

Course Outline: Politics of Cyberspace

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS

Note for students: This short course outline is provided for planning purposes only. Course information is tentative and subject to change; the final course syllabus will be available by the first day of classes.

Course Code

AP/POLS 4071 3.0 Politics of Cyberspace

Course Description

As a component of the information revolution and globalization, cyber, in all of its manifesting forms – digital technology, internet, cyborg (cybernetic organism), social networks (Twitter, Facebook, Whatsapp, TikTok), aesthetics, artificial life (AL), artificial intelligence (AI), algorithms, virtual reality, prosthetics, robotics – has since 1989 rapidly emerged as a feature of contemporary politics. The cyber is subject to competing claims regarding its positive and negative impact on power relations and individual identities.

This course focuses on a variety of interpretive approaches that are applied to cyber and cyberspace – communication theory, Marxism, feminism, poststructuralism, posthumanism, international relations, critical race analysis, identity theory, information theory, psychoanalytic theory, technological determinism and political economy.

The contradictory characterization of cyber and cyberspace as a mass and an alternative media and its political significance will be emphasized. The course will examine the influence of “non-place” on democratic development, social power and interaction, as well as new identity formation.

The course is presented in blended (BLEN) format that includes in-class, on-line and print EE (experiential education) components: seminar presentation, seminar participation, interactive on-line discussion forum, one minute film, plus paper abstract and essay. The aim is for the student to be able to interact proficiently and seamlessly both online and in person to meet the requirements of a networked world.

Course Delivery

BLEN/ONLN/SEMR

The course is presented in blended (BLEN) format that includes in-class, on-line and print EE (experiential education) components: seminar presentation, seminar participation, interactive on-line discussion forum, one minute film, plus paper abstract and essay. The aim is

for the student to be able to interact proficiently and seamlessly both online and in person to meet the requirements of a networked world.

Course Materials

Books

Han, Byung-Chul, *Infocracy: Digitization and the Crisis of Democracy* (Polity, 2022). ISBN:978509552986.

Arthur Kroker & Marilouise Kroker (2021) *Technologies of the New Real. Viral Contagion and Death of the Social* (University of Toronto Press) kindle, print and York Library ebook. ISBN:9781487540227.

Noble, Safiya Umoja, 2018. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (NYU Press) kindle, print and York Library ebook. ISBN:9781479837243.

Russell, Legacy, 2020. *Glitch Feminism. A Manifesto* (Verso) kindle and print; ISBN: 9781786632661.

Seymour, Richard. 2019. *The Twittering Machine* (The Indigo Press) epub, kindle, print and York Library ebook.

eArticles

Bengani, Priyanjana, "India had its first 'WhatsApp election', We have a million messages from it," *Columbian Journalism Review*, October 16, 2019.

https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/india-whatsapp-analysis-election-security.php

Banerjee, Deeplina, Suyesha Dutta, Suvolaxmi Dutta Choudhury

"In Indian Election, AI Amplifies Political Reach but Magnifies Disinformation,"

<https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/indian-election-use-of-ai-political-campaigns-voter-engagement>

Benjamin, Ruha, "Introduction" and Ch. 1 "Engineered Inequity," *Race After Technology* (Polity Press, 2019).

Carney, Kevin, "How does Social Media Influence Democracy? Evidence from WhatsApp in India," *VoxDev*, 6/10/2022.

Ockenden, Sasha, "Skin Deep: Deep Fakes and Misinformation," *Digital Diplomacy* (Dec 10, 2020)

<https://medium.com/digital-diplomacy/skin-deep-deep-fakes-and-misinformation-3c2f9cc59045>

Pardes, Arielle, "The TikTok Teens Trying to Meme the Vote," *Wired*, 10.22.2020.
<https://www.wired.com/story/tiktok-election-2020/>

Pew Research Center, "America's News Influences," (November 18, 2024).

Suler, John R., Ch.4 "The Disinhabited Self," *Psychology of The Digital Age. Humans Becoming Electric* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 95-111.

