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 sociological lens of understanding.

Explicitly, the goals of this course are: 1) to teach key themes and theories that will deepen one’s ability to analyze virtual communities and social media, 2) to consider specifically to what extent are virtual communities and social media are changing our society, 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.
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 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/Zoom call when there is no appointment to run a quick errand.
If office hours are full or you cannot make the times, you may email me to set up another time. 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.
Office hours can be done in-person (487 Social Sciences Building) OR online via Zoom (https://berkeley.zoom.us/j/99441395960).

Grade Breakdown:
- Disconnect Paper: 15%
- Take Home Midterm: 20%
- Virtual Community (VC) Paper: 35%
  - Early Data Report: 10%
  - VC Final Paper: 25%
- Take Home Final: 30%

***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. Please make such arrangements directly with the Head GSI.

Structure of our Class
The class will be held in person. This is the expectation of the course and attendance is essentially mandatory. Attendance for lecture is not regularly taken but is considered mandatory and expected. It is possible that I may plan to take attendance on days when fewer students attend to give credit for students who attend lecture. This is meant to be a positive incentive to provide recognition and a direct value to your grade for attendance (but this will not explicitly hurt anyone’s grade who does not attend).

You are responsible for all materials discussed in our times together, as well as any announcements made or questions answered. I make it a point to make lecture attendance valuable in helping with assignments, quizzes, and tests. I will also do my best to make these times manageable, interesting, and engaging! Finally, as we do not have discussion sections, there will also be important moments throughout the semester for our lectures to be used as a space for processing information.

Disconnect Paper:
During the first five weeks 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 connect it to one of the readings from the first three weeks of class. 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.

**Virtual Community Paper:**
During this semester, you will be asked to choose and immerse yourself with an online 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 and not just your own entertainment. 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. The paper is broken down into two parts: a data and analysis report and a final paper.

The early data report will ask you to describe your virtual community and encourage you to engage in it in a deeper way. You will need to start gathering some data and connect them to key concepts in the course or on the syllabus. This is a kind of preparation for writing the VC final paper.

In the VC final paper, you will be asked to make an argument relating your experience to course themes and readings. While there might be some overlap between previous reports and the final paper, the paper should overall be distinct, as you will be arguing a thesis and using course materials as well as the data you collected to prove this argument.

**Take-Home Final Exam:**
Your final exam will be a take-home exam. You will submit the exam via bCourses. 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.

**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 (Graders)
This class has a Head GSI who will be helping with grading, DSP requests, questions on assignments, and organizing readers. They will be an important resource and will be regularly communicating with you throughout the semester.

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 via bCourses so that you can reach out to them in case you have grading discrepancies. You will have the same reader for both virtual community project assignments (for consistency, feedback, and growth).

Grading Scale for the Class:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>98-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-97</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88-89</td>
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<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>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-77</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63-67</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>(everything below 60)</td>
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Course Policies (detailed info also available on bCourses)

Extensions are only approved for DSP accommodations and documentable emergency circumstances (e.g. hospitalization, death in the family, COVID-19 related issues, etc.). 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 and may get up to a 5% grade deduction. After that one-hour grace period, the paper will be considered a day late and will have a 10% grade deduction. Each additional day a paper is late, it will be penalized an additional 5%. After being four days, the paper will no longer be accepted. 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 extensions 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. Especially in larger classes, I feel it is important to have clear guideline to provide some equity.

That said, overall, please communicate with the Head GSI about difficulties that may prevent you from succeeding in the class if these emergencies do come up during the semester.

- 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, there is NOT a guarantee of an extension. 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 un成功fully uploaded, we have no choice but to give you a 0 on the assignment.

This is the course wide policy, but the Head GSI is able to make exceptions as they see fit.
**Disabled Students’ Program (DSP)**

If you are part of the Disabled Students’ Program (DSP) and require special accommodations, please try to make arrangements in advance—this will guarantee you access to your accommodations. If you do make arrangements last minute, we will try our best to still accommodate, but try to ask in advance, even if it’s just in case.

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, send an email with your DSP letter attached to the Head GSI. If you are asking for an extension, you will work with the Head GSI to establish a new due date.

Please follow these instructions carefully. Over the years, DSP has expanded to include many more students, and teaching very large classes without sections can make it difficult to handle these cases—so please make our job easier by following these instructions!

**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 after receiving your grade 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 (remotely or in-person) the reader who graded your paper to discuss why you got the grade you got.
2. Write a cover letter to the Head GSI and to me that explains how you understand their 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 your meeting, but we would like to have something written down for clarity and reference.
3. Your reader, the Head GSI, 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, the Head GSI does, or I do depends on whether your reader believes there is something that could be adjusted or not.
4. If your reader/Head GSI 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 historically), 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 grades many assignments. They probably have a sense for how your assignment compares to other people in the class. But grading many assignments 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).
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.

