



UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO
FACULTY OF ARTS
Department of Sociology
and Legal Studies

SOCIOLOGY OF DIGITAL MEDIA

SYLLABUS: SOC 701

Fall 2017

Tuesdays 2:30 – 5:20pm.

PAS 2085

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Instructor: Dr. Jennifer R. Whitson

Office: PAS 2025

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:00-2:00pm.

Mon-Friday: drop in if my door is open, or make an appointment via email.

Email: jwhitson@uwaterloo.ca

Outside of holidays and weekends, emails will be responded to within 36 hours.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

It's tempting to see new technologies, especially digital technologies, as drivers of political and social change. But technological artifacts also embody the values and assumptions -- and conflicts -- of the societies that produce them, in complicated and surprising ways.

Throughout the term we will explore the following questions together:

- How can we think about digital technologies in a smart and critical way?
- Do digital technologies "re-wire" society and drive social change, as is popularly claimed?
- How does technology reflect our social values and divisions?
- Are digital media inherently emancipatory? How has thinking on this topic changed over time?
- How might inequalities be inscribed and replicated in digital technologies? And what can we do about it?

In order to answer these questions (or at least deeply consider them), the course starts with an introduction to theories of technology and technological change, drawn primarily from the scholarly field of Science & Technology Studies. From these readings, we gain a nuanced sense of how social relations get "inside" technology, including the assumptions about society that may come to be embodied in technical artifacts and knowledge. So, for the first few weeks of the course, we are mainly just getting our feet wet with these theories of technology. During the rest of the term, we will examine how marginality and bias become designed-into the digital technologies we use every day. The goal of the course is to make visible how inequalities become inscribed into the material, cultural, economic and social fabric of the internet, based

upon race, class, gender, ability, age, and/or sexual orientation.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

At the end of this course, you'll be able to:

- Situate new digital technologies within in a larger historical trajectory.
- Develop a familiarity with key STS theorists and more contemporary digital media scholars.
- Assess how specific technologies are designed for specific bodies (e.g. gendered, able, adult etc.) and how these seemingly fair and “objective” technologies impact user’s agency differently.
- Discuss how social control and bias operate though material infrastructures (internet protocols, hardware, software, and platforms).
- Synthesize complex written arguments, summarize core ideas effectively, pull out key concepts, and teach these concepts to others.
- Identity areas for further study, and select appropriate methodologies for studying them.

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Each week, we’ll be reading approximately 3-4 articles or chapters, along with optional “lighter fare” such as weekly podcast, video-clip or articles (marked with an *). They are listed below, and can also be found on LEARN.
- This is a seminar course, predicated upon open discussion. Please come to class prepared to discuss the readings. If you have not done the readings and thus are not able to contribute meaningfully, you may be asked to leave the group.

EVALUATION STRUCTURE:

Deliverable	Date of Evaluation (if known)	Weighting
In-class Contributions	Weekly	10%
Class facilitation	Once per term	10%
Close Readings of articles	Twice per term (10% each)	20%
Implosion Project	TBA	20%
Term Paper	Dec 10 th .	40%
Total		100%

In-Class Contributions (10%)

This class is scheduled to meet every Tuesday, from 2:30 to 5:20 pm, over the fall semester. To succeed in this course, commitment and sustained engagement is required. This includes regular attendance and active participation in class activities. It is assumed you have done the readings

prior to class, taken notes / formulated questions on the assigned readings, and arrived prepared for group discussion. Given that this is a seminar, the bulk of the instruction is dialogical; the readings provide a point of entry for collectively debating and developing our theoretical knowledge on the sociology of digital media. Students will be assessed for contributions to in-class discussion. schedules accordingly. Some assignments require group facilitation and public speaking. While I understand not everyone is comfortable addressing an audience, the ability to speak in public is an important and transferable skill. Accordingly, you are encouraged to challenge yourself and treat the course as an opportunity to hone this practice. Grades will be awarded for raising relevant issues, asking pertinent questions, and generally contributing to the analysis of the topics covered on the following basis: Unsatisfactory (6), Satisfactory (7) Good (8), Very good (9), Excellent (10).

