

University of Waterloo  
Stratford School of Interaction Design and Business  
GBDA 412-003 – Fall 2021  
Special Topics in Digital Cultures  
Wednesdays 9:00-11:50am

### Instructor Information

Instructor: Prof. Christine McWebb

Office Hours on Microsoft Teams or in-person: Wednesdays 2:00pm-4:00pm, and by appointment

Email: [cmcwebb@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:cmcwebb@uwaterloo.ca)

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### Course Description

In this course, students will engage in the critical analysis of current and future media and information consumption. You will apply what you have learned previously about the impact of past information and technological innovations to our society of today and tomorrow.

Scholars and media theorists, in addition to Cognitive theory, framing theory, and Agenda-Setting theory provide some of the important critical lenses through which to view current digital technologies, research, and the consumption of information. We will pay particular attention to current paradigm shifts, such as the pandemic, and how societal events have shaped communication technologies and how, in turn, events have been shaped by technologies.

### Required Texts

- Herman, Edward S, and Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988. Print. ISBN-10: 0375714499 ISBN-13: 978-0375714498
- Film: Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media  
[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0104810/?ref\\_=adv\\_li\\_tt](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0104810/?ref_=adv_li_tt)
- Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less from Each Other*. Basic Books, a Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2017, 3rd edition. ISBN-978-0465093656
- Miller, Vincent. *Understanding Digital Culture*. SAGE Publications Ltd; 2 ed., 2020.

\*Additional readings will be posted on LEARN.

### Course Structure

This course consists of writing and video assignments, essays, lectures, weekly reading assignments, class discussions, and student presentations. Assignments will be completed individually or in groups.

### **Course Expectations**

Please read all materials carefully and on time - by class time for each week— as they form the basis for our discussions, assignments, and quizzes. We will be discussing the assigned texts and articles in detail. It is my expectation that you come to class fully prepared, which means that you have read the required readings, you have given them some thought, and you have arrived in class with something relevant to say and write about them, or with questions in mind. Please arrive on time, and plan to attend every class.

### **Course Goals and Learning Outcomes**

- Students will master an understanding of “culture” and some of the most vital issues facing “digital culture.”
- Students will continue to acquire methodological and conceptual tools to engage in 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 strengthen their capacity to think critically and to analyze complex theoretical concepts. Students will refine their professional skills (teamwork, oral and written communication, problem solving).

### **Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:**

- A. Construct analyses and communicate arguments in written and multimedia formats
  - Research and analysis practice
  - Reflective writing assignments
- B. Acquire and master methodological and conceptual tools to engage in in-depth analysis of digital technologies and cultures
  - Analytical essay writing or video creation
  - Contemporary critical analysis individually and as a group
- C. Strengthen their capacity to think critically and to analyze complex theoretical concepts
  - Summarizing complex readings
  - Leading class discussions
- D. Master their professional skills: teamwork, oral and written communication, and problem solving
  - Final Group Project
  - Team exercises

## Course Requirements and Assessment

Assessment	Date of Evaluation	Weighting
<i>Reading Summary and Discussion (T)</i>	As Scheduled	20%
Presentation		33
Discussion		33
One-Page Summary		33
<i>Group Project (T)</i>	DUE: Nov 3 or 10	25%
Idea Pitch	October 6	10
One-On-Ones	Week of October 18	20
Final Presentation/Peer Evaluation	Nov 3 or Nov 10	70
<i>Essay or Video (I)</i>	DUE: December 1	25%
Topic Proposal/Outline	November 17	15
Final Version	December 1	85
<i>Quizzes (I)</i>	ongoing	20%
<i>Participation/Attendance</i>	ongoing	10%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

*\*\*Assignments are to be submitted to LEARN unless otherwise specified. You will also be responsible for checking LEARN online regularly to find new content that is posted regularly.*

### Assessment 1: Reading Summary & Discussion

In small teams, students will choose a particular reading in this class and prepare a one-page summary and three discussion questions that they will post before their presentation that particular week. Presentations will focus on accurately summarizing the main points of the article or reading and highlighting additional portions of the article/reading that each presenter feels would stimulate group discussion. Overall, your presentation should be no longer than 20 mins plus Q&A. You will be graded on the quality and relevance of the handout, your presentation and class engagement in discussion. Feel free to make a 2-minute explainer video, a powerpoint presentation, a podcast, whatever mode suits your skills best and will introduce, inform, and inspire a discussion.

### Assessment 2: Group Project: Digitize a Product

The goal with this assignment is to give you an opportunity to collaborate with your peers while innovating, analyzing, and pitching a digital product. In groups of 3-4 students, organize, engage in, and share a 20-minute presentation that bridges course content with your own innovation and analysis. For a grading rubric and more detailed information, please see LEARN under Assignments.

### Assessment 3: Essay or Video

The purpose of this Final Assignment is to give you a chance to demonstrate the collective knowledge you have acquired in this course through your own media analysis of content related to digital culture. Please refer to detailed instructions and further information in LEARN under Assignments.

