

MRTS 3620: Digital Media and Society

Spring 2025

Tuesdays 5:00 p.m. – 7:50 p.m.

RTFP 264

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Office Hours: By appointment.

Office Location: Online

Course Description

This hybrid lecture/seminar 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 become more accessible and ubiquitous. Our scholarly inquiry addresses now commonplace practices and technologies such as digital video production and sharing, social media, the Internet, and video gaming. Together, 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 and our society.

Learning Objectives

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

- Produce compelling, evidence-based opinions about digital media and society.
- Engage thoughtfully in theoretical debates about the intertwining of technology and society.
- Discuss current scholarly research that critically interrogates global digital cultures.
- Explain how competing stakeholders, interests, and modalities of governance influenced and continue to 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 on 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. If this requirement will impact your participation in this class, we can discuss alternatives.

Assignment Details

Attendance/Participation. This 3000-level course encourages reading academic texts, experiencing a variety of digital media, and writing in a scholarly manner. As this course will be a mixture of lecture and seminar discussion, your attendance is required to meet the learning objectives of the course and will be marked via a sign-out sheet.

While there will be no pop quizzes, I call upon participants frequently to contribute their own thoughts and perspectives on each week's materials. To facilitate interesting and well-informed discussions during class, I encourage everyone to prepare for active participation by taking time to read the week's assigned readings.

MRTS 3620 Assignments

Attendance/Participation	10%
Canvas Responses	20%
Exam #1	20%
Exam #2	20%
Research Paper	30%

Canvas Responses

To facilitate our in-class discussions, students will submit 250-word-minimum responses to the readings on Canvas in advance of each class day. These responses should directly call to the readings, as well as any further connections you may have made to authors, works, and experiences from outside our course. Point values vary based on reading requirements.

Exam #1

This exam will cover the lectures, readings, and discussions presented in Part 1 of the course, testing your ability to synthesize the different perspectives and ideas gathered throughout the first few weeks of class. You will be given two long-answer questions and will need to prepare a 500–750-word response to each question. To ensure you have time to complete this assignment, we will not have class on the week the assignment is due.

Exam #2

Same as Exam #1, but it will cover the material discussed in Part 2 of the course.

Research Paper

The research paper will be an 8-to-10-page case study analysis (approx. 2000 words) that examines a work or facet of digital media through the tools and critical viewpoints gained throughout the course. In addition, this paper will also require the proper usage of additional academic sources, a strong argument, and proper formatting. The specifics of the formatting of this research paper will be discussed in full in Part 3 of our course, but I recommend workshopping ideas early and often with your peers.

Final Grade

Your final grade will thus be based upon two examinations, weekly 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, be present, and take detailed notes.

Note: all assignments are worth the exact number of points presented for ease of use.

Course Policies

Communication

- I ask to be addressed as Dr. Irby, Dr. Cameron, or simply “Professor.”
- Please check the syllabus first before emailing. Consider it my F.A.Q.
- I will often reply to emails as soon as I receive them. However, I 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, please ask them at least 48 hours prior to the deadline. I may not answer you in time if you delay (busy grading).
- 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 and activities. Unless you have a documented and excused absence as designated by UNT (e.g. religious holy days, active military service, official university functions, illness, pregnancy/parenting, etc.), any absences will result in a reduced grade.
- As a show of courtesy and respect, I grant everyone a single freebee day that will not penalize your attendance score. You may use it for whatever reason you see fit, and you do not need to request permission for it.
- Life happens. If you need a mental or physical health day, take it. Use the freebee day to catch up on sleep, food, friends, family, etc. **You will always matter more than points.**
- If we are unable to attend class together due to weather or unforeseen circumstances, I will adjust the syllabus as necessary, including potential online assignments.

Late Assignments

- All assignments are due as specified in the syllabus. While technical difficulties can and will happen, you are still responsible for meeting the deadlines established in this course. If you have problems and I am unavailable, 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, we can work out a reasonable alternative for you.
- The first 24 hours after the deadline are a grace period to allow for final edits and technical issues. Assignments turned in after this grace period will receive a one-point penalty for every 24 hours after the deadline. Once an assignment has lost at least 50% of its point maximum, it will not be accepted with no opportunity for a redo.
- In addition, any assignment not turned in by 5 p.m. on May 9th (the last day of Finals Week) will be given an automatic 0 with no opportunity for a redo.

