MRTS 3620: Digital Media and Society
Fall 2024
Thursday 2-4:50 p.m.
RTFP 264

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Course Description

This course is a critical evaluation of the ever-evolving relationship between digital media and society. Digital media—referring explicitly to the use of the "digits" of 0 and 1 by computer processes to mediate information—continues to shape and be shaped by the people that use it to survive and thrive in our world as these technologies became more accessible and ubiquitous. Our scholarly inquiry addresses now commonplace practices such as text messaging, blogging, photo sharing, smartphones, gaming, social networking, and video sharing. Over the weeks, we will cover a range of communicative contexts (journalism, tourism, leisure, performance, and public debate), communicators (professional and lay, young people and adults, intimates and groups), and perspectives on digital media.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand digital media as neither inherently good nor bad, but as a mediator.
- Produce compelling, evidence-based opinions about digital media and society.
- Engage in theoretical debates about the intertwining of technology and society.
- Discuss scholarly research that critically interrogates global digital cultures.
- Explain how competing stakeholders, interests, and modalities of governance shape the development, use, and regulation of digital media technologies.

Required Readings & Materials

1. There is no assigned textbook for this course, as I am all too aware of how strenuous textbooks can be for one's financial wellbeing. Instead, **all assigned readings will be made available for free via Canvas**.
2. All supplemental media for this course will also be available in Canvas or in class.
3. This course does require the use of a computer and Internet for online assignments and for engaging with course materials. If this may be an issue for you, please remember that you have access to the University's library network, which can provide both for you.

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Assignment Details
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Attendance/Participation. This 3000-level course encourages reading academic texts, experiencing a variety of digital media, and writing in a scholarly manner. To facilitate interesting and well-informed discussions during class, I encourage you to actively participate by taking time to read the week's assigned readings. The readings will cover a wide range of topics related to digital media and society, but our weekly discussions will largely be shaped by your collective interests and lines of questioning.

MRTS 3620 Assignments	
Attendance/Participation	10%
Canvas Responses	10%
Exam #1	25%
Exam #2	25%
Research Paper	30%

While there will be no pop quizzes, I may call upon participants randomly to contribute their own thoughts and perspectives. A sign-out sheet will be provided at the end of the course to mark your full attendance.

Canvas Responses
To jumpstart our in-class discussions, we will draft initial responses to the readings on Canvas. These responses should directly call to the texts, media, and other supplemental materials for the week's discussion, as well as any further connections you may have made to authors and works outside of our course.

Exam #1
This exam will cover the lectures, screenings, readings, and discussions presented in the first half of the course.

Exam #2
This exam will cover the lectures, screenings, readings, and discussions presented in the second half of the course. As such, it will not be cumulative.

Research Paper
The research paper will be an 8-page case study analysis (approx. 2000 words). Your submitted paper must be presented in Times New Roman, size 12 font, and on a document with 1" margins. In addition, please use either MLA or Chicago style and include a Works Cited page (not included in the final page count). The subject matter of the paper should relate to and expand upon the discussions and topics we will engage with in this course. Please submit your paper to Canvas by the deadline noted in this syllabus. More information will be provided closer to the due date.

Final Grade
Your final grade will thus be based upon two in-class examinations, Canvas responses, a research paper, attendance, and participation. Each of these components are essential to pass the class. As such, I encourage you to read the assigned materials, attend class, and take notes on all components of the class, including discussions, podcasts, and screenings.

`Course Policies`

Communication
- I ask to be addressed as Dr. Irby or Dr. Cameron.

- I will often reply to emails as soon as I receive them. However, I will reserve the right to respond within 48 hours to allow for a healthy work/life balance. This does not count the weekend; if you email me Friday, expect a response from me by Tuesday at the latest. In addition, I will only respond to emails sent from your UNT email due to security procedures, so please check what email you are using.

- If you have questions about assignments, I encourage you to ask them in advance of the deadline. Otherwise, I will likely be too busy grading to respond when you need it.

- Please check the syllabus first before emailing. Consider it my F.A.Q.

- If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes from your peers. Turn to two people right now and jot down their contact information:

  Classmate Name: _____
  Classmate Contact: _____

  Classmate Name: _____
  Classmate Contact: _____

- Beyond simple clarification questions, I cannot discuss anyone's grades via email; if you are concerned about your grade, talk to me before or after class, or schedule a meeting.