Class Facilitation (10%)

Over the course of the semester you are required to facilitate one seminar discussion. The goal of facilitation is not to lecture per se, but rather to stimulate dialogue amongst participants. Feel free to employ your preferred format for leading the discussion. The key to facilitation is NOT to prepare a lecture, but to keep our discussion on track. One common strategy is to provide a critical introduction and commentary of the week's readings, followed by an in-class discussion based on the questions you developed for the facilitation. You are not obliged, however, to follow this format. By way of suggestion, feel free to incorporate and draw from relevant newspaper articles, short video clips, powerpoint presentations, and other outside sources. The quality of your discussion questions, comprehension of the week's readings, and ability to link them to broader processes and debates will impact how much discussion and debate you can generate (and ultimately your grade for this assignment). You will be able to sign up for one group facilitation on the first day of class.

Close Readings of Articles (x2 = 20%) 1000-1500 words each

Over the duration of the course you are expected to produce two close reading summaries of any of the assigned readings (each close reading is worth 10%). Further guidelines on close readings are posted on LEARN. Your task is to briefly summarize the theoretical arguments that are being posed in the assigned reading(s), critique the work, while linking it to other readings / theories covered in the class. Some questions you might consider when preparing your commentaries are how convincing did you find the argument, and why? Was a new concept / theoretical intervention being proposed? What were the strengths and weaknesses of said theory? How do these readings inform your own research and scholarship? It will be helpful to consider the weeks' readings in relation to other material covered over the course. Keep in mind that these critical reading commentaries are not summaries. Rather, they are a critical reaction to the literature in question

Each close reading is to be uploaded in the designated class dropbox on LEARN at least 24 hours before the class convenes to discuss that reading (i.e. by 2:30pm the Monday before class). In effect, your close reading will be used by classmates as supplementary materials to help them process the class content. Thus, your close readings will be evaluated according to how helpful they are as a course resource. Grades will be assigned according your comprehension of the material, the quality of your critique, writing style, and ability to assess and synthesize the week’s reading with other material. If you chose, one of your close readings may be related your class facilitation. You will be able to sign up for your close readings on the first day of class.

Implosion Project (20%)

This assignment will be used to help you develop your term paper topic. It will be discussed in class on September 26th, and draws from the Dumit article.

Term Paper (40%)

You will write a 5000-6000 essay on any topic relevant to the course. The topic should ideally be generated from the Implosion Assignment. The paper involves an “argument” in the sense that you are going to make a point or observation and back it up with some scholarly evidence (drawing from both course material and outside sources). Papers should be argumentative and analytical rather than a review of the literature. You are encouraged to make an appointment with me to discuss your topic with me in advance, by the start of November.

Evaluation criteria:

- Does the paper have a clear and precisely stated purpose or question? Do you do a good job at establishing the importance of this line of research? Does it stay well within the parameters of this course?
- Do you do a good job of establishing your argument in a logical way?
- Do you do a good job of providing support for your argument, drawing from appropriate sources of information and situating your paper within existing literature?
- Do you do a good job of establishing clear comprehension of the concepts you are employing in the paper to forward your argument?
- Is the paper well-organized and well-written? Your ability to present your written work well – for this assignment or under any circumstance, really – makes a big difference in how well your ideas are received. Proof-read and take time in writing this paper.

TOPICS:

Assigned readings may change through the term. Please consult LEARN for the final listing.

Optional readings are marked with an asterisk *.

	Topic	Assigned Viewings/Listening	Notes
Sept 12	Designing in Inequality	No assigned readings. .	

