

Introduction

In Spring 2026, a [major data breach affecting Canvas](#), one of the most widely used learning management systems in higher education, brought renewed attention to the vulnerabilities of today's digital infrastructures. Beyond disrupting classroom use, the incident stressed the importance of critical data literacy and stressed the need to examine how digital platforms collect, process, and circulate information about their users. If nothing else, this remind us that data practices are never purely technical; they are also rhetorical, ethical, and political.

Many of the issues raised by the breach were illustrative of the concepts discussed in the Rhetorics of Data and Information graduate seminar offered through [Utah Tech University's](#) Master of Arts in [Technical Writing and Digital Rhetoric \(TWDR\) program](#). Taught every two years, the seminar investigates how language, design, and technology shape the collection, interpretation, and use of data. During the semester, students investigated the role technical and professional writers play in both furthering and challenging data-gathering practices that contribute to surveillance, diminish privacy, and reinforce existing power structures.

To examine these issues in greater depth, students engaged with the scholarship of [Sarah Young](#) (2023), [Frank Pasquale](#) (2016), [Shoshana Zuboff](#) (2019), [Safiya Noble](#)(2018), and [Mary F.E. Ebeling](#) (2022). These works provided a foundation for analyzing the rhetorical and ethical dimensions of contemporary data ecosystems and for considering the responsibilities of technical and professional writers within them. Students examined how communication practices, technological systems, and institutional policies shape public understandings of privacy, surveillance, and digital agency.

This collection emerged from that work. The project was also inspired by the [Digital Rhetoric and Privacy Collective](#) (DRPC), whose commitment to advancing scholarship on privacy, surveillance, and digital technologies demonstrates the value of bringing diverse perspectives to these conversations. Their efforts encouraged the development of an open-access venue where graduate students could share original research and contribute to ongoing discussions in technical and professional writing, rhetoric, and composition studies.

The chapters collected here illustrate how questions of data collection, surveillance, and privacy intersect with a wide range of social, cultural, and technological concerns. While grounded in the concepts explored during the seminar, each chapter extends those conversations into new contexts, demonstrating the breadth and relevance of current research on data and information practices.

The volume is organized into three parts. **Part I** presents methodological approaches and rhetorical analyses of how digital platforms communicate data-collection practices to users. **Part II** examines the consequences of these practices for individuals and communities, with particular attention to marginalized populations. **Part III** explores the relationship between data collection, surveillance, and the rapidly evolving landscape of generative artificial intelligence.

Together, these chapters demonstrate the pervasive influence of data practices in contemporary life and highlight the importance of critical inquiry into the systems that shape the digital experience. As an open-access publication, this volume seeks to extend these conversations beyond the boundaries of individual classrooms and institutions, contributing to ongoing discussions about privacy, surveillance, and the rights individuals hold in relation to their digital data.