Course Description
This course examines how digital communication technologies construct and constrain the formation of online 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.

Course Objectives
- Understand theoretical, critical, and popular discourses concerning the who, what, where, why, and how of “digital lives”
- Apply core concepts of new media theory to your own digital life and engage critically with wider digital culture
- Analyze cultural, material, and immaterial practices, objects, and artifacts of digital lives
- Create projects in several formats, including a formal essay, informal reflections, and creative/non-traditional writing and/or multimedia projects

Required Texts

The book is required, and we will be working with it every week. You may purchase a physical copy or e-book version. Additional assigned readings are available online for free; see the LEARN schedule for links.

Technology in the Classroom
We will be using the course page on Learn frequently and access to it is required. Since this is a digital humanities course, you may bring a laptop or tablet to class; sometimes we will work online and sometimes offline. There are Windows computers available in the classroom if you prefer to use those. When we are working offline, I expect you to be fully engaged with class and you will lose participation points if you are on a device during “offline” work. When we are working online, if you abuse your tech privilege (by spending class time on social networks, websites, games, platforms etc. unrelated to the weekly topic or immediate discussion), you will be docked participation marks at my discretion.

Absences and Attendance
You will note that attendance and participation are worth 15% of your final grade. Absences will impact this grade. Excused absences, as outlined by University Policy, will not impact your grade. If you have an excusable absence, you are responsible for verifying it as outlined in
policy. Attendance is vital to your success in this course. If you choose not to attend, you will be missing in-class exercises upon which some of your grades will depend. There are no “makeups” for this work.

Evaluation and Mark Distribution
This course is reading intensive, writing intensive, and participation intensive: I expect you to do the readings, take careful notes, show up, and take part. The following are graded components of the course and their respective value towards your final mark.

- Platform Autobiography (15%)
- Creative Project (20%)
- Group Presentation (15%)
- Participation (15%)
- Learn Discussion Boards (15%)
- End of Term Essay (20%)

Assignments Descriptions
These descriptions are intended to help you see an overview of the assignment. Detailed assignment sheets are available on Learn.

Platform Autobiography (15%)
You will select an element of your digital life that you use on a regular basis and document your experiences with it. The Autobiography should 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. Cite relevant research (at least one source). The platform study will be evaluated on your level of engagement with the chosen platform, demonstrated knowledge of its uses, clarity of writing, and technics (spelling, grammar, formatting, etc.). Your choice of platform must be approved via email by the end of class Jan 30th. The Platform Autobiography is due to Dropbox 11:59PM Feb 13th.

Creative Project (20%)
For this project, you may work on your own or in a group. Think about the intersections of identity, technology, social interactions, and online content to create a digital story. This may be accomplished in a few possible ways, which will be discussed in class: netprov, threaded storytelling project, or Twine game. In addition to submitting your story, you will also submit a personal reflection—a 2-3 page explanation of the project describing your storytelling goals and the connections to digital life and course readings, and if you worked in a group, how your group worked together, and what your own contributions to the project were (screenshots, drafts, etc.). If you have another idea for a storytelling project beyond the suggestions, feel free to discuss it with me during office hours. A project pitch consisting of the type of project, ideas for platforms used, and group member names must be sent for approval by the end of class March 6th. Creative Projects (including links to your project PLUS your own reflection) are due to Dropbox 11:59PM March 27th.
Group Presentation (15%)

In a small group, you will be responsible for reading, taking notes, and presenting the materials from your assigned reading. You and your group will sign up for a topic/date and work together to create a presentation reviewing the core concepts from the reading. Your presentation is intended to be a supplement, not a replacement, for reading the chapter. You will create a PowerPoint or Google slides presentation and share your review with the class. Your group will also upload your slides and notes to the Dropbox for me to mark, and then I will make the notes available to the entire class. These notes will be available for use in the Response Essay at the end of the term. You will sign up for a presentation date early in the term. There are no make-up dates available for this assignment. Do not sign up for a date you will not be in class.