Sept 19	A Brief Introduction to Science, Technology & Society Studies	<p>Latour, B. (1992). Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts. In W. E. Bijker & J. Law (Eds.), <i>Shaping Technology / Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change</i> (pp. 225–258). Cambridge MA: The MIT Press. Available as library e-book: https://proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/login?url=http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.01128</p> <p>Winner, L. (1980) Do Artifacts Have Politics? <i>Daedalus</i>, Vol. 109, No. 1, Modern Technology: Problem or Opportunity? (Winter,1980), pp. 121-136 http://www.jstor.org/stable/20024652</p> <p>David, P. A. (1985). Clio and the Economics of QWERTY. <i>The American Economic Review</i>, 75, 332–337.</p> <p>Wajcman, J. (2010). Feminist theories of technology. <i>Cambridge Journal of Economics</i>, 34(1), 143–152. https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/ben057</p> <p>* Mars, R., & Greenspan, S. (2012, April 4). The Arsenal of Exclusion [podcast]. Retrieved August 22, 2017, from http://99percentinvisible.org/episode/episode-51-the-arsenal-of-exclusion/</p>	Deadline for selecting close readings and class facilitation.
Sept 26	Methods for making the invisible more visible.	<p>Dumit, J. (2014). Writing the Implosion: Teaching the World One Thing at a Time. <i>Cultural Anthropology</i>, 29(2), 344–362. https://doi.org/10.14506/ca29.2.09</p> <p>Jackson, S. J. (2014). Rethinking Repair. In T. Gillespie, P. Boczkowski, & K. Foot (Eds.), <i>Media Technologies</i> (pp. 221–240). Cambridge MA: MIT Press. Available in library e-book: http://ieeexplore.ieee.org.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/xpl/bkabstractplus.jsp?bkn=6731153</p> <p>Star, S. L., & Strauss, A. (1999). Layers of Silence, Arenas of Voice: The Ecology of Visible and Invisible Work. <i>Computer. Supported Cooperative. Work</i>, 8(1–2), 9–30. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1008651105359</p> <p>* Brand, S. (1972). SPACEWAR: Fanatic Life and Symbolic Death Among the Computer Bums. Retrieved August 21, 2015, from http://www.wheels.org/spacewar/stone/rolling_stone.html</p>	
Oct 3		Work on Implosion Project	
Oct 10	No class today.		fall Break
Oct 17	The Infrastructure of the Internet	<p>Edwards, P. N. (1990). The Army and the Microworld: Computers and the Politics of Gender Identity. <i>Signs</i>, 16(1), 102–127. https://doi.org/10.2307/3174609</p> <p>Lessig, L. (2006). <i>Code: And Other Laws of Cyberspace, Version 2.0</i> (2nd Revised ed. edition). New York: Basic Books. Downloadable from: http://codev2.cc/</p>	

		<p>Galloway, A. R. (2004). <i>Protocol: How control exists after decentralization</i>. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press. Pp 29-53. Available online as library e-book: https://quod-lib-umich-edu.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls;idno=heb31968</p> <p>*Barlow, J. P. (2008, August 22). A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace. Retrieved from http://homes.eff.org/~barlow/Declaration-Final.html</p> <p>*Introduction to Internet Architecture and Institutions Ethan Zuckerman & Andrew McLaughlin https://cyber.harvard.edu/digitaldemocracy/internetarchitecture.html</p>	
Oct 24	Configuring the User	<p>Woolgar, S. (1991). Configuring the User: The Case of Usability Trials. In <i>A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination</i> (pp. 57–99). London: Routledge.</p> <p>Moser, I., & Law, J. (2003). “Making Voices”: New Media Technologies, Disabilities, and Articulation. In <i>Digital media revisited: Theoretical and conceptual innovation in digital domains</i> (pp. 491–520). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.</p> <p>Taylor, T. L. (2003). Intentional Bodies: Virtual Environments and the Designers who Shape Them. <i>International Journal of Engineering Education</i>, 19(1), 25–34. https://www.ijee.ie/articles/Vol19-1/IJEE1373.pdf</p> <p>* Mars, R. (2017, July 10). Repackaging the Pill [podcast]. Retrieved August 22, 2017, from http://99percentinvisible.org/episode/repackaging-the-pill/</p>	
Oct 31	Platform Studies	<p>Nagy, P., & Neff, G. (2015). Imagined Affordance: Reconstructing a Keyword for Communication Theory. <i>Social Media + Society</i>, 1(2), 2056305115603385. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115603385</p> <p>Stanfill, M. (2015). The interface as discourse: The production of norms through web design. <i>New Media & Society</i>, 17(7), 1059–1074. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814520873</p> <p>Gillespie, T. (2010). The Politics of ‘Platforms.’ <i>New Media & Society</i>, 12(3), 347–364. http://journals.sagepub.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/doi/pdf/10.1177/1461444809342738</p> <p>*Radiolab. (2015). <i>The Trust Engineers</i>. Retrieved from http://www.radiolab.org/story/trust-engineers/?utm_source=sharedUrl&utm_medium=metatag&utm_campaign=sharedUrl</p>	