Attendance & Participation
- I designate one participation point per class meeting, provided that you are present for the entire session and actively participate in class discussions, exercises, and activities. No partial points are awarded and, unless you have a documented emergency (e.g. a doctor's note), there is no way to make up for the missed point. However, I allow all students two "freebee" absences to use as needed with no-questions-asked.

- Since this class will heavily feature in-class discussions, I request that everyone takes the time to write down their thoughts, feelings, and questions about our readings and screenings and that everyone be prepared to engage in rich, academic discussions.

- If we are unable to attend class together due to weather or unforeseen circumstances, I will create an online assignment that will still allow us to engage in scholarly discourse.

- Life happens. If you need a mental or physical health day, take it. Use a freebee day to catch up on sleep, food, friends, family, etc. **You will always matter more than points**.

Late Assignments
- All assignments are due as specified in the syllabus. Exams will be made available online for one week prior to the deadline. However, I will allow a 24-hour grace period to account for any technical errors or last-minute adjustments.

- If you anticipate that you will not meet the deadlines as established, please let me know as soon as possible. I can only accommodate extensions if you communicate your needs ahead of time. No extensions will be granted after you miss a deadline, and late assignments that have not been extended receive zero credit.

- While technical difficulties can and will happen, you are still responsible for meeting the deadlines established in this course. If you have problems, consult the Guide to Canvas, ask a classmate for help, Google the issue for some troubleshooting tips, and, if all else fails, contact the UNT Canvas support desk. If the technical difficulties cannot be resolved by the end of the 24-hour grace period but you inform me before the deadline, we can work out a reasonable alternative for you.

Academic Integrity
- Everything that you submit on Canvas is in turn submitted by our system to Turnitin, a plagiarism and AI detecting software that allows us to verify the academic integrity of your work.

- Plagiarism refers to the unattributed usage of others' intellectual efforts, intentional or not. This may appear in Turnitin as highlighted sections that note whether specific phrases or sentences appear online and in their database. Highlights in Turnitin do not necessarily indicate plagiarism, but they can reveal instances of bad paraphrasing, uncited text, and copy/pasting from Wikipedia, among other tell-tale signs.

- ChatGPT or any other AI "help" is not allowed, under any circumstances or to any extent, in this course. This is a course built around expanding your knowledge and understanding of digital media and to assist you in developing an authorial voice. Turnitin also possesses tools that can analyze work for LLM-crafted text, though it has been known to present false positives.

- If it has been determined that you have intentionally and egregiously plagiarized the work of others or cheated on any part of any assignment, I will email you and cc my chair with a screenshot of the Turnitin result, and I will follow the Office of Academic Integrity's instructions. The assignment will also receive a "0" with no opportunity for a redo.

- If UNT determines that this is not your first infraction, you will automatically fail the course and you could face expulsion.

Respect

Everyone should show up prepared to participate in weekly discussions. Show respect by giving your peers and me your full attention. At all times and both within and outside the course, we will treat each other with respect. You are encouraged to challenge ideas, but I will not tolerate speech or behaviors that attack an individual or their community (including those based on group identities such as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and so forth).

All students are expected and required to abide by the UNT Student Code of Conduct. Be aware that this policy is taken very seriously on our campus.

Chosen Names & Pronouns

If you have a chosen name that is different from your legal name and/or have a preferred set of pronouns and would like them to be used in class, please let me know. Everyone deserves to be known for who they are, and anyone who flagrantly disregards an individual's name and pronouns shows a lack of respect that will not be tolerated in this course.

Emergency Notifications

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to your UNT email account for contingency plans for covering course materials.

UNT Email

The use of a UNT email address is required for any communication related to all classroom business, including course material, discussions, grades, questions, and more. Inquiries from non-UNT or non-Canvas (connected to your UNT student account) cannot be answered due to privacy protection policies.

ODA Notifications

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding specific course needs.

You may request accommodation at any time; however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided to all your professors as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that you must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester, and you must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. See the ODA website.

Seeking Help
If you are facing challenges securing food or housing and believe this may affect your performance in this course, I urge you to contact the Dean of Students for support at deanofstudents@unt.edu or 940- 565-2648. The UNT Food Pantry is free for all students.

The Student Health and Wellness Center is the on-campus medical clinic for UNT students. The clinic offers treatment for injuries, illnesses, and other medical issues with convenient access to on-site laboratory testing, and x-rays. They also offer health education services to keep you healthy, in class, and on the path to graduation and professional success.

