



Internet Ethics

Course and Instructor Information

Course Title: Internet Ethics

Credits: 3

Meeting Time: 2X per week (75-minute class periods)

Format: In-person

Class Size: 20 students

Prerequisites: None

Professor: Cody Turner, Ph.D.

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Course Description

This course explores ethical issues posed by the internet and online communication systems. The primary aim of the course is to identify ethical issues related to the internet and reason through different engineering, design, and policy solutions. Students will be introduced to standard normative ethical theories to provide them with a solid theoretical grounding that they can use to better understand and make sense of the applied ethical topics that will be the focus of the course. Topics covered include (but are not limited to) internet censorship, surveillance capitalism, echo chambers, fake news, online shaming, online anonymity, the digital divide, the right to be forgotten, the ethics of hacking, the metaverse, and intellectual property rights in the digital age. By the end of the course, students should be able to analyze and evaluate philosophical arguments well as write formal philosophical essays.

Course Learning Objectives:

- Identify applied ethical issues posed by the internet and online communication systems and be able to
- Examine applied ethical issues posed by the internet through the framework of different normative ethical theories
- Develop the ability to analyze and evaluate philosophical arguments and critically examine philosophical texts
- Develop the ability to write formal philosophical essays with clarity and precision

Required Material:

All required and optional readings for the class will be posted online through Canvas in the form of PDF files. I plan to have the majority of readings for the course posted online prior to the start

of the semester. Many of the required readings derive from Veliz, Carissa (ed.) (2022). *Oxford Handbook of Digital Ethics*. Oxford University Press.

Course Schedule

Unit 1: Introduction to Philosophy and Internet Ethics

- Class 1: Introduction to Philosophy and Philosophical Argumentation
 - *Required Readings*: ‘The Value of Philosophy’ (Bertrand Russell)
- Class 2: Introduction to Internet Ethics
 - *Required Reading*: ‘History of Digital Ethics’ (Vincent Muller)

Unit 2: Meta-Ethics and Normative Ethics

- Class 3: Meta-Ethics
 - *Required Readings*: ‘The Challenge of Cultural Relativism’ (James Rachels)
 - *Optional Readings*: ‘The Wager’ (Blaise Pascal), ‘The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism’ (William Rowe), ‘Is There a Hell? Universalism, Hell, and the Fate of the Ignorant’ (Stephen Davis), ‘Of Miracles’ (David Hume), ‘The Euthyphro’ (Plato)
- Class 4: Consequentialism
 - *Required Reading*: ‘The Debate Over Utilitarianism’ (James Rachels)
 - *Optional Readings*: *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (selected sections, Jeremy Bentham) ‘Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality’ (Peter Railton)
- Class 5: Deontology and the Distinction Between Rights-Based Versus Duty-Based Approaches to Morality
 - *Required Readings*: ‘War and Massacre’ (Thomas Nagel)
 - *Optional Readings*: *Groundwork on the Metaphysics of Morals* (selected sections, Immanuel Kant), ‘Rights-Based Ethics: A Critique and Replacement’ (Kai Nielsen), ‘The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil’ (Christine Korsgaard), ‘Unifying the Categorical Imperative’ (Marcus Arvan)
- Class 6: Virtue Ethics
 - *Required Readings*: ‘Virtue Ethics’ (Rosalind Hursthouse & Glen Pettigrove, you can skip section 2)
 - *Optional Readings*: *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, books I-II), ‘Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error’ (Gilbert Harman), ‘Identifying

and Defending the Hard Core of Virtue Ethics' (Mark Alfano), 'Confucianism, Buddhism, and Virtue Ethics' (Bradford Cokelet)