Nov 7	Inside Entrepreneurship: Ethnographies and Interviews	<p>Neff, G., Wissinger, E., & Zukin, S. (2005). Entrepreneurial Labor among Cultural Producers: “Cool” Jobs in “Hot” Industries. <i>Social Semiotics</i>, 15(3), 307–334.</p> <p>Irani, L. (2015). Hackathons and the Making of Entrepreneurial Citizenship. <i>Science, Technology & Human Values</i>, 0162243915578486. https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243915578486</p> <p>Whitson, J. TBA. Draft manuscript.</p> <p>* Mundy, L. (2017, April). Why Is Silicon Valley So Awful to Women? <i>The Atlantic</i>. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/04/why-is-silicon-valley-so-awful-to-women/517788/</p> <p>*Vassallo, T., Levy, E., Madansky, M., Mickell, H., Porter, B., Leas, M., & Oberweis, J. (2017). The Elephant in the Valley. Retrieved August 22, 2017, from https://www.elephantinthevalley.com/</p>	
Nov 14	Labour and Exploitation	<p>Terranova, T. (2000). Free Labor: Producing culture for the digital economy. <i>Social Text</i>, 18(2), 33–58.</p> <p>Dyer-Witford, N. (2015). <i>Cyber-Proletariat</i>. Chicago IL: University Of Chicago Press. Chapter 1</p> <p>Roberts, Sarah T. (2016) “Commercial Content Moderation: Digital Laborers’ Dirty Work,” in Noble and Tynes, <i>Intersectional Internet</i>. Peter Lang. http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/commpub/12/</p> <p>Noble, Safiya Umoja. (2016). A Future for Intersectional Black Feminist Technology Studies. <i>Scholar & Feminist Online</i>. (13.3-14.1), 1-8. Online: http://sfonline.barnard.edu/traversing-technologies/safiya-umoja-noble-a-future-for-intersectional-black-feminist-technology-studies/</p> <p>*Ashy Dryden. (2016) The Ethics of open source: http://opentranscripts.org/transcript/ethics-open-source/ or this version (not a talk): https://www.ashedryden.com/blog/the-ethics-of-unpaid-labor-and-the-oss-community</p>	
Nov 21	Data and Categorization	<p>Bivens, R. (2017). The gender binary will not be deprogrammed: Ten years of coding gender on Facebook. <i>New Media & Society</i>, 19(6), 880–898. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815621527</p> <p>Tufekci, Z. (2014). Engineering the public: Big data, surveillance and computational politics. <i>First Monday</i>, 19(7). Retrieved from http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/4901</p> <p>Barocas, Solon. (2014). Data Mining and the Discourse on Discrimination. Proceedings of the Data Ethics Workshop,</p>	

