# COMM 390 Special Topics: Social Media & Society

Spring 2018 | 11:00 am – 12:15 pm | Tuesday / Thursday

Professor Alice Marwick Office Hours:

Email: amarwick@unc.edu T/Th 1-2pm

## Course Description

This class examines the relationship between society and the current crop of computer-mediated communication technologies known as “social media,” including Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and more. These technologies are often regarded with fear or awe; the purpose of this class is to break down the mythologies of social media and develop methods of analysis and critical understanding. To do this, we will draw from a broad range of social theory including science and technology studies (STS), communication theory, linguistics, cultural studies, and media anthropology to critically evaluate the impact of social media on relationships, activism, branding, politics, news media, and identity. We will focus on the “sociotechnical,” the relationship between the technical affordances of a website/technology and the social norms of a user community, and how to use this to understand emerging technologies (and social media that doesn’t exist yet!). Students will also gain basic practical social media skills: understanding the landscape, learning “best practices,” and using different social media technologies throughout the class to create and propagate content.

## Course Readings

The following books are required. They are all available on Amazon or your favorite online bookseller. All other readings will be on Sakai – please *print them out* and bring them to class.

Baym, Nancy (2015) *Personal Connections in a Digital Age.* Second Edition. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. ISBN: 0745670342. **Make sure you buy the second edition from 2015.** ($19 on Amazon)

Boyd, danah. (2014). *It’s Complicated: The Social Life of Networked Teens.* New Haven: Yale University Press. ($10 on Amazon)

Sara Wachter-Boettcher. (2017). *Technically Wrong: Sexist Apps, Biased Algorithms, and Other Threats of Toxic Tech.* ($16 on Amazon)

# Assignments

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Attendance & Participation | 10% |
| Response Papers | 20% |
| Midterm | 20% |
| Written Assignment #1 | 15% |
| Written Assignment #2 | 15% |
| Final | 20% |
| TOTAL: | 100% |

## Attendance & Participation (10%)

You must do the reading or this class will be a waste of time. I randomly call on people to encourage everyone to fully absorb the readings and share your thoughts with your classmates. This class is predicated upon active participation by all members. At the college level (especially in a communication class) you must take responsibility and participate as an active learner. The attendance grade will also include reading quizzes which will be given regularly throughout the semester. These quizzes will test whether or not you did the reading. If you come in after the quiz has already started, you cannot take it.

You are allowed two unexcused absences. **Each absence above that number will result in a five-point deduction from your final grade.** The only excused absences are those for university organized and sponsored activities (student athletes), religious observances, and documented medical reasons. In all instances, you MUST notify me prior to missing class. Excused absences do not include leaving early for spring break, internship obligations, or other non-essential situations. If you miss more than four classes, excused or unexcused, you may fail the class. Please talk to me as early in the semester as possible about excused absences.

If you miss class, you are responsible for getting the notes from your classmates.

## Response Papers (20%)

There will be various worksheets and response papers due throughout the semester. While you should treat these as serious academic assignments, they will be of varying formality.

## Midterm Exam (20%)

The midterm exam is an objective, in-class exam, consisting of true-false, multiple choice, fill-in-the blank questions and short essays. The exam will cover the course material from the first half of the class. The midterm is on March 8.

## Written Assignment #1: Breaching Experiment (15%)

Instructions will be handed out in class. 5 pages, double-spaced..

## Written Assignment #2: Buzzfeed Assignment (15%)

Instructions will be handed out in class. You’ll be asked to write a Buzzfeed Community post and spread it virally, and then write 5 pages about the experience.

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## Final (20%)

The final exam is an objective, in-class exam, consisting of true-false, multiple choice, fill-in-the blank questions and short essays. The exam will cover the course material from the second half of the class.

# Class Schedule

*Reading loads are heavier on Tuesdays. Please come to class having done all the readings. There will be reading quizzes.*

**Thursday, January 11th - Intro and Class Overview**

Read: Syllabus

Discuss: Icebreakers, class objectives

Do: Syllabus quiz

**Tuesday, January 16 - Defining Social Media**

Read: boyd: preface, Intro pp. 1-13 (pdf on Sakai if you haven’t bought the book yet.)