Unit 3: Internet Censorship and Automated Decision-Making

- Class 7: Internet Censorship, Extreme Speech, and the Dark Web
 - *Required Reading*: 'Extreme Speech, Democratic Deliberation, and Social Media' (Jeffrey W. Howard)
 - *Optional Readings*: 'Some Information is too Dangerous to Be on the Internet' (Vincent Muller), 'The Debate on the Moral Responsibilities of Online Service Providers' (Mariarosaria Taddeo & Luciano Floridi), 'Two Types of Self-Censorship: Public and Private' (Philip Cook and Conrad Heilmann), 'A Public Policy Perspective of the Dark Web' (Michael Chertoff), 'A Digital Ethnography of the Dark Web Social Network' (Robert Gehl)
 - **PAPER #1 PROMPT DISTRIBUTED**
- Class 8: Algorithmic Bias and Automated Decision-Making
 - *Required Reading*: 'Algorithmic Bias and Access to Opportunities' (Lisa Herzog)
 - *Optional Readings*: 'Should We Automate Democracy?' (Johannes Himmelreich), 'Ethical Issues with Artificial Ethics Assistants' (Elizabeth O' Neil, Michal Klincewicz, Michiel Kemmer), 'The Ethics of Predictive Policing' (Katerina Hadimatheou and Christopher Nathan), 'Algorithmic Bias: On the Implicit Biases of Social Technology' (Gabbrielle M. Johnson), 'Algorithmic Bias: Senses, Sources, Solutions' (Sina Fazelpour and David Danks), 'Democratizing Algorithmic Fairness' (Pak-Hang Wong)

Unit 4: Digital Privacy (Ethics of Data Acquisition)

- Class 9: Digital Privacy
 - *Required Reading*: 'The Surveillance Delusion' (Carissa Veliz)
 - *Optional Reading*: 'Privacy, autonomy, and personalized targeting' (Karina Vold and Jess Whittlestone), 'Data, Privacy, and the Individual' (Carissa Veliz), 'Privacy exchanges: restoring consent in privacy self-management' (Mario Pascalev)
 - **CHATGPT CASE STUDY MEMO DUE**
- Class 10: The Ethics of Facial Recognition Technology
 - *Required Reading*: 'The Ethics of Facial Recognition Technology' (Evan Selinger and Brenda Leong)
 - *Optional Reading*: 'The ethical application of biometric facial recognition technology' (Marcus Smith and Seumas Miller)

Unit 5: Surveillance Capitalism and the Attention Economy (Ethics of Data Deployment)

- Class 11: Surveillance Capitalism and the Ethics of Adblocking
 - *Required Reading:* *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (Shoshana Zuboff, selected passages)
 - *Optional Readings:* '(When) Is Adblocking Wrong?' (Thomas Douglas), 'A Defense of Ad Blocking and Consumer Inattention' (Alexander Zambrano and Caleb Pickard), 'Price Discrimination in the Digital Age' (Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen and Lauritz Aastrup Munch)
 - **PAPER #1 DUE**
- Class 12: Digital Nudging and the Online Attention Economy
 - *Require Reading:* 'Digital Nudging: Exploring the Ethical Boundaries' (Marcello Ienca and Effy Vayena)
 - *Optional Readings:* 'Ethical Dimensions of Persuasive Technology' (James Williams), 'Is the Attention Economy Noxious?' (Clinton Castro and Adam K. Pham), 'Ethics of the Attention Economy: The Problem of Social Media Addiction' (Vikram Bhargava and Manuel Velasquez),

Unit 6: The Ethics of Social Media

- Class 13: Filter Bubbles and the Gamification of Social Media
 - *Required Reading:* 'How Twitter Gamifies Communication' (C. Thi Nguyen)
 - *Optional Readings:* 'Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles' (C. Thi Nguyen), 'Retweeting: Its Linguistic and Epistemic Value' (Neri Marsili)
- Class 14: Privacy in Social Media and Responsibility for Harms on Social Media
 - *Required Reading:* 'Privacy in Social Media' (Andrei Marmor)
 - *Optional Reading:* 'Is There Collective Responsibility for Misogyny Perpetrated on Social Media?' (Holly Lawford-Smith and Jessica Megarry)
- Class 15: The Ethics of Quitting Social Media
 - *Required Reading:* 'The Ethics of Quitting Social Media' (Robert Mark Simpson)

Unit 7: Fake News and Virtue Epistemology

- Class 16: Fake News and Deepfakes
 - *Required Reading:* 'Fake News: Rebuilding the Epistemic Landscape' (Neil Levy)
 - *Optional Readings:* 'Fake News and Epistemic Vice: Combating a Uniquely Noxious Market' (Megan Fritts and Frank Cabrera), 'Fake News and Partisan Epistemology' (Regina Rini),

