Spring 2019

HSS 408-474: Digital Sociology

Theresa Hunt

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STS 408: Digital Sociology  
Spring 2019

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M 10-11; W & Th by appt

Course Introduction: How do we experience the digital world? How are those experiences different from the analog world? The physical or empirical world? Which is the “real” world? How does our experience with the digital change based on who we are and where we live? This course introduces concepts and methods drawn from sociology to analyze humans and/in digital environments. While this obviously includes a close look at social media, we will also investigate privacy, identity, work, law and justice to understand how major systems both respond to and develop out of changes in digital technologies.

Course Delivery: This course is conducted primarily online, with optional face-to-face meetings (dates TBD) scheduled a few times throughout the semster. The course follows a pattern each month, starting in February: the first two weeks, students are asked to read a series of articles, watch videos and/or review websites at their own pace. Suggestions for what to finish and when are provided. The third week, students are asked to be active participants in an online forum that involves both instructor- and student-led discussions. These forums close Sunday at midnight the week after they have opened. The fourth week, students are asked to complete a multiple choice and short answer exam. Exams are posted on Monday, and are due Friday by midnight. The cycle starts again with the first week of the new month and repeats throughout the course.

Course Projects: This course offers students the opportunity to grow in bibliographic research skills, critical thinking skills, rhetoric and argumentation, and alternative research methodology. Final projects may include conventional formats (ie “term papers”), but also may include interactive projects involving social media and crowd-sourced information repositories. Projects will be introduced and described late in January; our first (optional) face-to-face meeting will cover the project options in more depth.
Course Learning Objectives

- Demonstrate an understanding of sociological theories that emerge through course notes/instruction and course readings.
- Demonstrate an understanding of how theoretical and methodological tools are used to analyze digital environments and social change.
- Demonstrate eventual proficiency with analysis of non-fiction and research texts.
- Demonstrate improvement with this analysis over the course of the semester by responding effectively to instructor feedback and directives.
- Demonstrate proficiency with information literacy by producing a multi-layered, bibliographic research project, including formal and informal web-based research discussions and a final project.
- Demonstrate consistent engagement with classmates and the professor through discussion forum and other posting activities.
- Demonstrate “online” leadership and initiative capabilities by facilitating conversations within the discussion forum, responding effectively to classmates in a digital environment and directing attention to texts/coursework/research in the online forum.

Final Grade assessment formula:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Forums</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Project (including pre-writing and drafting exercises)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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Course Schedule

*subject to change as needed*

January Schedule: INTRODUCING CONCEPTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Read: 1/22-1/27</th>
<th>Participate: 1/28-2/1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lupton, “Life is Digital”</td>
<td>Introductory forum; Instructions TBA</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIT’s online resource Basic Sociological Concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frontline, “The Facebook Dilemma” (Video)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zunger, “Computer Science Faces Ethics Crisis: The Cambridge Analytica Scandal Proves it”</td>
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### February/Module 1: DIGITAL SELF / DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Read: 2/1-2/17</th>
<th>Participate: 2/18-2/24</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lupton,</strong> “Theorizing Digital Society”</td>
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<td><strong>Turkle,</strong> “Connected, But Alone?” (video)</td>
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<td><strong>Carr,</strong> “Is Google Making Us Stupid?”</td>
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<td><strong>Oppenheimer,</strong> “Technology is Not Driving Us Apart After All”</td>
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<td><strong>Steele,</strong> “The Real Reason Voice Assistants are Female (And Why That Matters)”</td>
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<td><strong>Larson,</strong> “How Machines Learn to Be Racist” (Interactive Tool)</td>
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Discussion Forum: 1st post no later than Thursday, 2/21; 2nd & 3rd posts no later than midnight on Sunday, 2/24. Remember:
- Focus on course content to demonstrate engagement with reading!
- Earlier/sustained engagement in discussion forums **earns higher grades** for the assignment

### EXAM WEEK: FEBRUARY 25-MARCH 1. All exams must be completed by Friday, March 1 at midnight

### March/Module 2: AUDIENCE, DATA, AND SURVEILLANCE

*note shortened/different pattern of schedule & requirements due to spring break*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Read: 3/1-3/10</th>
<th>Participate: 3/11-3/17</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lupton,</strong> “The Quantified Self”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Angwin,</strong> Julia et al. 2016. “What Facebook Knows About You” (Interactive Tool)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Angwin et al,</strong> “Machine Bias”</td>
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<td><strong>Carney,</strong> “Leave No Dark Corner”</td>
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Discussion Forum: 1st post no later than Wednesday, 3/13; 2nd post no later than midnight on Sunday, 3/17. Remember:
- Focus on course content to demonstrate engagement with reading!
- Earlier/sustained engagement in discussion forums **earns higher grades** for the assignment

### EXAM WEEK: MARCH 25-MARCH 31. All exams must be completed by Friday, March 31 at midnight

### APRIL/Module 3: LABOR AND WORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Read: 4/1-4/14</th>
<th>Participate: 4/15-21</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marr,</strong> “The Sharing Economy”</td>
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<td><strong>Heller,</strong> “Is the Gig Economy Working?”</td>
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<td><strong>West,</strong> “Will Robots and AI Take Your Job?”</td>
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<td><strong>Klein,</strong> “How to Rethink Work in an Era of AI”</td>
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<td><strong>Dynarski,</strong> “Online Schooling: Who is Harmed and Who is Helped?”</td>
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<td><strong>Cottom,</strong> “The Coded Language of For-Profit Colleges”</td>
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Discussion Forum: 1st post no later than Wednesday, 3/13; 2nd post no later than midnight on Sunday, 3/17. Remember:
- Focus on course content to demonstrate engagement with reading!
- Earlier/sustained engagement in discussion forums **earns higher grades** for the assignment

### EXAM WEEK: APRIL 22-APRIL 28. All exams must be completed by Friday, April 28 at midnight
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPATE</th>
<th>SUBMIT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make <strong>one post</strong> about your project in the final project discussion forum no later than <strong>Midnight on 5/1</strong>. (Instructions &amp; details TBD).</td>
<td><strong>Final Projects Due Friday, May 10</strong> by Midnight</td>
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**Final Projects Due Friday, May 10** by Midnight