Academic Integrity

- Assignments submitted to Canvas may also be submitted 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.
- If I determine that you have intentionally and egregiously plagiarized the work of others or cheated on any part of any assignment, I will inform you of my decision and give your work a 0.
- However, Turnitin is notorious for false positives regarding both its plagiarism checking and its AI detection, especially regarding translation software and spellcheckers like Grammarly. As such, you may request a meeting to contest this ruling within five business days. This meeting could result in a full reversal of the ruling or an opportunity to present an alternative assignment.
- If the ruling remains after five business days, I will email you and cc Dr. Harry Benshoff with a screenshot of the Turnitin result and a description of my findings, following the Office of Academic Integrity's instructions. If UNT determines that this is not your first infraction, you may fail the course and could face expulsion from the university.

UNT Policies and Resources

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 of 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 for more information.

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](#).

One Last Thing

This syllabus is a living document, and as such the information presented can and will change as necessary for our class to provide an exemplary educational experience. As the instructor of the course, I reserve the right to modify this document at my discretion. If you have any questions or suggestions pertaining to the syllabus, please contact me.

Tentative Schedule	
WEEK	Class Topic & Readings
Week 1: Jan 14	Syllabus Reading & Class Introductions
Part 1: Into the Digital World	
Week 2: Jan 21	<p>The Digital Shift</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Henry Jenkins, “Introduction: ‘Worship at the Altar of Convergence’” • Jay David Bolter & Richard Grusin, “Introduction: The Double Logic of Remediation”
Week 3: Jan 28	<p>Video Gone Digital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheila Murphy, “From Tube to a ‘Series of Tubes’” • T.L. Taylor, “Networked Broadcasting”
Week 4: Feb 4	<p>Web 2.0 & Social Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Josef Nguyen, “Instagram and the Creative Filtering of Authentic Selves” • Susanna Paasonen, “A Midsummer’s Bonfire: Affective Intensities of Online Debate”
Week 5: Feb 11	<p>Video Game(ification)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carly Kocurek, “The Microcosmic Arcade” • Bryan Gardiner, “How Gamification Took Over the World”
Week 6: Feb 18	<p>Exam #1 (NO CLASS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due by 7:50 p.m. on February 18th. • Details via Canvas.
Part 2: Digital Deep Dive	
Week 7: Feb 25	<p>Case Study: Internet Archive VS Ao3 & <i>Rogue Archives</i> by Abigail De Kosnik</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch.1: Memory Machine Myth • Ch.3: Queer and Feminist Archival Cultures • Ch.7: Archontic Production
Week 8: Mar 4	<p>Case Study: <i>World of Warcraft</i> & <i>My Life as a Night Elf Priest</i> by Bonnie Nardi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prologue • Ch.1: What is <i>World of Warcraft</i> and Who Plays It? • Ch.4: A New Medium • Ch.9: Culture: WoW in China... and North America
Week 9: Mar 11	Spring Break (NO CLASS)

Week 10: Mar 18	<p>Case Study: Google & <i>Algorithms of Oppression</i> by Safiya Umoja Noble</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch.1: A Society Searching • Ch.2: Searching for Black Girls • Ch.3: Searching for People and Communities • Ch.4: Searching for Protections from Search Engines
Week 11: Mar 25	<p>Case Study: Documentary Media & <i>Where Truth Lies</i> by Kris Fallon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch.1: Seeing in the Dark • Ch.3: Networked Audiences • Ch.4: “States of Exception”
Week 12: Apr 1	<p>Exam #2 (NO CLASS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due by 7:50 p.m. on April 1st. • Details via Canvas.
Part 3: Research Paper	
Week 13: Apr 8	<p>Research Paper Overview In-Class Screening: <i>Feels Good Man</i> (2020) Discussion to follow.</p>
Week 14: Apr 15	<p>Paper Writing Workshop & Research Session Bring whatever supplies you need to read, write, and research. Work with your peers, share notes, and discuss findings. Last chance for paper consultations.</p>
Week 15: Apr 22	<p>Independent Research (NO CLASS)</p>
Week 16: Apr 29	<p>Independent Research (NO CLASS)</p>
Week 17: May 6	<p>Research Paper (NO CLASS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due by 7:50 p.m. on May 6th. • Details via Canvas.