If you are struggling with mental health, an abusive relationship, trauma or PTSD, or other personal challenges that are negatively affecting your studies, contact the UNT Counseling Center at 940-565-2741 or the CARE team at 940-565-4373. Denton County Friends of the Family has a 24-hour crisis hotline for anyone experiencing relationship violence or abuse (940-383-7273). Cumberland Counseling & Family Services offers affordable/sliding scale counseling services to individuals, couples, and families (940-382-5112).

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct. Federal laws and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex as well as sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. Survivor Advocacy can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565-2648.

Student Life
Use the resources available to you! These include our Research 1-level libraries as well as resources under the Division of Student Affairs. They have programs to enhance and support the experiences of students including the Center for Belonging and Engagement, Student Veterans' Affairs, and numerous Student Organizations.

Tentative Schedule	
WEEK	**Covered in Class**
Week 1: Aug 22	Syllabus Reading & Class Introductions Introduction to Digital Media and Society
Unit 1: Exploring Digital Media and Society	
Week 2: Aug 29	Topic: What's on TV? • Sheila Murphy, "From Tube to a 'Series of Tubes'" • Ramon Lobato, "What is Netflix?" • Lindsay Ellis, "YouTube: Manufacturing Authenticity (For Fun and Profit!)" [Video]
Week 3: Sept 5	Topic: Social (Media) Animals • Josef Nguyen, "Instagram and the Creative Filtering of Authentic Selves" • Kylie Jarret, "Let's Express Our Friendship by Sending Each Other Funny Links Instead of Actually Talking" • *emily is away* (2015) [Video Game]
Week 4: Sept 12	Topic: Digital Migrants • Andrew Shield, "New in Town" • Roopika Risam, "Now you see them" • *Path Out* (2017) [Video Game]
Week 5: Sept 19	Topic: Blurring Boundaries • In-Class Screening: *People's Republic of Desire* (2018) [Film] • Daniel Lark, "How Not to Be Seen"
Week 6: Sept 26	Topic: Considering Obsolescence • Sara Pesce, "Short Shelf-Life Media" • Matan Aharoni, "When obsolete technology meets convergence culture" • *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1987) [Film]
Week 7: Oct 3 **(NO CLASS)**	Exam #1 (1st Half of Class), to be completed online. • Due by the end of day October 3rd. • Details via Canvas.

Unit 2: Digging Deep into Digital Media and Society	
Week 8: Oct 10	Topic: Digital Selves & *Virtual Intimacies* – Shaka McGlotten • "Introduction" • Ch.2: "Intimacies in the Multi(player)verse" • Ch.3: "Feeling Black and Blue"
Week 9: Oct 17	Topic: Where Is Your Data?; or, *A Prehistory of the Cloud* – Tung-Hui Hu • "Introduction" • Ch.1: "The Shape of the Network" • Ch.4: "Seeing the Cloud of Data"
Week 10: Oct 24	Topic: The Internet's *Rogue Archives* – Abigail De Kosnik • "Introduction: Media as Historical Subjects" • Ch.1: "Memory Machine Myth" • Ch.3: "Queer and Feminist Archival Cultures"
Week 11: Oct 31	Topic: Search Engines as *Algorithms of Oppression* - Safiya Umoja Noble • "Introduction" • Ch.1: "A Society Searching" • Ch.2: "Searching for Black Girls"
Week 12: Nov 7	Topic: Trusting Media & *Where Truth Lies* - Kris Fallon • "Introduction" • Ch.3: "Networked Audiences" • Ch.4: "States of Exception"
Week 13: Nov 14	Topic: Pepe the Frog, Memes, and Digital Futures • In-Class Screening: *Feels Good Man* (2020) • Bring snacks. • Discussion to follow.
Week 14: Nov 21 **(NO CLASS)**	Exam #2 (2nd Half of Class), to be completed online. • Due by the end of day November 21st. • Details via Canvas.
Week 15: Nov 28 **(NO CLASS)**	**Thanksgiving Break**
Week 16: Dec 5 **(Optional)**	Paper Writing Workshop & Final Review • Bring a draft of your final essay to class. • Work with your peers, share notes. • Last chance for paper consultations.
Week 17: Dec 12	Final Essay • Due by December 12th by end of day • Details via Canvas.