Participation (15%)

In order to contribute to the best of your ability and earn a high participation grade, you must complete scheduled readings before class. Come to class ready to talk about what you read! You’ll earn participation points in a few ways, including but not limited to:

- Idea contribution
- Reading quizzes
- In-class writing
- Regular attendance
- Being on time
- Staying awake during class
- Being respectful of your classmates and instructor
- In-class activities
- And of course, in-class discussion

If you are not comfortable speaking up in class, or (like me) you are the kind of student who struggles to put their thoughts into words during discussion, there are all those other ways of earning participation points. Email me stop by office hours if you have questions.

Learn Discussion Board Posts (15%)

Each week, you are responsible for completing one of the two prompts on the Learn discussion board for that week. Choose one of the prompts and respond to it in 300-400 words. The discussion boards are intended to be informal and reflective and they will encourage you to connect different theories, concepts, and ideas from class each week. Your lowest two marks will be dropped. These may be completed for late points up until April 15th.

End of Term Essay (20%)

By the end of class, you will have access to a comprehensive set of notes from presentations over the term, in addition to your Discussion Board posts. For the end of term essay, there will be four prompts to choose from; you will choose two of these prompts and write a short essay using research and notes you took and collected over the course of the term. Prompts will be posted to Learn during the last week of class and responses are due to the Dropbox by Monday April 15th, 11:59PM.
Assignment Submission, Deadlines, and Late Policy

All assignments are to be handed in to the Learn Dropbox. I will not accept assignments via email unless that is the required format. Late assignments will be penalized 10% per weekday and may be graded without comments. Papers more than 5 weekdays late will receive a failing grade. Exceptions will only be made in extenuating circumstances.

Formatting and Citation

Use MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation style. Please remember to keep frequently updated backup copies in case of computer crashes.

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.

- **Discipline:** As a student, you are expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for your actions. If you are unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or if you need help in Learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration, you 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, you should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, [http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm)

- **Grievance:** If you believe that a decision affecting some aspect of your university life has been unfair or unreasonable, you may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, [http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm)

- **Appeals:** You 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, [http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm)

- **More information:** Academic Integrity website (Arts): [http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html](http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html) and Academic Integrity Office (UW): [http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/](http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/)

Accessibility and Accommodations

AccessAbility Services, ([https://uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/](https://uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/)) located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for those of us with disabilities, without compromising the academic integrity of curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to do your best in class, please register at the beginning of each academic term.

In cases where you are experiencing problems either in or outside of class that are affecting your attendance and/or work performance, please keep me informed. Under extreme circumstances, alternative arrangements may be made. In addition, please let me know if there is anything I can
do to make the course more accessible to you. The course is intended to be challenging, but the structure of the course itself should not be a barrier to your learning.

**Mental Health Support**

We all need a support system.

**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 from 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 folks in Waterloo. Phone: 519-884-0000 extension 213

Full details can be found online at the Faculty of ARTS [website](https://www.uwaterloo.ca)
Download [UWaterloo and regional mental health resources (PDF)](https://www.uwaterloo.ca)
Download the [WatSafe app](https://www.uwaterloo.ca) to your phone to quickly access mental health support information.

**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 six miles on each side of the Grand River.

**Sensitive Content and Content Warnings**

We are looking at digital media and discourse about digital media; I do not censor it. It may contain images, content, and language that is problematic, offensive, disturbing, or even traumatizing to some. To the best of my knowledge, I will give a general announcement about potentially sensitive content before it comes up in class.

If you find that specific material is likely to be challenging for you, please discuss any concerns you may have with me before the subject comes up in class. Likewise, if you wish to discuss your reactions to course material with the class or with me individually, I welcome such discussions as an appropriate part of our coursework. If you feel the need to step outside during a class discussion, you may always do so without penalty. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss. If you leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student or see me individually to discuss the situation.
A (Hopefully Unnecessary) Reminder about Respect and Safety
I would like to draw attention to the title of the course—digital lives. We are looking at our own
digital lives, but others’ lives as well. All content we discuss was produced by another human
being, and we will speak respectfully about and towards the subjects of and posters of digital
media content. You can speak about media that is created to be satirical, truthful, humorous,
offensive, honest, or abusive without being derisive towards those who posted the material or
those featured in the material. This can be difficult at times. But remember, this is University
level coursework. Be professional.

This is not to say we cannot or will not discuss topics, or that everyone must agree. But we will
only engage in respectful conversations in online and in-class discussions and assignments.
Please help to make this classroom a safe space for everyone. Sexism, racism, ableism,
homophobia, transphobia, religious prejudices, etc. will not be tolerated. The material we cover
in class may engage in these behaviors and discourses, but members of this class will not.