‘Deepfakes and the Epistemic Backdrop’ (Regina Rini), ‘Deepfakes, Deep Harms’ (Regina Rini & Leah Cohen)

- **PAPER #2 PROMPT DISTRIBUTED**
- Class 17: Online Intellectual Virtue
 - *Required Reading:* ‘Virtues in the Digital Age’ (Shannon Vallor)
 - *Optional Readings:* ‘Virtues for Agents in Directed Social Networks’ (Mark Alfano), ‘A Normative Framework for Sharing Information Online’ (Emily Sullivan and Mark Alfano), ‘A Virtue Epistemology of the Internet: Search Engines, Intellectual Virtues, and Education’ (Richard Heersmink)
- Class 18: Online Dating and Online Friendship
 - *Required Reading:* ‘The Moral Rights and Wrongs of Online Dating and Hook-Ups’ (Lily Frank and Michal Klincewicz)
 - *Optional Readings:* ‘Friendship Online’ (Dean Cocking), ‘Flourishing on Facebook: Virtue Friendship & New Social Media’ (Shannon Vallor), ‘The Philosophical Case for Robot Friendship’ (John Danaher), ‘Online Aristotelian Character Friendship as an Augmented Form of Penpalship’ (Kristjan Kristjansson)

Unit 8: The Ethics of Trolling, Online Shaming, and Online Anonymity

- Class 19: The Ethics of Trolling
 - *Required Reading:* ‘What’s Wrong with Trolling?’ (Rebecca Roache)
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 - *Optional Readings:* ‘Unintentional Trolling: How Subjects Express Their Prejudices Through Made-Up Stories’ (Rene Baston and Benedict Kenyah-Dampney)
- Class 20: The Ethics of Online Shaming
 - *Required Reading:* ‘The Moral Risks of Online Shaming’ (Krista K. Thomason)
 - *Optional Readings:* ‘Online Shaming and the Ethics of Public Disapproval’ (James Fritz), ‘Moral Outrage Porn’ (C. Thi Nguyen and Bekka Williams), ‘Online Public Shaming: Virtues and Vices’ (Paul Billingham and Tom Parr)
 - **PAPER #2 DUE**
- Class 21: The Ethics of Online Anonymity
 - *Required Reading:* ‘Trustworthiness and Truth: The Epistemic Pitfalls of Internet Accountability’ (Karen Frost-Arnold)
 - *Optional Reading:* ‘Online Masquerade: Redesigning the Internet for Free Speech Through the Use of Pseudonyms’ (Carissa Veliz)

Unit 9: The Right to Internet Access and The Right to Be Forgotten

- Class 22: The Right to Internet Access
 - *Required Reading:* ‘Is There a Right to Internet Access?’ (Rowan Cruft)
 - *Optional Readings:* ‘The Human Right to Free Internet Access’ (Merten Reglitz), ‘Digital Divide Research, Achievements, Shortcomings’ (Jan van Dijk)
- Class 23: The Right to be Forgotten and the Ethics of ‘Deathbots’
 - *Required Reading:* ‘The Right to Be Forgotten: A Philosophical View’ (Luciano Floridi)
 - *Optional Readings:* ‘Balancing the Right to Be Forgotten and Freedom of Expression in a Technological Architecture’ (Ludo Gorzeman and Paulan Korenhof), ‘The Ethics of ‘Deathbots’’ (Nora Freya Lindemann), ‘Communing with the Dead Online: Chatbots, Grief, and Continuing Bonds’ (Joel Krueger and Lucy Osler)

Unit 10: Future of the Internet: The Metaverse and The Real-World Web

- Class 24: Virtual Reality and the Metaverse
 - *Required Reading:* ‘The Ethics of Virtual Sexual Assault’ (John Danaher)
 - *Optional Readings:* ‘Virtual Reality and Technologically Mediated Love’ (Emma Gordon), ‘The Ethics of Virtual Reality Technology: Social Hazards and Public Policy Recommendations’ (James Spiegel), ‘Virtual Reality and the Meaning of Life’ (John Danaher), ‘The Values of the Virtual’ (Rami Ali)
 - **META QUEST 2 CASE STUDY MEMO DUE**
- Class 25: Augmented Reality and the Real-World Web
 - *Required Reading:* ‘Augmented Reality, Augmented Epistemology, and the Real-World Web’ (Cody Turner)
 - *Optional Readings:* ‘Augmented Reality, Augmented Ethics: Who has the Right to Augment a Particular Physical Space?’ (Erica Neely), *Reality +: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy* (sections, David Chalmers)

