

VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES and SOCIAL MEDIA
SOCIOLOGY 167
Spring 2012
Dr. Timothy King

Class Time: **Monday 5:30PM – 8:30PM**

Class Location: **2050 Valley LSB**

Office Hours: **after class**

Email: **tim.king.phd@gmail.com**

Final Exam: **Friday May 11, 11:30-2:30**

This course provides an overview of the social dynamics and phenomena of the Internet. This course will provide students with an understanding of the fundamental cultural and social principles of the Internet, from the perspective of social sciences and with a focus upon the relationship between technology and society. This course examines the ways in which society is changing due to the introduction and wide spread use of computers and computer network communication. We will explore the subjects social and economic change due to the Internet – the Internet in developing nations, new social networks and their impact on social lives, predation and cyber-bullying, online gaming and the social dynamics of virtual worlds, culture without a nation – the culture of the Internet, censorship and control of information, publishing open to all, dating and romance online, exploiting new technology: cyber-warfare and virtual crime.

Course Requirements:

1). **Lectures:** Participation in in-class discussions will be expected of every student. Class attendance is essential to passing this course – **missing more than 3 class sessions can result in a failing grade**. If serious or significant reasons require a student to miss a class session, proof of reason for absence must be provided and students must notify me in advance (if possible) if they expect to miss a class session. It will be the responsibility of the student to contact me (during office hours) to collect any assignments or course materials they have missed due to absence.

2). **Required Readings:**

Readings will be assigned at the end of each class session. Additional readings (articles) will also be provided.

• **Levinson, Paul** "New New Media" Allyn & Bacon (Penguin Academics), 2009

3). **Exams:** A midterm exam and a final exam will constitute 70% of the course grade (35% each exam). These examinations will test student understanding of in-class materials and the homework reading assignments.

4). **Course Assignments:** 30% of the course grade will be from assignments, both in class and out of class assignments. Several of these assignments will be in a group format and will require posting materials on the internet.

5). **Academic Integrity:** The University's policy on academic honesty will be strictly enforced. If you are in doubt about quoting, paraphrasing, or plagiarism, consult your University Bulletin (also on-line). In other words, cheating in any form can be grounds for failing the entire course. Including material from elsewhere and presenting it as your own work is not permissible. All quoted text or graphics must be submitted with full citation. Text and graphics taken from the internet must be cited with a full URL reference.

6). **Grading and Assessment:**

Midterm Exam: 35%

Final Exam: 35%

Course Assignments: 30%

7). **Performance Quality:** Your grade on assignments and exams will be based upon your knowledge and understanding of course and reading materials, and your competence in applying these materials to your work and class discussions.

This schedule may be subject to change or revision:

SESSION 1 (Mon, Jan 23) –

- **COURSE OVERVIEW** - An overview of course materials.
- **ANONYMOUS: None of us are as cruel as all of us** - An overview of the “Anonymous” and “Chanology” movements and online organization and communications – how an informal group of hackers attacked the Church of Scientology, the Internet security firm HB Gary, Sony Music, and the Iranian Government.

reading:

- Dibbell, Julian "The A**clown Offensive: How to Enrage the Church of Scientology" *Wired*, Sept 2009.

SESSION 2 (Mon, Jan 30) –

- **THE HISTORY OF THE INTERNET** - Data and internal messaging networks, email and usenet, the “browser wars” of the new millennium, the Web 2.0 Revolution of 2002-2005.
- **THE LANGUAGE OF THE INTERNET** – The predominance of English on the internet and its global implications. The evolution of *haxor* (“hacker”) and *l33t* (“leet”) – developing new English terminology and orthography. Overview of common internet cultural terms.

reading:

- Levinson, Paul "New New Media" Chapter 1: "*Why 'New New' Media?*"

SESSION 3 (Mon, Feb 6) –

- **SCAMMING and SCAMBAITING** - The world of “419 scams” and the social sanctions through “scam-baiting.”
- **VIRTUAL CRIME** - The Internet as a new arena for criminal activity: goldfarming economies, public shaming, virtual prostitution, and hacking.

reading:

- Suler, John "The Online Disinhibition Effect" *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, vol 7. no.3, 2004.