Discuss: *definition of social media, networked publics, persistence, visibility, searchability, spreadability*

**Thursday, January 18 – Key Concepts**

Read: Baym, Chapter 1 (“New Forms of Personal Connection”), pp. 1-21

Discuss: *Interactivity, temporal structure, social cues, storage, replicability, reach, mobility*

**Tuesday, January 23 - Always Already New: A Pre-History of Social Media**

Read: Standage “The Ancient Foundations of Social Media: Why Humans are Wired for Sharing”

Discuss: *Dunbar number, social grooming, early writing and literacy*

Do: RP1: Turn in response paper, explaining why a single social media technology of your choice “counts” as social media according to Boyd and baym’s definitions. 1000 words (1-2 pages).

**Thursday, January 25 – Mass & Interpersonal Mediated Communication**

Read: Schudson, “The Good Citizen” (short excerpt)

Rakow, 1992. “The Telephone and Women’s Talk” from *Gender on the Line*

Discuss: *Interpersonal and mass media; early mass media (pamphlets, newspapers, coffeehouses, etc.). The point is to show that many of the things we think are “new” about “new media” have actually been around for a LONG time!*

**Tuesday, January 30 - How Do We Talk About Social Media?**

Read: Baym Chapter 2, “Making New Media Make Sense”

Discuss:  *Reflective, productive, technological determinism, social constructivism, utopian, dystopian*

*What patterns do we fall into when discussing new technologies? How can we avoid them in this class?*

Do: RP2: Discuss Eavesdropping Worksheet

*Extra Credit Opportunity: Julia Ebner Talk (5 points extra on any one assignment). Location TBA*

**Thursday Feb 1 – How Does the News Talk About Social Media?**

Read:Carr, Is Google Making Us Stupid? *The Atlantic* <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/>

Foster, J. (2014). “The Persistent Myth of the Narcissistic Millennial.” <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/11/the-persistent-myth-of-the-narcissistic-millennial/382565/>

Discuss: *We will talk about the patterns the media falls into when reporting technology (and science more generally)*

Do: In class, watch Ben Goodacre, Battling Bad Science TED talk <http://www.ted.com/talks/ben_goldacre_battling_bad_science.html>

**Tuesday Feb 6 – The Early Internet**

Read: Reise, Monica. (2016) “The Definitive History of Social Media.” *The Daily Dot,* Sept 12. <https://www.dailydot.com/debug/history-of-social-media/>

Dibbell, J. (1993) “A Rape in Cyberspace.” (long, but very interesting) <http://www.juliandibbell.com/articles/a-rape-in-cyberspace/>

Discuss: *I’ll take you through a quick history of the internet and early social media technologies.*

Do: In class, watch “Who invented the internet? And why?” on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21eFwbb48sE>

Turn in Eavesdropping Worksheet (RP2)

**Thursday Feb 8 – Early Social Media**

Read: Correll, “The Ethnography of an Electronic Bar: The Lesbian Café”

Discuss: *social norms; textual internet technologies; MUDS/MOOs*

**Tuesday Feb 13 – Online Communities**

Read: Baym, Chapter 4, “Communities and Networks”

*Optional:* Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties”

Discuss: community, shared space, shared practice, speech community, norms, shared resources, network support, emotional support, esteem support, informational support, shared identities, networked individualism, civic engagement, strength of weak ties

First Paper Assigned

**Thursday Feb 15 – Community Norms**

Read:Monroe, “From Pickup Artist to Pariah” <http://nymag.com/thecut/2016/01/jared-rutledge-pickup-artist-c-v-r.html>

Discuss: *Explicit vs. implicit norms; social shaming*

**Tuesday Feb 20 - Affordances**

Read: Gibson, J. "The Theory of Affordances." *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception.* 127-143.

Norman “The Psychopathy of Everyday Things” (skim)

Discuss: *Affordance, delegation, anthropomorphism, re-inscription*

*What is an affordance?* *How do affordances this play into social construction or technological determinism?*

Do: RP3: Turn in a 1000-word discussion of the affordances of a particular object. Use class material.