Unit 11: The Ethics of Cybersecurity and Intellectual Property Rights in the Digital Age

- Class 26: The Ethics of Hacking, Cyberwarfare, and Cybersecurity
 - *Required Reading:* ‘Ethical Approaches to Cybersecurity’ (Kevin Macnish and Jeroen van der Ham)
 - *Optional Readings:* ‘The Ethics of Cyberwarfare’ (Randall R. Dipert), ‘Is it OK to be an Anonymous?’ (Philip Serracino-Inglott), ‘The Ethics of Hacking: Should it be Taught?’ (Nicole Radziwill et al.), ‘Cyber Attacks and Terrorism: A Twenty-First Century Conundrum’ (Marwan

Albahar), 'Cyber Security and Individual Rights: Striking the Right Balance' (Mariarosaria Taddeo), 'The Ethics of Cyber Attack' (David Lonsdale)

- Class 27: Intellectual Property Rights in the Digital Age
 - *Required Reading*: 'How the Digital Turn Upsets Intellectual Property' (Constantin Vica and Emanuel-Mihail Socacio)
 - *Optional Readings*: 'Intellectual Property and the Internet: the Share of Sharing' (Ejan Mackaay) 'Questions of Intellectual Property in the Artificial Intelligence Realm' (Gonenc Gurkaynak et al.), 'Locke, Intellectual Property Rights, and the Information Commons' (Herman T. Tavani), 'Ethical Dilemmas in 3D Printing from a US Perspective' (Erica Neely), 'Enforcing Intellectual Property on the Blockchain' (Martin Zeilinger)
- Class 28: FINAL EXAM REVIEW

Course Requirements and Grading

Summary of Course Grading:

Course Components	Weight
Final Exam	25%
Participation	20%
Paper #1	15%
Paper #2	15%
Reading Quizzes	15%
Case Study Memo #1	5%
Case Study Memo #2	5%

Grades in the C+ to B- range represent performance that *meets expectations*; Grades in the B+ to A- range represent performance that is significantly *better than the expectations*; Grades in the A range represent work that is *excellent*. You may contact me for information about your current grade or your expected grade in the course.

Reading Quizzes (15%)

Each week, students are expected to complete a short reading quiz on *one of the two required readings* for that week (which reading is up to you). These weekly reading quizzes will be completed on Canvas in the relevant module and are due before the start of class (no late submissions will be accepted). The quiz will invariably consist of the following three questions: What is the main argument, thesis, or idea being put forward in the reading? What is something that you found confusing *or* objectionable in the reading? What is a thought-provoking discussion question or topic based on the reading that you would

be interested in exploring further? Students should answer these questions in approximately 1-2 paragraphs (around 200-400 words total): The quizzes will be lightly graded, receiving a score of 0, 1, 2, or 3. As long you demonstrate that you have carefully completed the required reading, you will receive a 3. I will drop your lowest quiz grade at the end of the semester. *Importantly, there will be no reading quiz due during the two weeks in which there is a case study memo (see below).*

Case Study Memos (Memo #1 = 5%, Memo #2 = 5%)

There will be two case studies wherein students are expected to experiment with a given technology and then answer a set of questions based upon that experimentation. The two technologies under consideration will be ChatGPT (AI) and the Meta Quest 2 (VR). After experimenting with the technologies, students are expected to address the following questions (around 500-750 words total):

1) Project #1- ChatGPT and Large Language Models:

- a. Test the boundaries of ChatGPT's intelligence. Try to find some concrete ways in which ChatGPT falls short of being a genuine AGI. What is it not able to do that a real AGI would be able to do?
- b. Based on your experimentation, think of at least one positive use case of ChatGPT: how is it poised to enhance the productivity of someone working in a particular profession? How might someone use it to their benefit in everyday life?
- c. Based on your experimentation, think of at least one negative (ethically problematic) use case (or potential use case) of ChatGPT. How might this technology be used in an ethically suspect or unfair way?
- d. What is your general opinion of ChatGPT? How might it be viewed through the lens of one of the normative ethical theories we discussed? Do you think ChatGPT represents a significant advance in artificial intelligence technology or is it overhyped?

