SOC 290 - Political Economy of Digitality
The combined deployment of digital systems, massive data collection and computer code have reshaped the basic rules of social life: how people communicate, work, exchange and associate; how they relate to one another, themselves, and the world around them, down to the most ordinary and intimate aspects; how institutions, both public and private, think about and pursue their social mission and economic purpose; and how they sort, slot, and know populations and individuals. This course will analyze the political economy of digitality, paying attention to continuities and ruptures with antecedent forms of capital accumulation and state control. We will study closely the specific implementations of digital technologies across a wide range of domains and geographical settings and use that knowledge to revisit classic questions of social scientific theory – such as the search for economic profit, the production of social groups and inequalities, and the nature of politics and government.

Class goals and expectations
This course draws on research from a wide range of fields beyond sociology (including law, media studies, anthropology, STS, etc...). Some of these may be familiar to you, while others may take you outside of your comfort zone. I invite you to keep an open mind and approach this class with intellectual curiosity, interest, and imagination.

Our goal is to build productively on each other’s knowledge and ideas. Try to understand what a text is saying, and where the author is coming from. Be generous with your classmates, too. Remember that views expressed in the class may not reflect the speaker’s fully developed thinking about a topic. This course, like all courses, is a collective process of learning and intellectual exploration!

Books you should buy (they are also available online from the library):


**Course website**

There is a course website for Sociology 290 on bCourses. All journal articles and book excerpts are available in PDF format (Go to bCourses > Files > Required). You can also access some papers directly by clicking the hyperlinks in the syllabus.

**Course Requirements**

*Active participation* of all seminar members to class discussions.

*Weekly facts* about the topic being discussed that week. Just upload a web link to a news story (or twitter feed, or blog post, etc...) and add a one-sentence summary. Go to bCourses > Pages > page for that week and post the story. No need for your name, it will be fun to guess who posted what.

*Two in-class presentations*. One presentation will cover the readings for one week. It should be supported by a written memo briefly summarizing the main arguments and raising several themes / questions for further discussion in class. The memo should be posted on the course web site no later than midnight, on the day before class, so that people have enough time to read it. I will not grade the memos. The second presentation will take place at the end of the semester and will involve a discussion of the proposed research paper.

*One three-to-five pages final paper proposal*, due on October 5 at 5pm. (email is fine). The proposal should outline the research question, the research strategy, some relevant factoids, and explain the sociological motivation behind the problem studied (a critical review of the scholarly literature is an acceptable motivation). You are encouraged to come discuss your proposal in office hours.

*One final research paper* (15-20 double-spaced pages), due on Tuesday December 14 in both email and paper format. The only imperatives for this requirement are: (i) The paper must address a topic of your choice, related to the digital economy (ii) It must use some of the *readings* and *factoids*
discussed in this class. The paper may be empirical (e.g., a pilot study) or consist in a research proposal. Additional guidelines will be posted on the course website.

**Food!** Because we are meeting from 4-6pm, we will all be hungry! Therefore, we will take turns bringing a snack for the group. I will bring food on the very first day of class and we will have a big feast on the last day. Please [sign-up here](#) for your presentation date and food turn.
August 31. Introduction.


**Recommended**


September 7. The Age of Information.


**Recommended**


September 14. Production


**Recommended**


**September 21. Freedom and Desire**


Google’s Selfish Ledger. [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com).

**Recommended**


**September 28. Enclosures**


**Recommended**


October 5. The Promise of Inclusion


**Recommended**


October 12. Work


**Recommended**


October 19. Sorting


Recommended


**October 26. The Digital Poorhouse**


**Recommended**


**November 2. The New Jim Code**


**Recommended**


November 9. The Uses of Social Media


Recommended


November 16. Democracy


Recommended


November 23. No Class

November 30. Moral Economies


Recommended


December 7. Paper presentations. 4-hour class and dinner.