Overview of Course Content:
With the explosion of virtual communities and social media, technology and its effect on society has become a daily reality, invading all areas and aspects of our social lives. This ranges from pop culture, sports, and entertainment to political participation, intimacy, and family. Everyone taking this course has some exposure to virtual communities and social media—even if one is unaware of the extent and depth of this exposure in their lives. As a result, this course is not about discovering new ideas and never-before-seen concepts, but rather providing some tools and perspectives to understand aspects of society that we are somewhat familiar with. Put another way, this course seeks to understand a growing aspect of our society through a different lens of understanding.

Explicitly, the goals of this course are: 1) to provide a survey of subfields in social media research, 2) to expose you to what social science research looks like in these subfields, and 3) to provide a space for you to reflect and personally interact with what virtual communities and social media means in your own life.

Email Policy:
I am usually very good about answering emails, but please leave at least 2 days for me to get to you, especially over the weekend (I may not get to you until Monday/Tuesday). Also, please keep emails to questions that are relatively easy to answer, such as questions about logistics, instructions, office hours, etc. For questions about class content or your papers, please see me in office hours or talk to me before/after class.

Office Hours (OH):
Please sign-up for office hours (http://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/icwie). If you do not sign-up, you are welcome to come still, but just know that I might be busy with other students or have stepped out for a moment. You may visit me in office hours for any concern, big or small, course related or life related!

Technology Requirement:
The class does have an embedded requirement to be connected with technology—or rather I should say that it is assumed that you have access to and more or less regularly participate with technology. That said, I do not want this class to privilege those who have over those who have not. Please send me an email or come talk to me if you feel that you are either
not technologically proficient or will have trouble using technology and social media for the class assignments.

**Grade Breakdown:**

- Disconnect Paper 15%
- Take Home Midterm 25%
- Virtual Community Paper 25%
- Final 35%

***If English is not your first language, or you have trouble writing in English, there are resources on campus to help in writing your papers. I am happy to point you to some of them, just send me an email. Also, if you are part of the Disabled Students’ Program (DSP) and require any special accommodations, please talk to me and/or send me an email within the next two or three weeks to discuss alternative deadlines for assignments. In order to GUARANTEE your DSP accommodation, I absolutely need at least 3 weeks notice before the deadline of the assignment!***

**Grading Scale for the Class:**

- A+ (98-100)
- A (92-98)
- A- (90-92)
- B+ (88-90)
- B (82-88)
- B- (80-82)
- C+ (78-80)
- C (72-78)
- C- (70-72)
- D+ (68-70)
- D (62-68)
- D- (60-62)
- F (everything below 60)

**LATE ASSIGNMENTS ARE NOT ACCEPTED!** The following paper assignments will all be “handed out” and completed through the bCourses website. There is a one-hour grace period where you can still submit your assignment even though it will be considered late. Late assignments, even assignments just one minute late, are penalized a full grade (e.g. an A becomes a B). If you miss this grace period, you will be unable to submit your assignment and you will be given a 0 on it. Please be sure to turn things in on time and before the stated due date/time.

*NOTE: The reason I have a strict policy on late assignments is because I am concerned about unknowingly participating in a system that privileges certain racial, cultural, socioeconomic, family background influences that may account for one student asking for an extension while others keep silent about their circumstances. In a class this large, and without GSIs, I simply must impose a strict “no late assignments” policy.*

- **PLEASE submit your assignments early!** Do not wait for the last minute. BCourses is known to sometimes have errors in submission (I suspect due to too many students submitting at the same time), so please save us all some stress and extra work and submit things **at least an hour in advance of the due date and time.**
- **If you encounter an error in submission,** please take a screenshot of the error that includes the date and time of the error (your computer’s date/time clock is good enough)
and email me your assignment with the screenshot attached. In order for your assignment to be accepted, **I must receive this email before the submission due date.**

**Disconnect Paper:**
During the first month of the semester (make arrangements as necessary), for 36 hours you are to disconnect completely from any form of virtual community or social media. This means no text messages, emails, Internet, chat messengers, online spaces, online apps, online games, etc. You will write a short paper about this experience and one key positive and/or negative effect of virtual communities and social media in response to the first four weeks’ readings. See assignment on bCourses for more detailed information about this assignment.

**Virtual Community Paper:**
During this semester, you will be asked to spend at least five weeks (five hours a week) investing and interacting with a virtual community. This can certainly be a community that you are already a part of, but the interaction must be distinct, involved, deliberate, and intentional. In other words, you must reach out to the community in a proactive and initiative-taking way as to incite a response and deepen your interaction with it. If you have any questions about what an appropriate virtual community/online space is, please talk to me in office hours. In the final paper, you will be asked to reflect on this experience and relate it to readings and topics from class. See assignment on bCourses for more detailed information about this assignment.

**Midterm:**
Your midterm exam will be a take-home exam. It will cover topics from the first eight weeks of class. It will focus primarily on objective answers such as identifications, quotes, and short answers. More information to come as the semester moves along.

**Final Exam:**
Your final exam will be a take-home exam. It will be in essay format requiring you to answer questions that synthesize material in the course. It will also require you to cite readings as examples of your argument. More information as the semester moves along.
Reading List and Semester Schedule

Tips About the Readings:
Most of the readings are provided as a particular view of a topic. They should not be read as “truth,” but rather with some skepticism and analytical criticism—consider whether or not and to what extent you are convinced by the authors’ interpretation and view.

Overall, read for understanding, overarching meanings, and the big picture. Do not worry too much about specific statistics—although they may become useful in constructing your arguments for the midterm, virtual community paper, and final exam, you can always review them then.

Finally, the readings are organized in a particular way. The first 4 weeks are mostly theory-based readings and broad themes that we will see again and again. Then, weeks 5-8 are more specific to subfields and contexts, but still are looking at broad-based ideas that can be applied in multiple contexts. And finally weeks 9-13 look at certain cases and subfields as examples of some of the themes, theories, and ideas in a specific context.

Thursday, August 25
Introduction: Syllabus and Logistics

Tuesday, August 30
Introduction: Virtual Communities and Social Media

Thursday, September 1
Actor Network Theory

Tuesday, September 6
Theories of Technology and Society

Thursday, September 8
Theories of Media Studies

Disconnect Paper Handed Out
Virtual Community Paper Handed Out
Tuesday, September 13  
Social Network Analysis  

Thursday, September 15  
Utopian Views  

Tuesday, September 20  
Dystopian Views  

Thursday, September 22  
Alone Together: Psychology and Technology  

***Disconnect Paper Due Friday, September 23, before 11:59pm***

Tuesday, September 27  
Culture and Technology  
Thursday, September 29  
**Digital Divide**  

Tuesday, October 4  
**Social Capital**  

Thursday, October 6  
**Social Networking Sites**  

Tuesday, October 11  
**Geography and Technology**  
- Takhteyev, Yuri, Anatoliy Gruzd, and Barry Wellman. “Geography of Twitter networks,” *Social Networks* 34 (2012): 73-81

Thursday, October 13  
**Mobile Life in Offline Spaces**  

Tuesday, October 18  
**Midterm Review!**

*Take-Home Midterm Handed Out via bCourses*
Thursday, October 20  
Wearables: Technology and the Body  

***Take-Home Midterm Due Monday, October 24, before 11:59pm***

Tuesday, October 25  
Internet Dating  

Thursday, October 27  
Dating: CMC and Presentation of Self  

Tuesday, November 1  
Family, Youth, and Children: Sexting and Moral Panic  

Thursday, November 3  
Family, Youth, and Children: Cyberbullying and Drama  
Tuesday, November 8
Elections, Voting, and Political Awareness

Thursday, November 10
Revolutions, Movements, and Political Influence

Tuesday, November 15
Gaming: Violence, Addiction, and Virtual Communities
- Steinkuehler & Williams (2006). Where Everybody Knows Your (Screen) Name: Online Games as “Third Places”.

Thursday, November 17
Gaming: Competitive eSports

***Virtual Community Paper due Friday, November 18, before 11:59pm***
**Tuesday, November 22**  
Education and Online Classrooms  

**Thursday, November 24**  
Thanksgiving – No Classes

**Tuesday, November 29**  
South Africa Conference – No Classes  
Take-Home Final Exam Handed Out

**Thursday, December 1**  
Final Review and Evaluations

***Final Exam due Friday, December 16 before 11:59pm submitted via bCourses!***