Schedule
This schedule is a tentative plan for the course and subject to change at my
discretion. Assigned readings for each week are located on the Learn page.

Week 1:
Monday Jan 7th:
   Introduction: So…what is a class on digital life even about?

Wednesday 9th:
   Reading: Smith and Watson, “Virtually Me: A Toolbox about Online Self-Presentation”
   (LEARN)

Week 2:
Monday 14th:
   Reading: Lindgren, chapter 1 “Digital Society”

Wednesday 16th:
   Reading: Morrison, “Facebook and Coaxed Affordances” (LEARN) and Rooke, “Four
   Pillars of Internet Research Ethics” (LEARN)
   Discussion Board Due Friday

Week 3:
Monday Jan 21st:
   Reading: Lindgren, chapter 2 “Social Media”
   Group Presentation
Wednesday Jan 23rd:
  Reading: Davidson, “The Language of Internet Memes” (LEARN)
  Discussion Board Due Friday

**Week 4:**

Monday Jan 28th:
  Reading: Lindgren, chapter 3 “Cyber Debates”
  Group Presentation

Wednesday Jan 30th:
  *Email Platform Autobiography Choice to Betsy by the end of class*
  Readings: Jurgenson, “The IRL Fetish” and Turkle, “Stop Googling. Let’s Talk”
  Discussion Board Due Friday

**Week 5:**

Monday Feb 4th:
  Reading: Lindgren, chapter 4 “Interaction and Community”
  Group Presentation

Wednesday Feb 6th:
  Reading: boyd, *It’s Complicated* chapter 1 “Identity” (LEARN)
  Discussion Board Due Friday

**Week 6:**

Monday Feb 11th:
  Reading: Lindgren, chapter 5 “Communities and Networks”
  Group Presentation

Wednesday Feb 13th:
  Reading: Hamilton, Garretson, and Kerne, “Streaming on Twitch: Fostering Participatory Communities of Play within Live Mixed Media” (LEARN)
  Discussion Board Due Friday
  *Platform Autobiography Due to Dropbox 11:59PM*

**Week 7: No Classes**
Week 8:
Monday Feb 25th:
   Reading: Lindgren, chapter 6 “Digital Visuality and Visibility”
   Group Presentation
Wednesday Feb 27th:
   Reading: Sternbergh, “Smile, You’re Speaking Emoji: The Rapid Evolution of a Wordless Tongue”
   Discussion Board Due Friday

Week 9:
Monday Mar 4th:
   Reading: Reading: Lindgren, chapter 7 “Feeling Digital”
   Group Presentation
Wednesday Mar 6th:
   Readings: Spumante: “The Subtle Art of Trolling” and Rugnetta/PBS Idea Channel “When is a Troll No Longer a Troll?”
   Discussion Board Due Friday

Week 10:
Monday Mar 11th:
   Reading: Lindgren, chapter 8 “Digital Citizenship”
   Group Presentation
Wednesday Mar 13th:
   In-class work day, start Creative Projects
   Email pitch due to Betsy by the end of class
   Discussion Board Due Friday

Week 11:
Monday Mar 18th:
   Reading: Lindgren, chapter 9 “Digital Power and Exploitation”
   Group Presentation
Wednesday Mar 20th:

Reading: Bakioğlu, “Exposing Convergence: YouTube, Fan Labour, and Anxiety of Cultural Production in Lonelygirl15” (LEARN)

Discussion Board Due Friday

**Week 12:**

Monday Mar 25th:

Reading: Lindgren, chapter 10 “Digital Activism”

Group Presentation

Wednesday Mar 27th:

No Class Meeting—Finish your Creative Project

*Creative Projects Due to Learn by 11:59PM*

**Week 13:**

Monday Apr 1st:

Reading: Belkhir and Elmeligi, “Assessing ICT Global Emissions Footprint: Trends to 2040 & Recommendations” (LEARN)

Wednesday Apr 3rd:

Conclusion: So…what is a class on digital life even about?

Discussion Board Due Friday

*Response Essays due to Dropbox Monday, April 15th, 11:59PM.*

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