

**University of Waterloo**  
**Stratford Campus**  
**GBDA 203**  
**Introduction to Digital Cultures**  
**Fall 2016**  
**Tu 9-11.50am or 1-3.50pm, room DMS2022**

**Instructor Information**

Instructor: Christine McWebb  
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Office Hours: by appointment  
Email: cmcwebb@uwaterloo.ca

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TA (Section 002): Kayla Trieveri (kmtrivie@uwaterloo.ca)

Instructional Support Coordinator (Sections 001 and 002):  
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**I. Course Description**

This course provides students with an historical overview of various digital technologies and their impact on society and the human condition. Students will be introduced to research methods and theoretical concepts from media theory and cultural studies that will enable them to think, speak, and write critically about technology in an historical and global context. Students will also continue to develop their professional skills.

**II. Course Goals and Learning Outcomes**

- Students will develop an understanding of “culture” and some of the most vital issues facing “digital culture.”
- Students will acquire methodological and conceptual tools to engage in-depth analysis of digital technologies and cultures.
- Students will understand the complexity of the relationship between digital technologies and the communities of practice that employ those technologies and shape the scale and nature of their diffusion through society.
- Students will develop their capacity to construct and communicate arguments in written and multi-modal form.
- Students will develop their capacity to think critically and to analyse complex theoretical concepts.
- Students will further develop their professional skills (teamwork, oral and written communication, problem solving).

**Required Texts:**

- Miller, V. (2013). *Understanding Digital Culture*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

- Gere, C. (2008). *Digital Culture*. London: Reaktions Books.
- Courseware package (available at the bookstore)
- i-Clicker

## UW LEARN

Please note that all information and other readings pertaining to this course will be posted to the course LEARN site. Additional readings may be assigned. Please check the site regularly. It is the students' responsibility to remain informed about due dates, upcoming readings, assignments, tests, etc.

### Course Requirements and Assessment

| Assessment               | Date of Evaluation                    | Weighting        |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Attendance/Participation | Ongoing                               | 10%              |
| WatCV assignments 1,2,3  | Oct 4, Oct 25+Nov 1, Nov 29(in class) | 10% (3%, 3%, 4%) |
| 2 Reading quizzes        | Sept 27, Nov 1                        | 10% (5% each)    |
| Mid-term exam            | Oct 18                                | 20%              |
| Essay (drafts 1 & 2)     | Nov 8, Nov 22                         | 20%              |
| Final Exam               | tbd                                   | 30%              |
| <hr/>                    |                                       |                  |
| Total                    |                                       | 100%             |

### Assignments:

#### 1. Participation

*Date Due: Assessed Daily*

Participation accounts for your contributions to discussion, group activities and the general classroom atmosphere, which in turn are vital in determining what knowledge and skills you take from this course. Showing up on-time having properly prepared for whatever is planned according to the class calendar or prior announcements is the bare minimum requirement. Asking thoughtful questions, offering reasoned answers, and facilitating others' opportunities to contribute will be taken into account in the assessment. Students who do not attend class will receive no participation credit for missed days. A respectful attitude towards your classmates is required. At the same time, engaging debates and discussions are encouraged. Punctuality is important. Late arrivals will not be able to sign the attendance sheet.

#### 2. WatCV

*Dates Due: Oct 4, Oct 25 + Nov 1, Nov 29*

Students create an ePortfolio designed to showcase course assignments and articulate the “professional skills” (i.e. soft skills) developed while completing the WatCV reflection assignments.

### 3. *Analytical Paper Draft 1*

*Date Due: Nov 8*

You are expected to write a 5 page analytical paper on a specific topic.

The primary purpose of this assignment is for you to practice applying the theories and concepts introduced in class to analyze the meaning or social significance of a set of cultural practices. A secondary purpose is for you to demonstrate your understanding of methods introduced in the course and their application to the contemporary, mediated world. The tertiary purpose is for you to practice constructing well-rounded and firmly supported arguments in a professional writing style. Your paper will be evaluated on the basis of these criteria.

There are also a number of thoughtless mistakes that can detract from your writing and your ability to demonstrate your understanding. Please use the following checklist to ensure you do not commit one of these mistakes.

#### Research Checklist:

- Argument is grounded in and cites from at least 2 class readings
- No encyclopedia/Wikipedia cited
- Citations are correctly formatted in Chicago Author-Date style.
- Sources are properly cited internally, in-text
- Sources are properly cited externally on a separate “References” page

#### Format Checklist:

- Paper is typed
- Paper is double-spaced
- Paper has one inch margins
- Paper is in 12 point (size) Times or Times New Roman font
- Paper is stapled together, with a separate “Title Page” and “References” (not included in 5 page count)
- First page of text begins on the first line
- Paper is organized by a thesis statement that previews the paper’s argument and roadmaps how the paper makes that argument
- Paper has a recognizable introduction, body and conclusion

Students who have indicated on their Draft 1 that they will complete Analytical Paper Draft 2 will receive feedback from their peers. Otherwise, Draft 1 will be considered your final paper.

### 4. *Analysis Paper Peer Workshop*

*Date Due: Nov 8*

On the same day that Analytical Paper Draft 1 is turned in, we will have a peer workshop during class, and you will workshop papers with 2-3 classmates. A workshop guide will be provided. You are expected to provide comments (formative feedback and compelling questions) to help your peers improve their papers. Giving feedback to your peers helps you to further develop your own thinking and writing, and it helps you to better understand writing as an ongoing process of

creation and revision. Feedback must be returned to your peers by the end of the class period and completion will be verified by either the instructor or TA.