2) Project #2- Meta Quest 2 and Virtual Reality:

- a. Experiment with different apps on the Meta Quest 2 headset device. Find some concrete ways in which the virtual environments that you explore fall short of being 'real.' What are some features that the 'real' physical world possesses that are missing in the virtual worlds provided by the Meta Quest 2?
- b. Based on your experimentation, think of at least one positive use case (existing or hypothetical) of the Meta Quest 2: how is it poised to enhance the productivity of someone working in a particular profession? How might someone use it to their benefit in everyday life? How might someone use it to their benefit in everyday life?
- c. Based on your experimentation, think of at least one negative use case (or potential use case) of the Meta Quest 2. How might this technology be used in an ethically suspect or problematic way?
- d. What is your opinion of the Meta Quest 2 in particular and virtual reality in general? Do you think the Meta Quest 2 represents a significant advance in virtual reality technology or is it overhyped?

These case study memos are not supposed to be formal academic papers and need not be structured as such. You can even answer the above questions in a bulletin format if you wish. The most important

thing is that the memos sufficiently address the above questions and illustrate that you spent time carefully experimenting with and reflecting upon the technologies. The memos are due on Canvas by midnight the Wednesday before class. *Again, there will be no reading quiz due during the two weeks in which there is a case study memo.*

Participation (20%)

Students are expected to attend class in-person each week. No more than two unexcused absences will be permitted during the semester. To receive an A grade for participation, students must also be actively engaged with the course content by (1) vocally participating in class discussion and learning activities during our in-person meetings, and (2) submitting a post to the online participation board for that day prior to the start of class. Regarding (1): students must arrive to class on time, be prepared to discuss the topic of the day, and refrain from being disruptive and disengaged. Texting and the use of cellphones is strictly forbidden (unless I temporarily allow their use for the purposes of a given learning activity). The goal in class is to promote an inclusive learning environment that is hospitable to all students. Be charitable. Give your peers the benefit of the doubt. Try to understand what they intend to say, be respectful of your peers, their points of view and their desire to learn. Disagreeing with a point is good. If you disagree with a point, give a reason for why you disagree. Attacking the person who made the point is not allowed.

Regarding (2): the goal of this element of participation is to allow students to further engage with the course content on their own terms and more deeply discern the practical relevance of the topics in internet ethics more clearly. Unlike the weekly reading quizzes (once a week), this participation assignment must be completed prior to each class (twice a week). During Units 1 and 2, participation will entail answering a single discussion question in around 3-4 sentences. Then, starting with Unit 3, participation will become more open-ended, and will involve finding a news story and/or personal anecdote that is relevant to the topic of the day. By ‘personal anecdote’, I mean any experience that you (or someone you know) has had or observed on the internet that relates to the topic of the day. The anecdote could even just be a short statement expressing your thoughts on the topic. By ‘news story’, I do not necessarily mean a *breaking* news story, it could be some months or years old. Further, the news story/personal anecdote need not be tied to the specifics of the required reading for that day; it just needs to broadly pertain to the topic at hand. This is meant to be open-ended. If you choose a news story, please include a link, and provide a 1-2 sentence description of the story. If you choose a personal anecdote, please provide a 3-4 sentence description of the anecdote. Students will have an opportunity to vocally share their news stories/personal anecdotes in class, but they will not be required to do so. These participation assignments will be very lightly graded, receiving either a P or F. Students are encouraged to comment upon each other’s posts and use the participation board as a platform for lively interaction on the week’s topics. If you do comment upon another student’s post, the comment should be respectful and professional. Harmful or abusive writing will not be tolerated.

To sum, the typical weekly obligations for the course (assuming there is no paper or case study memo due that week) include (a) the two required readings, (b) one reading quiz, and (c) two short participation submissions.

