The University of Western Ontario
Department of Sociology
Sociology SOC 3301G
The Internet and Society
Winter 2015

Classes
Time: Mondays 1:30-4:30 pm
Location: SSC 3014

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Office Hours: Mondays 12:30-1:30 pm.

1. Course Description
The Internet is becoming ubiquitous in many parts of the world connecting individuals near and far. Digital technologies (Facebook, Twitter, mobile phones) have become normalized and are an integral part of many people’s everyday lives. This course has three primary objectives: 1) To discuss the relevance of studying the intersection of the digital and social. 2) To become familiar with different theoretical approaches to examining the effects of the Internet on society. 3) To learn about contemporary uses of the Internet. We will investigate various platforms and the social implications these have had for our understanding of social phenomena, such as friendship, work, the public sphere, and privacy. Our aim is to not only have a good understanding of the theories of Internet, but also of the methodological challenges inherent in studies of the sociodigital.

2. Course Objectives
Students completing this course will:
1. Become familiar with different theoretical approaches to examining the effects of the Internet on society.
2. Learn about different methodological approaches to examining the effects of the Internet on society.
3. Learn to critically examine the role of the Internet in society.
3. Prerequisites
Enrollment in third or fourth year of Sociology or Criminology Honors Specialization or Honors Double Major.

“Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.”

4. Course Website and Other Resources
Required Textbook:
Course material is on the OWL system.

The Web site for Registrarial Services is http://www4.registrar.uwo.ca.

5. Course Requirements and Grading

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Proportion of Test Grade</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Throughout</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Facilitation</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term</td>
<td>February 9</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>March 30</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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Students are expected to do the weekly readings. The weekly readings will be the basis for class discussions and the assignments.

6. A few words about the assignments and deadlines
I will not give extensions except under special circumstances. 5% will be deducted per day for late assignments. Please see the Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness at https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm. If you cannot meet the deadline, notify the instructor as soon as possible, preferably before the scheduled date and present adequate documentation.

Medical documentation will be required to reschedule your seminar facilitation, the mid-term test, and assignment deadline. Please send an email to your professor as soon as possible to make arrangements and submit documentation to the appropriate Faculty Dean’s office (Social Science). No electronic devices are allowed during the mid-term test or other aids. Be sure to keep a copy of all work submitted in fulfilment of this class.

Policy Regarding Missed Exams
Make-up exams will be granted with approved documentation only. If you have a conflict with one of the exam dates, it is your responsibility to discuss it with the Academic Counseling office at least one week before the regularly scheduled exam and provide documentation of the conflict. If approved, you will be allowed to schedule a make-up exam. If you miss an exam due to illness or for any other unforeseen reason, you must
provide documentation of the reason for missing the exam to your Academic Counselor within 48 hours of the regularly scheduled exam. If your Academic Counselor agrees that your reason for missing the exam is legitimate and is supported by your medical doctor’s documentation, you will be allowed to write a makeup exam.

6.1 Participation
The course will use a seminar format (as this is a 3000 level course) where we will engage each other’s ideas and opinions to negotiate our learning. Students are requested to come prepared to class, to participate actively in the discussions, and to allow others space to express their views. Your class participation grade will reflect the frequency and quality of contributions. Students who do not participate in class discussions can expect a very low grade for participation. Your participation will be based on attendance and active engagement in class and online discussions. Attendance is expected to all classes, but alone is not sufficient to obtain good marks in participation.

COURSE ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS: With the exception of legitimate medical/personal excuses (documentation required to be submitted) students are expected to attend at least 80% of the class meetings for this course. A passing grade in the course cannot be obtained without meeting this attendance requirement

6.2 Group Seminar Facilitation
Students are expected to prepare a 45 minute seminar facilitation on the various topics covered in the course. The seminar facilitations will be based on the topic covered in class during that week. The first day of class a list with the weekly topics will be distributed and students can choose what papers they would like to discuss. Please choose 1 paper on which your presentation will be based. If in doubt about the appropriateness of your paper, please email the paper to your professor for approval before your seminar facilitation. The main objective in your facilitation will be to ensure that the class gains a firm and critical grasp of the concepts in the readings. You are free to facilitate the discussion in any way you choose (e.g. through the use of exercises, examples, cases, etc.). You can, for example, identify 2-3 general questions based on the reading and use these questions to guide discussion on the readings of the week. You should also try to identify links between the week’s readings and material covered earlier in the course. The facilitation will be graded based on comprehensive coverage of subject matter, pertinent links with other assigned readings, critique and questions raised, and handling of discussion.

