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, sexual 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 talk to me before/after class or by appointment in office hours.

Office Hours:

Feel free to come into office hours for anything, course or life related! Please sign up at the link at the top of the page if you know in advance that you’d like to come in. If you do not sign up, you are still welcome to drop in, but I do sometimes step out of the office when there is no appointment to run a quick errand. Also, if the door to my office is closed during office hours, feel free to knock (loudly). I try not to run late with my appointments but it does sometimes happen—if you notice me running late and have time constraints with your assigned time, please feel free to politely interrupt and let me know.
**Grade Breakdown:**

- Disconnect Paper: 15%
- Take Home Midterm: 25%
- Virtual Community Paper: 25%
- Take Home 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 have posted some such resources on bCourses under “Files” and “Writing Resources.” You can also check out the Student Learning Center (SLC) at their website http://slc.berkeley.edu for more information.***

Also, if you are part of the Disabled Students’ Program (DSP) and require any special accommodations, please try to make arrangements at least a week in advance—this will guarantee you access to your accommodations.

**Grading Scale for the Class:**

- A+ (98-100)
- A (93-97)
- A- (90-92)
- B+ (88-89)
- B (83-87)
- B- (80-82)
- C+ (78-79)
- C (73-77)
- C- (70-72)
- D+ (68-69)
- D (63-67)
- D- (60-62)
- F (everything below 60)

**Lectures**

Lectures will take us through major themes that develop, connect, and reappear throughout the course. I will not only be lecturing, but will also answer questions and engage in discussions.

You are responsible for all material discussed in lectures, as well as any announcements made. I often discuss assignments in more detail, answering important questions and providing extra details—you will be responsible for all of this, so please be sure to consistently attend lecture. Although official lecture attendance is not taken, the midterm and the final exam will look to test lecture (and reading) knowledge.

In general, coming to lecture regularly will make your academic life with this class much easier, so I highly encourage it. I will do my best to make the lectures interesting and engaging.

**Readings**

All readings will be posted on bCourses. There is no plan to create a course reader, as typically most students do not purchase them (due to their high cost). If this is a significant problem for you, please do speak to me.

**Readers**

Readers will be grading all assignments in the course. They will be assigned randomly and in a rotating fashion so that a combination of different readers will determine your overall grades. Your assigned reader will be posted a couple weeks in advance of each assignment’s due date so that you can reach out to your reader with questions as needed.
LATE ASSIGNMENTS ARE NOT ACCEPTED! The 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, are penalized a full grade (e.g. an A becomes a B). If you miss this grace period, you will still be able to submit your assignment, but it will not be graded and you will receive 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 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 six 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—driven for research and social discovery purposes. In other words, you must reach out to the community in a proactive and initiative-taking way to incite a response and deepen your interaction with and understanding of 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 make an argument relating this experience to themes and course content. 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 short answer questions that have objective 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 and evaluate material in the course. It will also require you to cite readings as examples of your argument. More information as the semester moves along.

Re-grade Policy:
If you want a re-grade, please follow the following steps. You have two weeks to initiate the beginning of this process (meaning you have one week to contact your reader). I do not do re-grades after this two-week cut-off (to avoid people asking for re-grades at the end of the semester).

1. Meet with your reader (online or in-person) to discuss why you got the grade you got.
2. Write a cover letter to your reader that explains how you understand the reader's perspective and why you still have an issue with the grade (what you thought was mis-graded). I realize that you hopefully also discussed this in person, but we would like to have something written down, also in case for future reference.
3. Your reader will re-grade your paper (the entire thing) and whatever grade you get becomes final grade (either higher or lower)
4. If for some reason you are still unsatisfied, you may refer the issue to me. I will need to see the cover letter and will discuss with the reader after reading your work. I should warn you, however, in general (on average from what I have seen), I may be a tougher grader than the reader. Whatever grade I end up giving is the final say on the matter.

Keep in mind, your readers read many papers. They probably have a sense for how your paper compares to other people's in the class. But reading many papers could also allow for mistakes, so while that is possible, please have sober judgment over your own work and really consider the reader's perspective. Regardless of how much time or effort you put into the assignment, if it simply did not meet the requirements, you may still have gotten a lower grade (keep in mind, your reader has no idea how much time you spent on the assignment and isn't evaluating effort, but what is written on the rubrics).
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 29
Introduction: Syllabus and Logistics

WEEK ONE
Tuesday, September 3
Introduction: Virtual Communities and Social Media

Thursday, September 5
Actor Network Theory

WEEK TWO
Tuesday, September 10
Theories of Technology and Society

Disconnect Paper Handed Out

Thursday, September 12
Theories of Media Studies

Virtual Community Paper Handed Out
WEEK THREE
Tuesday, September 17  Social Network Analysis

Thursday, September 19  Utopian Views

WEEK FOUR
Tuesday, September 24  Dystopian Views

Thursday, September 26  Alone Together: Psychology and Technology

***Disconnect Paper Due Friday, September 27, before 11:59pm***

WEEK FIVE
Tuesday, October 1  Culture and Technology

Thursday, October 3  Privacy, Surveillance, and Information Capital
WEEK SIX
Tuesday, October 8  
Social Capital  

Thursday, October 10  
Social Networking Sites  

WEEK SEVEN
Tuesday, October 15  
Geography and Technology  
- Takhteyev, Yuri, Anatoliy Gruzd, and Barry Wellman. “Geography of Twitter networks,” *Social Networks* 34 (2012): 73-81

Thursday, October 17  
Mobile Life in Offline Spaces  

WEEK EIGHT
Tuesday, October 22  
Midterm Review!  
Take-Home Midterm Handed Out via bCourses

Thursday, October 24  
Wearables: Technology and the Body  

***Take-Home Midterm Due Monday, October 28, before 11:59pm***
WEEK NINE  
Tuesday, October 29  
Internet Dating and Presentation of Self  

Thursday, October 31  
Intimacy Online?  

WEEK TEN  
Tuesday, November 5  
Youth and Children: Sexting, Cyberbullying, and Moral Panic  

Thursday, November 7  
Networked Teens  

WEEK ELEVEN  
Tuesday, November 12  
Elections, Voting, and Political Awareness  
Thursday, November 14  Revolutions, Movements, and Political Influence

***Virtual Community Paper due Monday, November 18, before 11:59pm***

WEEK TWELVE
Tuesday, November 19 Gaming: Violence, Addiction, and Virtual Communities
- Steinkuehler & Williams (2006). Where Everybody Knows Your (Screen) Name: Online Games as “Third Places”.

Thursday, November 21 Gaming: Competitive eSports

WEEK THIRTEEN
Tuesday, November 26 Shortened class—explain take-home final
Take-Home Final Exam Handed Out

Thursday, November 28 Thanksgiving – No Classes

WEEK FOURTEEN
Tuesday, December 3 Education and Online Classrooms and Evaluations

Thursday, December 5 Final Review and Q&As
***Final Exam due Friday, December 20 before 11:59pm submitted via bCourses!***