New Jersey Institute of Technology

Digital Commons @ NJIT

Spring 2021

HSS 408-452: Digital Sociology

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HSS 408: Digital Sociology

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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 WebEx meetings (dates TBD) scheduled a few times throughout the semster. The course follows a 3-week pattern most months, starting in September: the first two weeks, students 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. A midterm exam consisting of multiple choice and short-answer questions will be administered once this semester. The exam opens on Monday morning, is due Sunday by midnight. See the course schedule below for specific dates.

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 Texts: You must purchase and watch an episode of the series *Black Mirror* called "Nosedive". It's [available on iTunes](#) for $2.99. It is included in Netflix subscriptions (season 3, episode 1). All other texts have been made available on Canvas, and are organized by date. Should you need to access an article from *The New York Times*, [you can create an account through Van Houten Library](#).

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.

Other course policies:

Late assignments: **Discussion forum posting** happens in real-time and thus cannot be made up. Students receiving the highest grades for discussion forum work **post consistently through the module**, and follow directions regarding the posts (see notes above on discussion forum exercises). Making all required posts at once and at the end of the module suggests poor planning and neglect of the assignment, and does not allow for other students (or the instructor) to interact with your ideas.

Research projects submitted late will lose 1 grade point per day (ie from a B to a C). Work submitted 48 hours after the stated deadline **will receive NO credit**. Receipt of <u>final</u> papers is verified through TurnItIn or instructor email. If you do not receive a return receipt within four hours of sending the final paper, **it is your responsibility** to follow up and ensure your paper has been received.

Plagiarism, presenting someone else's words, thoughts, or ideas (in whole or in part) as your own, is cheating and will not be tolerated. The NJIT Honor Code will be upheld, and any violations will be brought to the immediate attention of the Dean of Students. NJIT enforces strict academic integrity policies, and any plagiarized material will result in a failing grade for the assignment and possibly for the course. Academic probation and possible suspension or

expulsion from the university may also be pursued by NJIT administration in cases of plagiarism. Three very important things to remember:

1) Various plagiarism-detection tools are employed in this course.
2) There have been numerous cases of students attempting to submit papers written by students enrolled in earlier versions of this class. These students have received failing grades and academic probation – and the students supplying the papers have also been punished.
3) If you're struggling with the final project or concerned about these policies, I'm happy to work with you! Plagiarism is not worth the risk to your future.

Final Grade Scale:

A:89.6-100	B+: 87.6-89.5	B: 80-87.5	C+:77.6-79.5	C: 70-77.5	D: 60-69.5	F: 0-59.5

Final Grade assessment formula:

Discussion Forums	35%
Collaborative (VoiceThread, NowComment) Activities	25%
Exam	10%
Research Project (including pre-writing and drafting exercises)	30%

Course Schedule - *subject to change as needed*

INTRODUCTORY SESSION

What is Digital Sociology?

Read, Watch, & Listen: 1/19-1/24	Participate: 1/22-1/31

PBS Newshour: "The Quantified Self: Data Gone Wild?"
 Lupton, "Life is Digital"
 Introductory Case Studies
     -   "One Effect of the Instagrammed Insurrection: FOMO"(Schiller/Wood, *Marketplace*)
     -   "Americans' Perceptions of Privacy and Surveillance in the Covid-19 Pandemic" (Zhang/Kreps et al, *PLOS ONE*)
	Introductory forum:
	 1. Intro Post (complete no later than 1/22 to verify presence in course)
	 2. Post reading-reaction commentary
	 3. 1-source share-out with commentary
	 4. **Optional WebEx Meet: 1/26 at 4 PM**

February/Module 1: Surveillance, Data, and Algorithms

Read & Comment: 2/1-2/21	Participate: 2/22-2/28
Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression* (excerpt) **Lupton,** "The Quantified Self" **Dewey,** "Everyone You Know Will Be Able to Rate You" **Humphreys**, "The Qualified Self" (video) **Carney,** "Leave No Dark Corner" VoiceThread activity due by 2/14 **Optional WebEx Meet: 2/9 at 11 AM**	Discussion Forum Week Remember: Focus on course content to demonstrate engagement with reading! Earlier/sustained engagement in discussion forums **earns higher grades** for the assignment

March/Module 2: Digital Relationships

Read & Comment: 3/1-3/14	Participate: 3/22-3/28
Lupton, "Theorizing Digital Society" **Turkle,** "Connected, But Alone?" (video) **Carr,** "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" **Oppenheimer,** "Technology is Not Driving Us Apart After All" **Twenge,** "i-Gen" (excerpt) NowComment activity due by 3/7 **Optional WebEx Meet: 3/11 at 2 PM**	Discussion Forum Week 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 29-April 4. All exams must be completed by Sunday, April 4 at midnight

April / Module 3: JUSTICE & WORK

Read: 4/5-4/18	Participate: 4/19-4/25
Angwin et al, "Machine Bias" **Koebler,** "The Impossible Job: Inside Facebook's Struggle to Moderate Two Billion People" **Heller**, "Is the Gig Economy Working?" **Niller,** "Can AI Be a Fair Judge in Court? Estonia Thinks So"	Discussion Forum Week Remember: - Focus on course content to demonstrate engagement with reading! - Earlier/sustained engagement in discussion forums **earns higher grades** for the assignment

CONFERENCE & WORKSHOP WEEKS: 4/26-5/4. Sign up for conferences (optional) or synchronous workshop sessions (WebEx).

Final Projects must be submitted no later than <u>Sunday, May 9 at Midnight</u>