Course Description:

This course provides an introduction to the growing field of social media studies. We will engage with central conversations and debates in social media theory to examine topics such as memes, social networks, fan communities and texts, digital identity, and other emergent social media forms. By the end of the course, students will comprehend theoretical, critical and popular discourses concerning social media and be able to further engage with their own social media and wider Internet usage.

Course Evaluation

Attendance and Participation: 30%

Tumblr Blog Responses (200-300 words): 15% (3x5%) Various due dates

Midterm Paper: 25% Due March 1st

Creative Group Project: 20% Presentations in class April 1st

  • Group Project Reflection: 10% Due April 1st

Required Texts

All course readings are either available via links as indicated, or are posted on LEARN as PDFs. Readings posted on LEARN are alphabetically labeled by author and section titles.

Schedule

This syllabus is subject to change at the instructor's discretion, as needed.

Week 1: Introduction to Social Media

  January 6th
  • First day of class: Introduction and syllabus review
January 8th

Week 2: Communicating Socially

January 13th

January 15th

Week 3: Social Media Infrastructures

January 20th

January 22nd
- “First Impressions: The Printing Press” BBC. 2017. (podcast)

Week 4: Participatory Culture

January 27th

January 29th
- Watch: Henry Jenkins TEDxNYED 2010. (Youtube)

Week 5: Meme Culture

February 3rd
February 5th

**Week 6: Online Selfhood**

February 10th
- **Watch:** *We Are Data.* C-Span. 2017. (The author starts at the 5:00 mark)

February 12th

**Week 7: Reading Week**

February 17th/19th No class

**Week 8: Mobile Telephony**

February 24th
- **Watch:** History of Cell Phones 2017. (Youtube)

February 26th

**Week 9: The Attention Economy**

March 2nd

March 4th

**Week 10: Digital Dualism and Abstinence**

March 9th
March 11th

**Week 11: Activism and the Filter Bubble**

March 16th
• **Watch:** Algorithms and filters: The filter is the message (TEDtalk) 2011.

March 18th

**Week 12: Managing Privacy**

March 23rd

March 25th
• **Watch:** *The Great Hack* (Available on Netflix)

**Week 13:**

March 30th
• Course review and group work

April 1st
• Group Presentations

**Detailed Course Breakdown**

**Attendance and Participation: 30%**

Attendance and participation make up a large portion of your grade to insure that we have engaging discussions during each class. In my experience, English courses are the most successful when students are actively engaged and asking questions, rather than just letting the instructor do all the talking.

Participation is encouraged and will be rewarded, so students must come to class having done the readings for that day. *Every Saturday*, I will post a list of prompts on LEARN, which are meant to help fuel discussion for the readings. Each class will be a combination of my lecturing and an informal discussion about the prompts. To be prepared, read the assigned text prior to class.
bring the text to class, and be ready to discuss it as a group. Those who are less comfortable speaking in class and are concerned about this component of the grade are free to send me an email answering each of the discussion prompts prior to class. This will count towards participation.

I will take attendance every class, and it’s important to show up even if you aren’t comfortable speaking aloud, as we will delve deeply into the readings and also discuss assignments and expectations. Students who miss more than 3 classes without any documentation will automatically lose their entire participation grade. Students who miss more than that risk failing the course.

**Tumblr Blog Responses (200-300 words each): 15% (3x5%)**

Each student will create a Tumblr account and complete 3 blog responses over the course of the semester. Each post should reflect on one reading, and must be submitted before the start of that class. In other words, students cannot submit the response after we cover that material in class. Please email me your username before posting your first blog or I will not be able to view it.

In keeping with the aesthetics and affordances of Tumblr, blog responses may contain links, images, videos, and other multimedia, but must consist primarily of 200-300 words of the student's own writing. Relevant re-blogging and commentary on other Tumblr content is permitted in addition to this. All 3 blog entries must be completed by March 25th, and only one blog post per week is permitted.

**Midterm Paper (6-8 pages): 25% Due March 1st**

This paper will involve the selection of one “object-to-think-with” that students will use to write a strong argumentative essay. This object can be a variety of things, such as social media platform, a game, a technological device, an app, etc. Students must support their argument using at least 3 sources, which include one assigned reading, and at least 2 external readings.

The essay must be in MLA format, with a Reference list at the end. Refer to this guide for instructions on how to use MLA formatting for essays and for proper referencing. [http://www.easybib.com/guides/citation-guides/mla-format/](http://www.easybib.com/guides/citation-guides/mla-format/)

**Creative Group Project (20%): Presentations April 1st**

In groups of 3-4, students will prepare a creative project. Students are encouraged to interpret this project broadly. Make a podcast, a video essay, a dramatic performance, a game (digital or board), a disruptive social media account, a critical maker project—be creative. The project should engage with key topics and ideas, and involve at least 2 assigned readings. Student groups will be expected to consult with the professor well before the due date to ensure appropriate criteria are met for their project.

**Group Project Reflection (10%) Due April 1st**
Each group member will be responsible for preparing a 1-2 page reflection on their contribution to their group’s project. These reflections are informal but must be unique. In other words, though some redundancy will be expected, students should work on these independently.

Course Policies and Other Information

Late Policy:

My late policy is simple: if your assignment is 1 day late, I will deduct 3%. On the second day and every day after that, including weekends, I will deduct 5%. This is so that you can take one extra day to make sure you are satisfied and totally finished with your work, without losing too much of your grade. This policy is in place for students that need a bit of extra time to improve already existing work, or if something unexpected has happened, but is less forgiving for students who procrastinate or hand in work very late.

Extensions:

Students who require extensions must email me at least 24 hours before the due date, and must provide a legitimate reason for the extension request. I will NOT grant extensions without some kind of documentation that demonstrates a medical or family emergency. Students who regularly require extra time for assignments should register with Accessibility Services at the beginning of term, but must still request extensions from me.

Electronic Devices:

Since this is a social media course, students are highly encouraged to bring devices to class. However, students who abuse this privilege by using their devices in ways that are unrelated to the weekly topic will be docked participation marks. Please be respectful to your peers, as web browsing and other online activities can be distracting to people sitting near you.

Contacting the Instructor

I encourage students to contact me with any questions about the course via e-mail. Anyone who would like to receive more thorough feedback should come to my office and speak with me in person during my office hour, or by appointment. I will answer short e-mails and check my messages regularly, but always assume it will take at least 24 hours for me to respond, so plan accordingly.

Academic Integrity

The Faculty of Arts requires that I make you aware of the following: “Students are expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. Students who are unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who need 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 Assistant Dean.
For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy #71, Student Academic Discipline, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm. Students who believe that they have been wrongfully or unjustly penalized have the right to grieve: refer to Policy #70, Student Grievance: http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm

Note for Students with Disabilities

The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), 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 OPD at the beginning of each academic term.

The Writing Centre

The Writing Centre works across all faculties to help students clarify their ideas, develop their voices, and write in the style appropriate to their disciplines. Writing Centre staff offer one-on-one support in planning assignments and presentations, using and documenting research, organizing and structuring papers, and revising for clarity and coherence.

You can make multiple appointments throughout the term, or drop in at the Library for quick questions or feedback. To book a 50-minute appointment and to see drop-in hours, visit www.uwaterloo.ca/writing-centre. Group appointments for team-based projects, presentations, and papers are also available.