Course Description
This course examines how digital technologies construct and constrain the formation of identities and social spaces. More specifically, we will explore the technical, cultural, and social forces that make digital lives both familiar and unfamiliar, traditional and subversive.

In addition to studying the who, what, where, why, and how of “digital lives,” this course is focused on helping you develop your skills as an academic reader and writer in the discipline of English.

Contact Information
You can reach me through e-mail at nhobin@uwaterloo.ca. I will read your messages within one business day and answer within two. Use e-mail to contact me if you need to discuss course progress, grades, illness, or other course-related subject for which you are entitled to confidentiality. Communications from me will go to your UWaterloo e-mail accounts, and I encourage you to use these for messages related to the course.

If you have an inquiry your peers might benefit from knowing the answer to, such as clarifying questions regarding assignments or readings, I invite you to use the “Ask the Instructor” board on the Discussions page on Learn. I’ll be keeping an eye on this board daily during the work week, and will typically post responses within 24 hours.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes
During this course, we will:

A. Discuss the affordances and constraints of new media, and the various cultural uses and imaginations of media.
B. Identify the basic concepts with which scholars study and theorize digital media and online materials.
C. Analyze, with these concepts, the cultural, material, and immaterial practices, objects, and artifacts of digital lives.
D. Apply core concepts of new media theory to our own digital lives and engage critically with wider digital culture.
E. Communicate confidently and knowledgeably about digital media, online cultures, and other aspects of digital society.

Required Texts

This book is required; you can expect to be required to read a chapter each week, with occasional additional or supplementary readings. It is available at the UWaterloo Bookstore, but you are also able to seek out digital copies if you prefer.

Additional readings, and a schedule for their completion, will be made available on Learn.

Submission Dates
Assignments are required to be submitted to Learn, in a discussion board or dropbox, in .pdf, .doc, or .docx format. Writing assignments submitted late or incorrectly will be penalized 5% for each day until corrected, and may also not receive the same level of commentary and feedback.

Submissions more than one week late will not be accepted, and will receive a 0. Weekly discussions, quizzes, and peer review activities are time-sensitive activities, and late submissions will not be accepted without prior accommodation.

If you are having difficulty meeting deadlines for any reason, let me know. I am willing to accommodate a broad range of circumstances, provided they are discussed with me sufficiently in advance.
### Course Requirements and Assessments

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<td>Weekly Discussion</td>
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<td>Quizzes</td>
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<td>Draft and Peer Review</td>
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<td>Research Project</td>
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<td>Proposal</td>
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### Engaging with Digital Lives

Our primary learning activity each week will centre around discussion of the topics introduced through the readings. At the beginning of each week, you will get access to a discussion board with a selection of discussion prompts. At minimum, you will receive completion marks for posting and responding to your peers; further points can be earned for engaging actively and critically with the course material. Our object through these discussions is to understand and explore the key subjects from the readings; you are welcome here to ask questions, suggest examples, and relate things back to real-world events and objects.

Every two weeks, you will additionally submit a short reflection relating the subjects we’ve covered to your own experience of digital life. Like the discussions, these will have prompts you can follow, but you are also able to create topics of your own.

A short multiple-choice quiz on the subject of key ideas from the readings will be given twice during the term.

### Narrative Essay

The assignment will take the form of a 3-page essay addressing the question, “How has a specific form of technology influenced my life in a meaningful way?” The paper should be formatted in MLA style, but is not expected to be very formal otherwise: it is a personal narrative which will help me to get to know you a little, and will introduce you to the processes of critically and consciously assessing your relationship with a media object.

### Media Review

For this short paper you will select an element of your digital life that you use on a regular basis and document your experiences with it. The review will include a short description of the platform, an explanation of who uses it and how you use it, an account of your engagement with the platform, and remarks on the platform’s affordances. This is intended to be slightly more formal than the narrative; rather than exploring our relationship with objects, the focus here is to critically analyse the object itself, identifying the kinds of behaviours it encourages and those design features which facilitate such encouragement.
Before you submit your media review, we will have a peer review session. You will need to have a (mostly) complete draft of your essay ready for this date, during which you will have the opportunity to give and receive feedback from your classmates.

**Final Project**

As your capstone for the course, you will develop a line of inquiry into the subject of digital lives, which showcases your ability to conduct effective research and analysis on the practices, objects, or artifacts of the subject.

You may consider one of the following options:

- Develop a research paper in which you consider, research, and pose an answer to a question about digital lives, with appropriately documented sources.
- Find a text, such as a video game or movie, and critically examine how it explores, challenges or subverts the themes we have looked at in the course.
- Propose something. As long as it shows off your ability to explore the subject of digital lives in a critical way, I’m open to it.

Your finished project may be submitted as a written work or an audiovisual presentation.

In preparation for your project, you will first have to submit a proposal of no more than a page describing your topic or research question, a tentative thesis statement, and what interests them about the subject, and an annotated bibliography of roughly 6 sources, cited in MLA style, each with a description and explanation of how they will be used in the project. You will also need a (mostly) complete draft for peer review.

The final submission will be due on the last day of the lecture period. There are no written exams in this iteration of the course.

*Accommodations for students with disabilities:* The AccessAbility Services office, located in Needles Hall Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

**Other Important Information**

*Academic Integrity:* In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

More information is available at Academic integrity (Arts) and Academic Integrity Office (UWaterloo).

*Discipline:* A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline.

*Grievance:* A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4.
**Appeals:** A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read [Policy 72 - Student Appeals](#).

**Mental Health Support**
All of us need a support system. The faculty and staff in Arts encourage students to seek out mental health supports if they are needed.

**On Campus**
- Counselling Services: counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca / 519-888-4567 xt 32655
- MATES: one-to-one peer support program offered by Federation of Students (FEDS) and Counselling Services
- Health Services Emergency service: located across the creek form Student Life Centre

**Off campus, 24/7**
- Good2Talk: Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454
- Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Phone: 519-749-433 ext. 6880
- Here 24/7: Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247
- OK2BME: set of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning teens in Waterloo. Phone: 519-884-0000 extension 213

Full details can be found online at the [Faculty of ARTS website](#). You can also download [UWaterloo and regional mental health resources (PDF)](#), or the [WatSafe app](#) to your phone to quickly access mental health support information.

**Academic freedom at the University of Waterloo**

Policy 33, Ethical Behaviour states, as one of its general principles (Section 1):

> The University supports academic freedom for all members of the University community. Academic freedom carries with it the duty to use that freedom in a manner consistent with the scholarly obligation to base teaching and research on an honest and ethical quest for knowledge. In the context of this policy, “academic freedom” refers to academic activities, including teaching and scholarship, as is articulated in the principles set out in the Memorandum of Agreement between the FAUW and the University of Waterloo, 1998 (Article 6). The academic environment which fosters free debate may from time to time include the presentation or discussion of unpopular opinions or controversial material. Such material shall be dealt with as openly, respectfully and sensitively as possible.

This definition is repeated in Policies 70 and 71, and in the Memorandum of Agreement, Section 6.

**Territorial Acknowledgement:**
We acknowledge that we are living and working on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River.