Digital Cultures (JMC:6333:0001), Fall 2016
Mondays 10:30 a.m. – 1:15 p.m., E254 AJB

Instructor: Dr. Brian Ekdale, brian-ekdale@uiowa.edu, E324 AJB
Office Hours: Mon. 2-3 p.m., Tues. 2-4 p.m., or by appointment

DEO: Dr. David Ryfe, david-ryfe@uiowa.edu, E305B Adler Journalism Bldg.

Course Description: In Keywords, Raymond Williams describes culture as “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.” This was before social justice groups became identified by hashtags, Facebook became a primary news source, watches tracked when you were having sex, and a woman in a Chewbacca mask could “break the Internet.” This graduate seminar explores what has become of culture (or cultures) in the digital age. Cultural studies will be our primary orientation, but we will also engage with relevant scholarship from critical theorists and social scientists. Most of the readings were produced by American and European scholars writing about American and European life, but we will also explore digital cultures around the world, with case studies from Russia, Cameroon, Azerbaijan, and more. Weekly topics explore digital cultures and the public (e.g. participatory culture, exploitation of labor, memes, social movements), media industries (e.g. TV manufacturers, journalists), ethics (e.g. big data, privacy, surveillance), hardware (e.g. underwater cables, mobile phones), and software (e.g. algorithms, affordances). You will be expected to participate in weekly discussions, submit five reading response papers, work with a partner to produce an annotated bibliography and in-class presentation on a digital media technology, and submit a final research paper or proposal based on a topic of your choosing.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation (15%): The success of a graduate seminar depends on the participation of its students. Therefore, you will be graded on your attendance, preparedness, contribution, and cooperation.

- **Attendance** means showing up. Simply put, you should be in seminar. If you have a legitimate reason for arriving late, leaving early, or missing class, please discuss this with me before the start of class.
- **Preparedness** means completing all assigned readings prior to the start of class. While I encourage you to draw from your individual experiences and areas of expertise, our discussions should be centered on the theories and concepts explored in the weekly readings.
- **Contribution** means sharing your ideas. Each of you offers a unique perspective and understanding; therefore, it is important that you share your thoughts, opinions, and reactions with each other.
- **Cooperation** means working well with others. A seminar should be a place where students feel comfortable sharing their views, even when those views are uncommon or unpopular. At the same time, we must always be aware of how our words and actions affect those around us. Intolerance, antagonism, and demagoguery have no place in the healthy exchange of ideas.

Reading Responses (10%): To get you thinking critically about the assigned readings, you must turn in a total of five reading response papers during the course of the semester. These papers should be brief (about 300-500 words). You should use these responses to discuss connections between all of the required readings for the week. What are the main arguments? Are they persuasive? What are the areas of commonality and difference across the readings? Do they relate to other readings or ideas encountered earlier in the semester? Are you left with any unanswered questions? These responses should demonstrate that you understand the readings, you’ve grappled with their arguments, and you are able to clearly communicate your thoughts. Upload your reading responses to ICON at least an hour before the start of class.

- Please note that readings listed in the course schedule are broken up into two sections: required and supplemental. Seminar discussions and reading response papers will focus on the required readings.
for each week. I’ve provided a list of supplemental readings under each topic as a resource for those of you interested in exploring the topic further.

Technology Research Presentation (25%): It is hard to keep up with the latest scholarship in digital media. Therefore, the technology research presentations provide an opportunity for us to encounter recent research on digital technologies and cultural phenomena. For this assignment, you will work in partners to find, review, and share research about a digital media technology (e.g. Facebook, Tinder, video games, etc.). Specifically, you and your partner will do the following:

- **Review recent scholarship** on a digital media technology. You should collect research published in books and scholarly journals, submitted as theses or dissertations, and/or presented at academic conferences. Although you may include one or two “seminal” studies that are several years old, you should focus on research published/submitted/presented within the last 3 years. Below are several media studies journals and conferences that invite scholarship on digital culture. This list is intended to get you started on your literature search and is not exhaustive.
  - **Journals**: New Media & Society; Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication; Information, Communication & Society; First Monday; Television & New Media; Critical Studies in Media Communication; The Information Society; Digital Journalism; Social Media + Society
  - **Conferences**: Association for Internet Researchers; International Communication Association; Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication; National Communication Association; Society for Cinema and Media Studies
- **Produce an annotated bibliography** of 10-12 studies reviewed above. Organize your bibliography and the selected research around 2-3 coherent themes (e.g. Facebook and Privacy, Facebook and Romance, Facebook and Racial Justice). For each entry, you should summarize the theoretical approach, the methods, the major findings, and how the study relates to other entries in your bibliography. Each annotation should be approximately 250 words long. Annotations must reflect your original work (i.e. do not simply copy the official abstract). You may include direct quotations from the text, but direct quotations must be brief and cited properly. Feel free to make connections to course readings and concepts we’ve discussed earlier in the semester. After you submit your annotated bibliography, I will post a copy to the course ICON. Think of your annotated bibliography as a shared resource for your fellow classmates.
- **Share the findings of your literature review** in a 10-15 minute in-class presentation. When presenting, you should summarize the main themes of the scholarship you reviewed. Do not attempt to discuss each and every reading in depth. Instead, highlight a few exemplary studies while speaking more broadly about areas of overlap, agreement, and disagreement across the research you’ve reviewed.
- **Assign one article or book chapter** for your classmates to read in advance of your presentation day. Following your presentation, you will lead a discussion about your technology and assigned reading. You must distribute your reading by noon on the Friday before your presentation day. I will leave an hour at the end of seminar for the technology research presentation and ensuing discussion.