### Assessment 4: Participation and Attendance

Attendance is required for this class. If you have a good reason to miss class, be sure you email me prior to your absence to let me know you won't be attending class. If you develop a habit of missing class, it will be reflected in your grade for attendance. Participation means that you come to class having read the week's readings, ready to express your own ideas and to participate with your other classmates and myself. Attendance is crucial but attendance alone does not count for full participation.

**Course Outline: The following is an outline of what we will cover from week to week.**

Week	Date	Topic	Readings Due
1	Sept 8	Introduction Introduction to Digital Culture – a refresher	
2	Sept 15	1. Here we are – Singularity? – Two Years later	KURZWEIL- <i>The Future is Now</i> - CH 1 & 2 - Review  KELLY – What Technology Wants – CH 5  WEST, THOMPSON - Mobile Knowledge : Driving a Paradigm Shift
3	Sept 22	1. The Internet of Things  2. Our Data turned Propaganda – The Pandemic	Humans and...Interconnectivity - Event  CHOMSKY - <i>Manufacturing Consent</i> - Summary  The Great Hack: <a href="https://youtu.be/iX8GxLP1FHo">https://youtu.be/iX8GxLP1FHo</a>

4	Sept 29	1. Alone Together – The Robotic Moment	TURKLE - <i>Alone Together</i> Ch. 1,2,3
5	Oct 6	1. How do we fit in? - Digital Identity	MILLER - CH7 Digital Identity  <b>DUE Group Project Idea Pitch – In Class</b>
	Oct 12	<b>Thanksgiving</b>	
6	Oct 20	1. Digital Identity – cont’d  2. How we Communicate	Donna Haraway “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist - Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”  TURKLE - <i>Alone Together</i> CH 10  <b>DUE Group Project One-on-Ones</b>
7	Oct 27	1. Information Politics and the Online Public Sphere - Populism	MILLER - CH 5 Information Politics and the Online Public Sphere  The Social Dilemma - Documentary <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaaC57tcci0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaaC57tcci0</a>
8	Nov 3	<b>Group Presentations</b>	
9	Nov 10	<b>Group Presentations</b>	
10	Nov 17	1. What is our role? - Media Disruptions	Hiroshi, Ishii and Brygg Ullmer “Tangible Bits: Towards Seamless Interfaces between People, Bits and

			Atoms”  The Discursive Power of Memes Ch1, 2, 3, 5  <b>DUE Essay or Video topic proposal</b>
11	Nov 24	1. The New Economy	Miller, Ch. 2 “The Economic Foundations of the Information Age”  Chris Harrison, Desney Tan, and Dan Morris “Skinput: Appropriating the Body as an Input Surface”  Don Ihde “Bodies in Technology”
12	Dec 1	<b>Wrap-up</b>	<b>DUE Final Essay</b>

### Equipment and Media Services

Questions: Email Micah Brenner or Noah Pratt at [stratford.digitalmedia@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:stratford.digitalmedia@uwaterloo.ca), or call 519-888-4567 ext. 23014

- [Loan Agreement and Equipment Inventory](#)

### Course Modification Warning – including responding to a change in public health guidelines

The instructor reserves the right to modify elements of the course during the term. If a modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation. If the University of Waterloo mandates a return to online learning, we will continue to meet synchronously through LEARN for 1.5 hours during regular class-time. The remaining time will be spent asynchronously. It is the responsibility of the students to check their uWaterloo email and course website on LEARN regularly during the term.

### Late Work

Late work will be accepted at any time. The grade deduction of 2% per day/maximum of 10%/week

will be deducted for a late assignment submission. Projects must be submitted to LEARN with an active hyperlink to your project hosted on YouTube/Vimeo/SoundCloud, if applicable. Deadlines must be met to avoid late penalties—please allow ample time to export and upload your work. If students are unable to submit an assignment on time due to extenuating circumstances, appropriate documentation must be provided. (Please see ‘Attendance’ below).

### **Attendance and Illness**

Success in this course is dependent on regular class attendance and participation. You are expected to attend every class. Students who are unable to meet assignment due dates or write a quiz must provide documentation verifying the events that have precluded them from meeting their academic deadlines. When illness is the cause of a missed deadline, students should seek medical treatment and provide confirmation of the illness to the instructor within 48 hours by submitting a completed University of Waterloo Verification of Illness form to support requests for accommodation due to illness. Please also review UW’s Policy on Accommodation Due to Illness: <https://uwaterloo.ca/registrar/current-students/accommodation-due-to-illness>.

### **Information on Plagiarism Detection**

Plagiarism: Text matching software (Turnitin®) may be used to screen assignments in this course. Turnitin® is used to verify that all materials and sources in assignments are documented.

Copyright: Any images, footage, sound, or music used in your projects must have a CC or PD license and must be cited in the credits. Be aware that found footage may be used to supplement your projects; however, it can consist of no more than 20% of your material. You will be asked to provide raw files for any suspicious material not cited. Please be advised that copyright infringement is a serious offence and will not be tolerated in this course.

### **Academic Integrity**

To maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. See the [Office of Academic Integrity webpage](#) for more information. 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 their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the School’s academic advisor who will provide further assistance.

**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 they have grounds for an appeal, should refer to [Policy72-StudentAppeals](#).

**Note for Students with Disabilities**

The [AccessAbility Services](#) office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (NH 1401), 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*.