I have kept the reading load to be rather manageable, but some days will have more reading than others. Overall, read for understanding, overarching meanings, and the big picture. Do not worry too much about detailed specifics, such as dates of historical events, economic statistics, etc.—you can always go back and look at key parts of the reading to apply to your assignments. If you can write 3-5 sentences to summarize the main concepts of the readings, you are doing great.

Depending on how much time you have this semester, skim aggressively—learn when to slow down and focus and when to speed up and even skip! I DO NOT expect you to read every word of every reading, nor should you, as this is actually a bad reading habit to develop (for academic, course reading). Almost all readings will be discussed in lecture, so between your aggressive and smart skimming and the lectures, I believe this reading load is manageable. Do your best to at least skim through every reading on the syllabus before class, and perhaps after lecture, you can revisit the reading and fine tune your reading notes.

List of Important Due Dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Disconnect Paper</td>
<td>Tuesday, September 26</td>
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<tr>
<td>VC Early Data Report</td>
<td>Tuesday, October 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Home Midterm due</td>
<td>Friday, October 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC Final Paper due</td>
<td>Friday, November 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Home Final Exam due</td>
<td>Friday, December 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UNIT 0: INTRODUCTION
Week 1

1. **Thursday, August 24**
   Introduction: Syllabus and Logistics

Week 2

2. **Tuesday, August 29**
   Virtual Communities and Social Media

3. **Thursday, August 31**
   Actor Network Theory
UNIT 1: UTOPIAN AND DYSTOPIAN DISCOURSES

Week 3
4. Tuesday, September 5  Theories of Technology and Society
   
   HANDOUT: Disconnect Paper via bCourses due Tuesday, September 26

5. Thursday, September 7  Utopian Views

Week 4
6. Tuesday, September 12  Dystopian Views (I)

7. Thursday, September 14  Dystopian Views (II): Big Data, AI, and Algorithms
   - YouTube Video Discussion with “The Social Dilemma” Filmmakers and Katie Couric [via bCourses or YouTube link: https://youtu.be/yGi2YKZZNFe?t=532]

Week 5
8. Tuesday, September 19  Dystopian Views (III): Psychology and Relationships

9. Thursday, September 21  Moral Panic

UNIT 2: THEORIES AND TOOLS FOR ANALYSIS

Week 6
10. Tuesday, September 26  Theories of Media Studies

***Disconnect Paper Due Tuesday, September 26***

11. Thursday, September 28  The Attention Economy  

HANDOUT: VC Early Data Report via bCourses due Tuesday, October 17

Week 7  
12. Tuesday, October 3  Culture on the Internet  

13. Thursday, October 5  Global Societies(?) and Global Change  

UNIT 3: SOCIAL NETWORKS, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND SOCIAL CHANGE  
Section 1: Social Networks and Social Capital  
Week 8  
14. Tuesday, October 10  Social Network Analysis  

15. Thursday, October 12  Social Decapitalization  

Week 9  
16. Tuesday, October 17  Social Capital and SNS  

***VC Data and Analysis Report Due Tuesday, October 17***

17. Thursday, October 19  Public Spaces and Social Interactions  


HANDOUT: VC Final Paper due Friday, November 17

Week 10  
18. Tuesday, October 24  Midterm Review  

HANDOUT: Take Home Midterm due Friday, October 27
Section 2: Social Change

19. Thursday, October 26  Engagement in Virtual Communities

***Take Home Midterm Due Friday, October 27***

Week 11

20. Tuesday, October 31  Elections, Voting, and Political Awareness

21. Thursday, November 2  Fake News and Disinformation

Week 12

22. Tuesday, November 7  Political Polarization

23. Thursday, November 9  Revolutions and Social Movements
UNIT 4: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND CONCLUSION

Week 13
24. Tuesday, November 14  Gaming (I): Dystopian Views

25. Thursday, November 16  Gaming (II): Utopian Views
   - Steinkuehler & Williams (2006). Where Everybody Knows Your (Screen) Name: Online Games as “Third Places”.

***VC Paper Due Friday, November 17***

Week 14
26. Tuesday, November 21  Privacy Panic: Technology and the Body

27. Thursday, November 23  THANKSGIVING NO CLASS

Week 15
28. Tuesday, November 28  AI Bots (and Future of Tech)

29. Thursday, November 30  Final Review
   HANDOUT: Take-Home Final via bCourses due Friday, December 15