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 source of both news and misinformation, watches tracked you having sex, and international diplomacy was negotiated over Twitter.

This graduate seminar explores what has become of culture (or cultures) in the digital age. Cultural studies will be our primary orientation, but we also will engage with relevant scholarship from critical theorists and social scientists as well as contemporary news coverage. We will look at some seminal pieces on digital and social media as well as more recent efforts to understand the relationship between technology and society. Although many of our readings were produced by American and European scholars writing about American and European life, I have sought to include scholarship about digital media in a variety of social, cultural, and national contexts. Digital media are global; our understanding of digital cultures should be as well.

In this seminar, you are expected to participate in weekly discussions, submit reading response briefs, work with a partner to create an annotated bibliography and in-class presentation on a digital media technology, and submit a research paper or proposal based on a topic of your choosing.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Participation (20%)**: The success of any 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 based on your beliefs, upbringing, and areas of expertise. 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 everyone feels comfortable sharing their views, even if those views are uncommon or unpopular. At the same time, you must always be aware of how your words and actions affect those around you. Intolerance, antagonism, and demagoguery have no place in the healthy exchange of ideas.
Reading Response Briefs (10%): To help spark in-class discussion, each week you will write a response brief to the required readings. In your response, I want you to (1) identify the reading that resonated with you the most (i.e., the argument was most provocative, the evidence was most persuasive, the writing was most compelling, etc.) and briefly state what you appreciated about the reading and (2) identify the reading that resonated with you the least (i.e., the argument was least provocative, the evidence was least persuasive, the writing was least compelling, etc.) and briefly state what you didn’t appreciate about the reading. These briefs should demonstrate that you understand the readings, you’ve grappled with their arguments, and you are able to clearly communicate your ideas. I am less interested in the quality of your prose than the thoughtfulness of your critiques. Therefore, your response to each article may take the form of a paragraph or a series of bullet points. Upload your response briefs 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 briefs 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 (20%): It is challenging 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 pairs to find, review, and share research about a digital media technology (e.g. Twitch, Facebook, Tinder, Instagram, 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. Look, in particular, for articles that adopt a social constructivist approach and/or use qualitative methods. Below are several media studies journals and conferences that feature scholarship on digital culture. This list is intended to get you started on your literature search and is by no means exhaustive.
  - **Journals:** New Media & Society; Information, Communication & Society; Media, Culture & Society; First Monday; Television & New Media; Critical Studies in Media Communication; International Journal of Communication; Digital Journalism; Social Media + Society
  - **Conferences:** International Communication Association; Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication; Association for Internet Researchers (AoIR); 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 approach, methods, major arguments/findings, and how the study relates to other entries in your bibliography. You also should include a brief critique that addresses any flaws, oversights, or questionable assumptions. 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 include the relevant page number. 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 course 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 puzzle/question(s) and methodology. This proposal should be approximately 10-pages long (double-spaced, 12pt font, 1-inch margins). In 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 (including relevant recruitment materials and interview protocols).

In addition to submitting your research project at the end of the semester, you must also:

• Submit a 500- to 750-word research proposal, describing your proposed topic, justifying its significant, and stating if you plan to submit a full paper or a project proposal. 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, February 25th.

• Share your research project with your peers in a formal, in-class presentation on Monday, April 29th. 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

Note: Required Readings are listed in a suggested reading order. Supplemental Readings are listed alphabetically.

Week 1 (1/14) – Introductions

Required Reading

Supplemental Reading

Week 2 (1/21) – MLK DAY (no seminar)

Week 3 (1/28) – Histories

Required Readings

Supplemental Readings

**Week 4 (2/4) – Participation and Exploitation**

**Required Readings**

• Jenkins, H. Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable media: creating value and meaning in a networked culture*. New York: NYU Press. (pp. 47–84; “Where Web 2.0 Went Wrong”)

**Supplemental Readings**


**Week 5 (2/11) – Affordances**

*Required Readings*


*Supplemental Readings*

• Bucher, T., & Helmond, A. (2017). The affordances of social media platforms. In J. Burgess, A. Marwick, & T. Poell (Eds.), The SAGE Handbook of Social Media (pp. 53-68), Washington DC: Sage.


**Week 6 (2/18) – Algorithms**

**Required Readings**


**Supplemental Readings**


• Kitchin, R. (2016). Thinking critically about and researching algorithms. *Information, Communication & Society, Online First.*

**Week 7 (2/25) – Infrastructures and Platforms**

**Research Proposal Due**

**Required Readings**


**Supplemental Readings**


**Week 8 (3/4) – Big Data**

**Required Readings**

**Supplemental Readings**

Week 9 (3/11) – Privacy and Surveillance

Tech Presentation #1

Required Readings

Supplemental Readings
• Marwick, A. E., & boyd, d. (2014). Networked privacy: How teenagers negotiate context


**SPRING BREAK**

**Week 10 (3/25) – Digital Work**

**Tech Presentation #2**

**Required Readings**

- Duffy, B.E. (2017). (Not) getting paid to do what you love: Gender, social media, and aspirational work. New Haven: Yale University Press. (pp. 45-97, “(Not) Just for the Fun of It: The Labor of Social Media Production”)

**Supplemental Readings**


**Week 11 (4/1) – Media Industries**

**Tech Presentation #3**

*Required Readings*


*Supplemental Readings*

Week 12 (4/8) – Journalism

Tech Presentation #4

Required Readings

- Bauerlein, M., & Jeffery, C. (2018, December 4). It’s the end of news as we know it (and Facebook is feeling fine). *Mother Jones.*

Supplemental Readings


**Week 13 (4/15) – News & Information**

**Tech Presentation #5**

**Required Readings**

• Phillips, W. (2018). The oxygen of amplification: Better practices for reporting on extremists, antagonists, and manipulators online. (“Executive Summary” and “Part 1: In Their Own Words”)

**Supplemental Readings**


**Week 14 (4/22) – Research Project Work**

Presentation from Human Subjects Board about IRB protocols
Individual meetings with Brian to discuss student research projects

**Week 15 (4/29) – 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](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 web site 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](http://www.uiowa.edu/safety).