) is required. Students who have questions about receiving accommodations, or those who have, or think they may have, a disability (mobility, sensory, health, psychological, learning, etc.) are invited to contact OSA for a confidential discussion. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation and would like to request it for this course, please send me the accommodation letter at least one week in advance.

Email Policy

All email communication in this course should be titled with the following format **4396|Your Name|Email Title**. Please use your @utdallas.edu email account. Please also make sure you *copy both the TA and me*. This is to help ensure that your email is noticed and responded to.

Tentative Course Schedule

Note that the topics in **bold font** are group-led sessions.

Week	Topics	Required Reading	Deadlines
week 1: 01/17-01/19	Introduction and Preliminaries		
week 2: 01/24-01/26	Digitization		
week 3: 01/31-02/02	User Participation & Social Media		
week 4: 02/07-02/09	Digital Platform I	BP Ch1&Ch3	Group Sign-up Due
week 5: 02/14-02/16	Digital Platform II	BP Ch4&Ch5	
week 6: 02/21-02/23	Digital Platform III		
week 7: 02/28-03/02	Property Rights & Intellectual Property	CU Ch4&Ch5I	
week 8: 03/07-03/09	Liability & Crime	CU Ch6&Ch12	
week 9: 03/14-03/16	No Class - Spring Break		Classroom Questions Due
week 10: 03/21-03/23	**Digital Copyright**		
week 11: 03/28-03/30	**Content Moderation**		
week 12: 04/04-04/06	**Censorship**		
week 13: 04/11-04/13	**Intermediary Liability**		
week 14: 04/18-04/20	**Security**		
week 15: 04/25-04/27	**Privacy**		Annotated Bibliography Due
week 16: 05/02-05/04	Selected Topic		Final Essay Due