6.3 Mid-Term
Because this is a ‘G’ course, the mid-term test will consist of 4 short-answer questions and 1 essay question (choose one of two options). The mid-term test will take 2 hours and there will be no class on that day.

6.4 Final Paper
This is a comprehensive research paper. The research paper should be a critical and analytical exploration of a topic discussed in class or related to Internet and Society. The paper should clearly state what your topic is and what key lines of argument you are putting forward. Your paper should include sources discussed in class as well as primary sources you have identified from the library. In this paper, you will be assessed for the ability to bring independent, critical thinking to bear on the topic. Specify clearly what
you are arguing for and against, as this will be key for the structure of your essay. A
detailed handout on the assignment will be given in class.

7. Plagiarism
The statement: “Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read
the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic
Offence, at the following Web site:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.”
In accordance with policy at UWO:
“Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an
idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using
quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or
citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the
Western Academic Calendar).”
“All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the
commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the
detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as
source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of
papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing
agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (http://www.turnitin.com ).”

8. Course Schedule
It is your responsibility to consult the course schedule in order to keep up with the course
readings and ensure you do not miss the deadlines for the assignments. The course
schedule outlines the topics to be discussed each week, the readings corresponding to the
lectures, and deadlines for the assignments. Assigned readings should be completed
before attending the class. Seminar readings are suggested, but not required.

Class Schedule

I. INTRODUCTION TO INTERNET RESEARCH

1

Jan. 5 Introduction to the Course: Overview of course material
and assignments. Course organization and assignment of seminars
and readings.

Introductory Lecture: The Internet as a changing technology and
its impact on society.

Assigned Reading: Chapter 1 of Technology and Society.

*Assignment of Class Facilitation Topics and Groups.

2

Jan. 12 Lecture: The Geography of the Internet and
Technology: Does distance still matter?

Assigned Reading: Chapters 3-4 of Technology and Society.
Seminar: Does distance matter and how? Understanding the complexities of virtual and real space and their interrelation.

Readings for Seminar:


II. THE INTERNET, ITS USES AND LABOUR

3

Jan. 19 Uses and Gratifications of the Internet and Technology

Assigned Reading: Chapter 5 of *Technology and Society*.

Seminar: What motivates individuals to use the Internet? What gratifications do they obtain?

Readings for Seminar:


4

Jan. 26 Digital Work: How does work take place in digital networks? What is the meaning of UGC?

Assigned Reading: Chapter 6 of *Technology and Society*.

Seminar: Labour in a Digital Era. How does the digital affect labour?

Readings for Seminar:


5

Feb. 2 Gender and the Internet: How is the Internet gendered? Why do men and women use the Internet differently?

Seminar: How do women and men compare in their use of the Internet? Is there a gender bias?
Readings for Seminar:


⇒ Mid-Term Review

Feb. 9 Mid-Term Exam

Feb. 16 Reading Week—No Class.

III. THE INTERNET AND SOCIABILITY

Feb. 23 Investigating the Digital Divide: The role of race, SES, and commerce online. [Guest Lecture by Michael Haight]

Assigned Reading: Chapter 7 of Technology and Society.

Seminar: Issues affecting the digital divide: across and within countries.

Readings for Seminar:


Assignment of Final Paper Topics.

March 2 Social Capital and the Internet: How has the Internet affected social capital? Has social capital increased or decreased?

Assigned Reading: Chapter 8 of Technology and Society.

Seminar: Social capital and the net.

Readings for Seminar:


March 9 The Internet as a Form of Embodiment: Research beyond text: voice, body, gestures, practices, culture…
Seminar: The body in virtual space: Engagement and trust

Readings for Seminar:


10 March 16  Blogs/Twitter and Political Movements

Assigned Reading: Chapter 8 of *Technology and Society.*

Seminar: The Arab Spring.

Readings for Seminar:


11 March 23  The Internet as a Form of Sociability: What is the nature of online friendship? Can we build trusting relationships online?

Assigned Reading: Chapter 9 of *Technology and Society.*

Seminar: Relationships on the Web.

Readings for Seminar:


March 30 Privacy Online: How do we protect our privacy on the Internet? What kinds of privacy exist?

Assigned Reading: Chapter 10 of Technology and Society.

Seminar: Privacy and Identity Play.

Readings for Seminar:

Final Papers Due in Class.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

April 6: Review Class.
What did we cover in class?
Are the effects of the Internet positive or negative?

Final Papers Graded Returned to Students.
Textbooks of Interest


Additional Readings:


