Soc 167 – Virtual Communities and Social Media
University of California, Berkeley
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30am-11am
100 Genetics and Plant Biology

Instructor: Edwin Lin  Email: edklin@berkeley.edu
Office Hours: 487 Barrows Hall, Thursdays, 11:45am-1:45pm or by appointment
Sign-up for Office Hours at http://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/icwie

Readers: Gregory Fayard, gmfayard@berkeley.edu
Elena Rein, elena_rein@berkeley.edu
Mark Quinn, mark.quinn@berkeley.edu

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.

About This Syllabus:
This syllabus is essentially a contract between you (the student) and me (the instructor). Many policies are listed in the syllabus that may not be relevant to you now, but may come up as the semester goes along. Please keep this handy and refer to it for detailed information about the course, such as grading, email, office hours, late assignments, DSP, extensions, etc.

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.

During busy weeks, I get upwards of 50 emails a day from students. As a result, sometimes I will only be able to provide short, curt answers. I apologize if it comes across as rude or uncaring, but it is simply due to the volume of responses I have to get through in a reasonable time frame.

I also reserve the right to simply respond to your email with “see syllabus” if the information is covered in this syllabus.
Office Hours:
Feel free to come into office hours for anything, course or life related! Please sign up at
the link at the beginning of the syllabus 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.
If office hours are full, you may email me to set up another time, either in person or via
phone/online meeting. If you have a very short question, you can try to drop by and sneak in
before/after a student for a quick question (as not every student will use the entire 15 minutes
they signed up for)—but be prepared to wait patiently as well.
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disconnect Paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Home Midterm</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Community Paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Home Final</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***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](http://slc.berkeley.edu) for more information.

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

To ask for an extension or accommodation using your DSP letter, you must first be sure
that your DSP letter allows for the accommodation you are requesting. Then, follow these two
steps:
1) Send an email with your DSP letter attached to both the reader grading the assignment
you are asking for an accommodation for and me (the instructor). If you are asking for an
extension, please suggest a reasonable due date (allowed by your letter) to turn in the
assignment.
2) Once I approve (via email) the extension/accommodation, please post a comment in
bCourses for the assignment that you are receiving accommodations for that states (1)
your new due date, (2) the date of my email that approved your accommodation, and (3)
upload/attach your DSP letter to the comment for reference.
Please follow these instructions carefully. Over the years, DSP has expanded to include many
more students, and teaching very large classes without GSIs can make it difficult to handle these
cases—so please make our job easier by following these instructions!

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.

**Grading Scale for the Class:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>98-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-87</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>78-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63-67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>(everything below 60)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Course Assignments

LATE ASSIGNMENTS ARE NOT ACCEPTED! The only exception is for approved DSP accommodations and documented extreme emergencies (e.g. hospitalization, death in the family). All 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 a couple minutes late, are penalized up to a full grade (e.g. up to a 10% deduction). If you miss this grace period, you will be unable to get credit for 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 and 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 rather sizeable class, I feel it is important to have a strict “no late assignments” policy.

- PLEASE submit your assignments early! Do not wait for the last minute, especially given the late assignment policy for the class, 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.
- On bCourses, you can submit assignments early and re-submit them (to override the submission) at a later date. They will not be graded until the due date passes. So submit assignments early to avoid last minute technological errors so that you at least get some credit in case of emergency.
- Back-up your work! Stolen laptops, broken laptops, etc. are a real risk of the technological era. If you encounter such a problem, no extension will be given. It is therefore your responsibility to back up your work so that you can still turn in the assignment in case a technologically related tragedy occurs.
- 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 your assignment with the screenshot attached to your GSI. In order for your assignment to be accepted as on time, your GSI must receive this email before the submission due date.
- It is your responsibility to make sure you submitted the correct assignment and that the assignment was fully submitted, so please after submitting your assignment, check to be sure that the correct document was successfully uploaded onto bCourses. If you submit the wrong assignment or if it was unsuccessfully uploaded, we have no choice but to give you a 0 on the assignment.

Grading Philosophy:
I believe that the grade you get is the grade you earn. I also believe that your final grade in the course should reflect an accurate assessment of the entire body of work you submit for the class. If something unexpected or tragic occurs with one assignment (e.g. you do much worse on an assignment due to personal circumstances, you were unable to turn it in on time and received a 0, etc.), I will still evaluate the rest of your coursework to see what grade you deserve for the entire course—in other words, focus on the other assignments and show you deserve an A in the
course in spite of one major slip-up. You will never receive a grade **lower** than what you earned by sheer point calculation, but you may receive a grade **higher** if your work proves it (e.g. improvement, exceptional final exam, etc.).