		<p>Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining (KDD). Online: https://dataethics.github.io/proceedings/DataMiningandtheDiscourseOnDiscrimination.pdf</p> <p>*D'Ignazio, Catherine. (2016 June 3). A Primer on Non-Binary Gender and Big Data. MIT Centre for Civic Media. Online: https://civic.mit.edu/blog/kanarinka/a-primer-on-non-binary-gender-and-big-data</p> <p>* Hall, C. (2016, November 4). RimWorld's sexuality problem leads to 'witch hunt,' says developer. Retrieved November 7, 2016, from http://www.polygon.com/platform/amp/2016/11/4/13509622/rimworld-sexuality-problem-rock-paper-shotgun-tynan-sylvester</p>	
Nov 28	Accountability and Algorithmic Governance	<p>Nissenbaum, H. (1994). Computing and Accountability. <i>Communications of the ACM</i>, 37(1), 72–80. https://doi.org/10.1145/175222.175228</p> <p>Gillespie, T. (2014). The Relevance of Algorithms. In T. Gillespie, P. Boczkowski, & K. Foot (Eds.), <i>Media Technologies</i> (pp. 167–194). Cambridge MA: MIT Press. Available in library e-book: http://ieeexplore.ieee.org.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/xpl/bkabstractplus.jsp?bkn=6731153</p> <p>Mackenzie, A. (2015). The production of prediction: What does machine learning want? <i>European Journal of Cultural Studies</i>, 18(4–5), 429–445. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549415577384</p> <p>* Garcia, M. (2017). How to Keep Your AI From Turning Into a Racist Monster. Retrieved May 10, 2017, from https://www.wired.com/2017/02/keep-ai-turning-racist-monster/</p>	
Dec 5			Social event
Dec 10			Term paper Due

ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

- You may submit written assignments up to 5 days late without penalty; however, late assignments will not receive extensive written feedback.
- Written assignments submitted more than 5 days late will be docked 5%/day, up to a maximum of 25%. Assignments handed in more than 10 days past the due date will not

be accepted, and will score 0. In other words, plan ahead, develop a work schedule, and stick to it. Any request for an extension beyond 5 days must be submitted by email to me at least one week before the due date.

- All assignments are expected to follow the above-noted policy, unless you have a medical note, have received Special Accommodations from AccessAbility, or have asked for an extension from me.

Extensions will not be granted unless they have been approved at least 5 days before the due date.

- Failure to complete or hand in a written assignment earns a zero on that project.
- All assignments must be submitted electronically via the respective LEARN dropboxes.
They are due by 11:30 pm.
- Papers should employ proper APA format. This should include a cover sheet that indicates your name, student number, title, instructor's name, course number, and word count. Word count should not include your references. Papers should have page numbering, one inch margins, be double spaced, and use 12 point, Times New Roman (default) font.
- Make sure your bibliography on submitted work is perfect, including citing any images, sound clips, or visual elements incorporated in your work. If you are unfamiliar with APA citation style you should consult one of the many books in the library that will provide guidance on academic styles. Perdue also has online guides found here:
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>
- Be sure to back up your work (both locally and to network drives) and print out hard copies regularly as you write. That way, if your computer fails, you can always locate another computer at the University to finish your work.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity webpage](#) and the [Arts Academic Integrity webpage](#) for more information.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of

penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances](#), Section 4. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72 - Student Appeals](#).

ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

The [AccessAbility Services](#) office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT:

All of us need a support system. The faculty and staff in Arts encourage students to seek out mental health supports if they are needed.

On Campus

- Counselling Services: counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca / 519-888-4567 Ext 32655
- [MATES](#): one-to-one peer support program offered by Federation of Students (FEDS) and Counselling Services
- Health Services Emergency service: located across the creek from Student Life Centre

Off campus, 24/7

- [Good2Talk](#): Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454
- Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Phone: 519-749-433 ext. 6880
- [Here 24/7](#): Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247
- [OK2BME](#): set of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning teens in Waterloo. Phone: 519-884-0000 extension 213

Full details can be found online at the Faculty of ARTS [website](#)

Download [UWaterloo and regional mental health resources \(PDF\)](#)

Download the [WatSafe app](#) to your phone to quickly access mental health support information

TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

We acknowledge that we are living and working on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River.

For more information about the purpose of territorial acknowledgements, in your own presentations and public addresses please see the [CAUT Guide to Acknowledging Traditional Territory \(PDF\)](#).