Research Project (50%): Each of you will develop an original research project that explores a topic of your own choosing. This scholarship should demonstrate your ability to apply digital media theories and concepts to your individual research agenda. For this project, you have two options:

1. **Produce a “conference ready” research paper** that examines media content. This paper should include an introduction; a review of relevant literature; a description of your research puzzle or research question(s); an explanation of your methodology; a findings/analysis section; and a discussion/conclusion section that summarizes the significance of this research. This paper should be approximately 20-pages long (double-spaced, 12pt font, 1-inch margins).
2. **Propose a “field ready” research study** that involves human subjects. This proposal should include an introduction, a literature review, and a description of your research question(s) and methodology. This proposal should be approximately 10-pages long (double-spaced, 12pt font, 1-inch margins).
lieu of a findings/analysis/discussion section, you must prepare a HawkIRB application for human subjects review, including subject recruitment documentation (e.g. recruitment email, etc.) and data collection instruments (e.g. interview protocols, surveys, etc.). You are not required to submit your IRB protocol for review, but you must prepare and turn in to me all of the required documentation. In addition to submitting your research project at the end of the semester, you must also:

- Submit a 500- to 750-word research proposal, in which you describe your proposed topic, justify its significant, and state if you plan to submit a full paper or a project proposal with an IRB application. In your proposal, you will want to briefly review relevant literature, present a research puzzle or pose one or more research questions, and propose methods for solving this puzzle or answering these questions. The proposal is due Monday, October 3rd.
- Share your research project with your peers in a formal, in-class presentation on December 5 (our final meeting time). This 10- to 12-minute presentation should approximate a presentation at an academic conference. I will cut off any presentation longer than 12 minutes, so please ensure that you practice in advance. We will have a brief Q&A session following each presentation.

Grading Scale:

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**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Week 1 (8/22) – Introductions**

*Required Reading*


*Supplemental Reading*


**Week 2 (8/29) – Histories/Pre-Histories**

*Required Readings*

**Supplemental Readings**

  http://www.juliandibbell.com/articles/a-rape-in-cyberspace/

**Week 3 (9/5) – LABOR DAY (no seminar)**

**Week 4 (9/12) – Participation and Exploitation**

**Required Readings**


**Supplemental Readings**


**Week 5 (9/19) – Affordances**

**Required Readings**


**Supplemental Readings**

**Week 6 (9/26) – Algorithms**

**Required Readings**


**Supplemental Readings**


**Week 7 (10/3) – Infrastructure**

**Research Proposal Due**

**Required Readings**


**Supplemental Readings**


**Week 8 (10/10) – When Data Are Big**

**Required Readings**


**Supplemental Readings**


**Week 9 (10/17) – Privacy and Ethics**

**Technology Research Presentation #1**

**Required Readings**


**Supplemental Readings**


• Rudder, C. (2014). *Dataclysm: Who we are (when we think no one's looking)*. New York: Random House Incorporated.


**Week 10 (10/24) – Memes and Visual Culture**

**Technology Research Presentation #2**

**Required Readings**


**Supplemental Readings**

• Hochman, N., & Manovich, L. (2013). Zooming into an Instagram City: Reading the local through social media. *First Monday, 18*(7).
• Miltner, K. M. (2014). “There’s no place for lulz on LOLCats”: The role of genre, gender, and group identity in the interpretation and enjoyment of an Internet meme. *First Monday, 19*(8).
• Phillips, W. (2015). *This is why we can’t have nice things: Mapping the relationship between online trolling and mainstream culture.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

**Week 11 (10/31) – Mediawork and Digital Labor**

**Technology Research Presentation #3**

**Required Readings**

• Mayer, V. (2011). *Below the line: Producers and production studies in the new television economy.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press. (pp. 31-65; “Producers as Creatives: Creativity in Television Set Production”)

**Supplemental Readings**

Week 12 (11/7) – Political/Civic Culture

Technology Research Presentation #4

Required Readings

Supplemental Readings

Week 13 (11/14) – Journalism

Required Readings

Supplemental Readings
THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 14 (11/28) – Research Project Work

Presentation from Human Subjects Board about IRB protocols

Individual meetings with Brian to discuss student research projects

Week 15 (12/5) – Research Presentations

Student Research Project Presentations

Finals Week

Research project due during assigned final exam period (day/time TBA)

COURSE POLICIES

Academic Misconduct: Plagiarism and academic misconduct occurs when a student presents ideas and/or words that are not her own. It is academic fraud. Clear evidence of academic misconduct will result in a failing grade for the assignment and possibly the course. Per college policy, I am required to report academic misconduct to the departmental DEO.

According to the University of Iowa Academic Policies, academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to:

- Presenting ideas from sources that you do not credit
- Using direct quotations without quotation marks and/or without credit to the source
- Paraphrasing information and ideas from sources without credit to the source
- Failing to provide adequate citations for material obtained through electronic research
- Downloading and submitting work from electronic databases without citation
- Submitting material written by the student for a previous course at this or any other institution
- Submitting material written by someone else as one’s own, including purchased papers

Students are responsible for understanding this policy. If you have questions, please ask for clarification.

Administrative Home: The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook.

Electronic Communication: University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences (Operations Manual, III.15.2, k.11).
**Accommodations for Disabilities:** A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet privately with the course instructor to make particular arrangements. See [www.uiowa.edu/~sds/](http://www.uiowa.edu/~sds/) for more information.

**CLAS Final Examination Policies:** The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. **No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes.** All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's website and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

**Making a Suggestion or a Complaint:** Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

**Understanding Sexual Harassment:** Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

**Reacting Safely to Severe Weather:** In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Department of Public Safety website.