I review every grade submitted at the end of the course and will handle things like borderline grades, rounding, etc. based on the performance of your work as a whole. I even (sometimes) re-read your already graded work to see if you should be bumped up from a B+ to an A- if you are on the borderline. These are done for **every** student, regardless of whether you email me or not (to ensure a fair playing field for all my students), so there is no need to “advocate” for yourself—just focus on the work and prove you deserve (i.e. earn) the grade you are hoping for.

**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. 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 because their grades are borderline).

1. Meet with the reader (in person/remotely) to discuss why you got the grade you got.
2. Write a cover letter to the reader and to me that explains how you understand his/her 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 for clarity and reference.
3. Your reader or I will re-grade your work (the entire thing) and whatever grade you get becomes the final grade (either higher or lower). Whether your reader re-grades it or I do depends on whether your reader believes there is something that could be adjusted or not.
4. If your reader re-grades the assignment and you are still unsatisfied, you may refer the issue to me. I should warn you that in general (on average from what I have seen), I might be a tougher grader than the reader. Whatever grade I end up giving is the final say on the matter.

Keep in mind, your reader reads **many** papers. They probably have a sense for how your paper compares to other people 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 grader's perspective. Regardless of how much time or effort you put into the assignment, if it simply did not meet the requirements or if you did not adequately communicate what was in your head, 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 the expectation of the assignment based on a rubric or answer key).

**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 four 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.

**Take-Home 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.

**Take-Home 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.
Reading List and Semester Schedule

Assignments that are “handed out” means they will be explained in class and available on bCourses. Please complete readings before class on the day that they are listed under.

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.

OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

1. Tuesday, January 21   Introduction: Syllabus and Logistics

2. Thursday, January 23   Virtual Communities and Social Media

THEORY

3. Tuesday, January 28   Actor Network Theory

4. Thursday, January 30   Theories of Technology and Society
   
   Disconnect Paper Handed Out due Wednesday, February 19

5. Tuesday, February 4   Theories of Media Studies

6. Thursday, February 6   Social Network Analysis
MAJOR DISCOURSES

7. Tuesday, February 11     Utopian Views

8. Thursday, February 13     Dystopian Views

9. Tuesday, February 18     Alone Together: Psychology and Technology

***Disconnect Paper Due Wednesday February 19, before 11:59pm***

MAJOR THEMES

10. Thursday, February 20     Culture and Technology

Virtual Community Paper Handed Out due Friday, April 10

11. Tuesday, February 25     Privacy, Surveillance, and Information Capital

12. Thursday, February 27     Social Capital
13. **Tuesday, March 3**  **Social Networking Sites**

14. **Thursday, March 5**  **Geography and Technology**
   - Takhteyev, Yuri, Anatoliy Gruzd, and Barry Wellman. “Geography of Twitter networks,” *Social Networks* 34 (2012): 73-81

15. **Tuesday, March 10**  **Public Spaces**

16. **Thursday, March 12**  **Social Interactions**

**MIDTERM**

17. **Tuesday, March 17**  **Midterm Review!**
   Take-Home Midterm Handed Out via bCourses due Monday, March 23

**CASE STUDIES AND EXAMPLES**

18. **Thursday, March 19**  **Wearables: Technology and the Body**

   ***Take-Home Midterm Due Monday, March 23, before 11:59pm***
   ***March 23-27 NO CLASS SPRING BREAK***

19. **Tuesday, March 31**  **Internet Dating and Presentation of Self**
20. Thursday, April 2  Intimacy Online?

21. Tuesday, April 7  Sexting, Cyberbullying, and Moral Panic

22. Thursday, April 9  Networked Teens

***Virtual Community Paper due Friday, April 10, before 11:59pm***

23. Tuesday, April 14  Elections, Voting, and Political Awareness

24. Thursday, April 16  Revolutions, Movements, and Political Influence

25. Tuesday, April 21  Gaming: Violence, Addiction, and Virtual Communities
   - Steinkuehler & Williams (2006). Where Everybody Knows Your (Screen) Name: Online Games as “Third Places”.
26. Thursday, April 23  
Gaming: Competitive eSports  

27. Tuesday, April 28  
Education and Online Classrooms and Evaluations  

28. Thursday, April 30  
Final Review  
Take-Home Final Handed Out via bCourses due Friday, May 15

***Final Exam due Friday, May 15 before 11:59pm submitted via bCourses!***