Final Exam (25%)

The final exam will be administered in-person on our scheduled exam date and will feature a combination of multiple-choice and short answer questions. The exam will be *cumulative* and *closed notebook*. However, the exam will include more material from the second half of the class than the first half and I will distribute a detailed study guide near the end of the semester specifying which content is fair game for the exam.

Papers (Paper #1= 15%, Paper #2= 15%)

Writing philosophical essays is crucial to becoming a good philosopher, as the act of writing forces students to clarify their thoughts, structure their ideas, and discern any confusions on the topic at hand. There will be two paper assignments in the class. The required length for each paper is 4-6 pages double spaced, 12 times new roman. Students are expected to number their pages and include a bibliography (either MLA or APA format is acceptable). Avoid quoting my handouts or the readings. Direct quotations are prohibited for the purposes of this assignment. The prompt for each paper will include a handful of questions. Students are expected to choose one of these questions and write an essay in response to it. Students will have two weeks to write each paper and will submit their assignments on online via a designated link. I will take time to explain how to write a good philosophical essay and prioritize providing detailed feedback to help students become better writers. I will also provide the opportunity to give students feedback on rough drafts of their papers.

- **ChatGPT Disclaimer:** The use of ChatGPT (or any similar Large Language Model) for writing in this course is strictly forbidden and will be considered plagiarism. One of the worst things you can do in an internet ethics course is to use the internet in an unethical way to write papers for you!

Grading Scale:

Grade	Letter Grade
Excellent	A
	A-
Very Good	B+
Good	B
	B-
	C+
Average	C
Fair	C-
Poor	D+
	D
Merely Passing	D-
Failure	F

Due Dates and Late Policy

The instructor reserves the right to change dates accordingly as the semester progresses. All changes will be communicated in an appropriate manner via email and through Canvas. If you are unable to complete an assignment on time and have a valid reason (unavoidable study disruptions, health issues, family obligations), then send me an email beforehand to let me know and I am happy to grant an

extension. Generally speaking, please try to arrive at class on time each meeting to avoid disruptions. If you are more than 15 minutes late for class, that will be considered an absence.

Academic Integrity Policy

The Policy: Students are expected to adhere to the University Honor Code (honorcode.nd.edu). Any violations of the Honor Code will be referred to the appropriate committee. The Honor code exists to inform students and Faculty of their obligations in upholding the highest standards of professional and ethical integrity. All student work is subject to the University Honor Code. Professional and Academic practice provides guidance about how to properly cite, reference, and attribute the intellectual property of others. Any attempt to deceive a faculty member or to help another student to do so will be considered a violation of this standard. It is your job to be sure that the instructor has no reason to suspect academic dishonesty.

Note: Plagiarism implies academic misconduct and is defined as “The practice of taking someone else’s work or ideas and presenting them as one’s own”. Importantly, plagiarism need not be intentional and can be the result of negligence.

Consequences: An instructor may impose a sanction on the student that varies depending upon the instructor’s evaluation of the nature and gravity of the offense. Possible sanctions include but are not limited to, the following: (1) Require the student to redo the assignment; (2) Require the student to complete another assignment; (3) Assign a grade of zero to the assignment; (4) Assign a final grade of “F” for the course. A student may appeal these decisions according to the honor code policy.

Students with Disabilities and Sexual Harassment Policy

Students with Disabilities: The University of Notre Dame is committed to protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities and assuring that the learning environment is accessible. Students seeking accommodations for disabilities can instigate a request with Disability Services. Learn more about how to register with Disability Services at the following link: <https://dulac.nd.edu/academic/disabilities/>

Sexual Harassment Policy: It is Notre Dame policy to maintain a working and learning environment free from sexual harassment and from discrimination. Sexual harassment is illegal under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972. Notre Dame will not tolerate sexual harassment of students or employees and will take action to eliminate such behavior. To learn more about Notre Dame’s sexual harassment policy, visit the following link: [https://equity.nd.edu/assets/398818/policy_on_discriminatory_harassment_sexual_harassment_and_othe
r_sex_based_misconduct_final.pdf](https://equity.nd.edu/assets/398818/policy_on_discriminatory_harassment_sexual_harassment_and_other_sex_based_misconduct_final.pdf)