Tactical Technology Collective, "Psychometric Profiling: Persuasion by Personality in Elections"
<https://ourdataourselves.tacticaltech.org/posts/psychometric-profiling/> accessed 23/12/2019

Tactical Technology Collective, "WhatsApp: The Widespread Use of WhatsApp in Political Campaigning in the Global South"

<https://ourdataourselves.tacticaltech.org/posts/whatsapp/> accessed 23/12/2019

Tolentino, Jia, "The Age of the Instagram Face," *The New Yorker*, December 12, 2019
<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/decade-in-review/the-age-of-instagram-face>

Seminar [synchronic]: 16:00-18:00 weekly seminar presentations and discussion of the presenters' questions and the readings.

Weekly Readings: [asynchronic] read prior to the seminar. Approximately 4-5 hours reading per week. I suggest taking notes on the readings that you think will inform your essay

Seminar Participation: [synchronic] Attend class with the readings done and a readiness to engage the presenters' discussion questions.

Written Seminar Presentation and Questions [asynchronic] to be posted on the **eClass Forum** by 20:00 Monday evening and presented in the Tuesday seminar. The presentation of the written is synchronic. **The Seminar Presentation** consists of a **500-word summary** of the selected reading plus **two discussion questions** derived from the reading. Each presentation and discussion of the questions will be 20-25 minutes. **The presenter is responsible for the summary and the two questions; the rest of us are responsible for discussing.**

Discussion Forum Posting [asynchronic]: written responses to the presenters posed questions on the weekly reading and/or other thoughts/reflections/information related to the weekly readings. This can be done before class or in a portion of the asynchronic 1 hour of allotted class time, or any time during the week that fits your workload schedule. For the **eClass Discussion Forum** – post:

- 1) the seminar reading summary and two questions derived from the reading. The grade for this is the Presentation Grade out of 20%.

- 2) observations/comments/musing (written, images, audio files) regarding issues relating to cyberspace, social media, digital life and posthuman identity.
- 3) responses to the presentation questions.

The aim is to have an interactive discussion as well as posting your own observations. A total of 15 posts, either beginning a new thread or responding to a thread, are expected. These are to be done weekly and not left until the last days of the course.

Essay and Film Abstract [asynchronous]: A **two-page (500 words)** double-spaced Word.doc or .docx abstract outlining the subject of the paper and film and the course material to be used. The abstract is to be uploaded on the eClass Essay Abstract Assignment section.

Conference Presentation of Essay Abstract [synchronic]: A **5-minute** presentation of your proposed paper topic as set out in the abstract – not simply reading the abstract.

Essay Assignment [asynchronous]: The aim of the essay (**3500-3750 words**) is to engage course material on the topic of your choice relating to the politics of cyberspace, social media, digital life and/or posthuman identity. A minimum of five texts on the course must be integrated into your essay. In addition, outside material may be used as long as the emphasis is the course material. Each book and article count as one source. A bibliography is required. The essay is to be uploaded as a **double-spaced Word document** on the eClass Essay Assignment section.

Film [asynchronous]: A **1-minute** film which accompanies the essay. The film can be shot on a phone camera, digital still camera, video camera, or computer web cam and it can use found footage as long as the footage is altered by you. The film is not to be more than 1 minute and 25 seconds or less than 50 seconds.

Tentative Grade Breakdown and Deadlines

[Provide a breakdown of course components into individual assessments, including the weight of each assessment and anticipated date held or due date. Include whether assessments are held in-person or online or if they might be held outside of class time (e.g. evenings or weekends)]

Assessment	Weight	Mode	Tentative Deadline
One Seminar Presentation	20	Online/In-person/ Synchronous	Weekly Sept-Dec
Discussion Forum:	10	Online/Asynchronous	Weekly Sept-Dec

Assessment	Weight	Mode	Tentative Deadline
Seminar Participation	10	Online/In-person/ Synchronous	Weekly Sept-Dec
Conference Presentation	5	Online/In-person/ Synchronous	Dec 3
Essay and Essay Abstract	45	Asynchronous	Dec 9-22
One-Minute Film	10	Asynchronous	Dec 9-22