SESSION 4 (Mon, Feb 13) –

- **SOCIAL NETWORKS (and STRANGERS)** - The expansion of social networks on the Internet and the nature of “strangers.” We will examine the nature of social networks and the diffusion of information across social networks, and why they are perceived to be the "Holy Grail" for marketing.

reading:

- Levinson, Paul "New New Media" Chapter 5: "*Digg.*"
- Levinson, Paul "New New Media" Chapter 6: "*Myspace.*"
- Levinson, Paul "New New Media" Chapter 7: "*Facebook.*"

MONDAY FEBRUARY 20 - ACADEMIC HOLIDAY

SESSION 5 (Mon, Feb 27) –

- **THE FREEDOM of (MIS)INFORMATION** - Understanding the (almost terrifying) volume of information available on the Internet; what the Internet knows about you; how much *misinformation* exists on the Internet.
- **PARTICIPATORY NEWS** – how the Internet is changing the way we receive and report news: the participatory nature of modern news, civilian journalism, and amateur news publishing.

reading:

- Mitchell, Robert "What the Web Knows About You" *Computerworld*, 2009.
- Levinson, Paul "New New Media" Chapter 4: "*Wikipedia.*"

SESSION 6 (Mon, Mar 5) –

- **HUMOR AND THE INTERNET** - What is “humor” and how do social sciences identify and define it?
- **DIGITAL ECONOMY and CURRENCY** – We will examine the economy of the Internet: the billion-dollar industry of "Goldfarming" in online games, to the underground economy of Bitcoins.

reading:

- Wallace, Benjamin "The Rise and Fall of Bitcoin" *Wired*, Dec 2011.
- Nakamoto, Satoshi "Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System" 2009.
- Levinson, Paul "New New Media" Chapter 3: "*YouTube.*"

SESSION 7 (Mon, Mar 12) –

• **BOTNETS, WORMS, and TROJAN HORSES: The Tools of Cyber Warfare -**
The world of viruses, botnet attacks, and Internet espionage. The case study of the cyber attacks on the nation of Estonia.

reading:

- Levinson, Paul "New New Media" Chapter 8: "*Twitter.*"
- Levinson, Paul "New New Media" Chapter 12: "*New New Media and the Election of 2008.*"

SESSION 8 (Mon, Mar 19) – MIDTERM EXAMINATION

MONDAY MARCH 26 -- SPRING RECESS

SESSION 9 (Mon, Apr 2) –

- **SHOCK SITES** - The phenomenon of Internet “shock sites” and the social dynamics surrounding these sites.
- **SEX and the INTERNET** - The world of pornography, predation, and sexual conduct on the Internet.

reading:

- Levinson, Paul "New New Media" Chapter 11: "*The Dark Side of New New Media.*"

SESSION 10 (Mon, Apr 9) –

- **PUBLISH THYSELF: from Online Diaries to Tumblelogging** - Early online diaries, blogging, self-publishing and the arts, the Internet is the new television, revenge blogs.
- **ART and the INTERNET** – How the power of publication is affecting the music industry, copyrights, and the world of art.

reading:

- Captain, Sean "Inside Occupy Wall Street's Secret Media HQ" *Wired*, Nov 2011.
- Levinson, Paul "New New Media" Chapter 2: "*Blogging.*"
- Schwatz, Mattathias "The Troubles of Korea's Influential Economic Pundit" *Wired*, Oct 2009.

SESSION 11 (Mon, Apr 16) –

- **VIDEO GAMES, TECHNOLOGY, and SOCIAL INTERACTION** - The history of video games and the social dynamics of video games.

reading:

- Levinson, Paul "New New Media" Chapter 9: "*Second Life.*"

SESSION 12 (Mon, Apr 23) –

REVIEW FOR FINAL EXAMINATION

FINAL EXAMINATION: Friday May 11, 11:30-2:30