If you do not turn in a paper draft, you will not be able to participate in the peer workshop.

5. *Analysis Paper Draft 2 – Final Draft* *Date Due: Nov 22*

A thorough revision of Analysis Paper Draft 1 that develops the paper based on feedback from peers. All marked copies of Analysis Paper Draft 1 MUST accompany Analysis Paper Draft 2 when it is turned in. One criteria for grading this assignment will be the strength of revision from the first draft to this one.

6. *Two Reading Comprehension Tests on Assigned Readings* *Date Due: Sept 27, Nov 1*

You will write two short comprehension tests on assigned readings. Short answer questions will be on content only; no analysis will be required.

7. *Midterm Exam* *Date Due: Oct 18*

The midterm exam will be a mix of short answers and multiple choice questions.

8. *Final Exam* *Date Due: TBD by Registrar*

The final exam will be scheduled by the Office of the Registrar. It will be a mix of short answer and short essay questions. Length: 2.5 hours.

Course Outline

| Week | Date          | Topic   | Readings + Assignments Due  |
|------|---------------|---|---|
| 1    | Sept 13, 2016 | Introduction:<br>What is culture?<br>What is digital culture?<br><br>Introduction to WatCV  | Readings:<br>1. Miller - Introduction   |
| 2    | Sept 20, 2016 | Guest lecture: Prof. Donald Bruce, Dean of Arts, University of Guelph:<br><br>Socio-historical and cultural context of (digital) media                | Readings:<br>1. Gere – Chapter 1<br>2. Miller – Chapter 1   |
| 3    | Sept 27, 2016 | Case study: What are video games? A Conundrum of Digital Culture (Miller pp. 39-44)<br><br>Guest lecture: Jordan Mandel, Lab Instructor, UW Stratford | Reading Comprehension Quiz 1 (on readings of weeks 1-3)<br><br>Readings:<br>1. Miller – chapter 3 |

| Week | Date                    | Topic   | Readings + Assignments Due   |
|------|-------------------------|---|--|
|      |                         | Convergence Culture<br>Case Study: The Changing Culture Industry of Digital Music   |  |
| 4    | Oct 4, 2016             | Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction<br><br>Cybernetics<br><br>A primer on semiotics   | Readings:<br>1. Gere – Chapter 2<br>2. Benjamin (coursepack)<br><br>WatCV Assignment 1 due   |
| 5    | Oct 13, 2016 (Thursday) | The Digital Divide – Domestic and Global<br><br>In-class activity for Microtile Wall: Infographic on Digital Divide                         | Readings:<br>1. Miller – chapter 4   |
| 6    | Oct 18, 2016            | <i>Mid-term exam in class (2 hours)</i>   | No Readings  |
| 7    | Oct 25, 2016            | The Medium is the Message<br><br>Digital Counter-Culture<br><br>WatCV Peer review session   | Readings:<br>1. McLuhan (coursepack)<br>2. Gere – chapter 4<br><br>WatCV Assignment 2 due  |
| 8    | Nov 1, 2016             | Digital Identity<br><br>Social Media and the Problem of Community   | Reading Comprehension Quiz 2 (readings of weeks 4-8)<br><br>Readings:<br>1. Miller – chapter 7 and 8<br><br>Revised WatCV Assignment 2 due |
| 9    | Nov 8, 2016             | Analytical Peer Review Session  | No Readings<br><br>Analytical paper Draft 1  |
| 10   | Nov 15, 2016            | The Body and Information Technology   | Readings:<br>1. Miller – chapter 9, Conclusion<br>2. Gere – chapters 6 and 7   |
| 11   | Nov 22, 2016            | The Future – The Singularity Principle<br>In-class activity: The Singularity Principle represented creatively (possibly for Microtile wall) | Readings:<br>1. Kurzweil (coursepack)<br><br>Analytical Paper Final Version  |

| Week | Date         | Topic                                       | Readings + Assignments Due |
|------|--------------|---|----------------------------|
| 12   | Nov 29, 2016 | WatCV Assignment 3 – in class<br><br>Review | No readings                |

### **Course Modification Warning**

The instructor reserves the right to modify elements of the course during the term. Please note that due dates will be consistent with our clients' time schedules, as such there may be changes to due dates and deliverable outputs. If a modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her uWaterloo email and course website on LEARN daily during the term and to note any changes.

### **Late Work**

Unless a physician's note or suitable documentation is provided, 2% per business day will be taken off for a late assignment submission.

### **Electronic Device Policy**

Students are expected to use classroom, lab, and project time productively. Student use of laptops, mobile phones and tablets for any purpose other than approved coursework during classroom, lab, and project time is prohibited. This includes social media, instant messaging, personal correspondence and surfing for unrelated content. Mobile phones must be turned off and put away during class. Students shall not unduly interfere with the study, work or working environment of their peers.

Failure to comply with the Code of Professional Conduct will result in disciplinary measures befitting the infringement of this policy and in compliance with the appropriate University policy or policies.

### **Academic Integrity**

In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the UWaterloo Academic Integrity Webpage (<https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/>) and the Arts Academic Integrity Office Webpage (<http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/current-undergraduates/academic-responsibility>) for more information.

### **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 (<https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70>). When in doubt please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

### **Discipline**

A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing academic offenses and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offenses (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. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71, Student Discipline (<http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm>). For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties (<http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm>).

### **Appeals**

A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71, Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72, Student Appeals (<http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.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 the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.