**Thursday Feb 22 – Affordances of Social Media**

Read: Miltner & Highfield, “Never Gonna GIF You Up: Analyzing the Cultural Significance of the Animated GIF.”

Discuss: *Sociotechnical, materialism, polysemy, communicative affordances, affect, repetition, decontextualization, cultural knowledge*

**Tuesday Feb 27 – Identity**

Read: boyd, Chapter 1 - Identity

Discuss: *context collapse, imagined audience, self-presentation, impression management*

Do: First paper due

***Thursday March 1: Prof. Marwick at Virginia Tech, class canceled***

Do: RP4: Watch an episode of any television series that deals with social media. Write a review of how the episode depicts social media and its impact on identity and/or relationships.

[If you can’t think of any, I suggest:

Black Mirror S03E01 – “Nosedive” (Netflix)

Modern Family S06E16 - “Connection Lost” (iTunes)

Community S05E08 – “App Development and Condiments” (Hulu)

Parks and Recreation S05E04 – “Sex Education” (Netflix)

*And lots of episodes of Selfie, Younger, The Good Wife, Gossip Girl, etc.*]

**Tuesday March 6 – Relationships**

Read: Baym, Chapter 6, “Digital Media in Relational Development and Maintenance” Gershon, “Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover” (from *Breakup 2.0*)

Discuss: *Disembodied identities, identity cues, self-presentation, latent tie, self-presentation, disembodied audiences, cognitive misers, platforms*

**Thursday March 8 – MIDTERM IN CLASS**

***March 13 – 15: No class, spring break***

**Tuesday March 20 – Social Media, Journalism, and the News**

Read: Hermida, “Social Media and Journalism” (2017)

Blanda, “Medium, and the reason you can’t stand the news anymore” <https://medium.com/@SeanBlanda/medium-and-the-reason-you-cant-stand-the-news-anymore-c98068fec3f8>

Discuss: *Traditional news values, traditional news industry norms, changes in news, social sharing, how journalists use social media, metrics*

*What effects has social media had on journalism (news production)?*

*What effects has social media had on news consumption?*

**Thursday March 22 – Fake News Online**

Read: Silverman, “These are 50 of the biggest fake news hits on Facebook in 2017” <https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/these-are-50-of-the-biggest-fake-news-hits-on-facebook-in?utm>

What’s the Solution to “Fake News?” <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/whats-the-solution-to-fake-news/>

Discuss: *Fake news, metrics, programmatic advertising, sponsored content*

Buzzfeed Post Assigned

**Tuesday March 27 – Spreading Disinformation**

Read: Marwick & Lewis (2017). “Media Manipulation & Disinformation Online.” *This is a very long report. I don’t expect you to read all of it. But please do read the Executive Summary, pp. 27-45 and the case studies (pp. 50-56).*

Discuss: *trolls, alt-right, memes, misinformation, disinformation*

**Thursday March 29 – Online Harassment**

Read: Sarah Sobieraj (2017): Bitch, slut, skank, c\*\*\*: patterned resistance to women’s visibility in digital publics, *Information, Communication & Society*

*Optional (but short, easy read):* Wachter-Boettcher Chapter 8

Discuss: *Online harassment, digital publics, intimidation, doxing, shaming, discrediting, reduced social cues, chilling effects*

Do: Buzzfeed post due (published and live!)

**Tuesday April 3 – The Tech Industry**

Read: Wachter-Boettcher Chap 1-3

Discuss: *Culture Fit, the pipeline, personas, default effect, edge case,*

*We will talk about the tech industry and the influence it has on what gets developed and designed.*

**Thursday April 5 – Toxic Tech Design**

Read: Wachter-Boettcher Chap 4, 5, 9

Discuss: *Interaction design, “real name” policy, engagement, opt out / opt in, meritocracy*

*We will talk about design choices and the assumptions built into many of the technologies that we use day to day.*

**Tuesday April 10 – Interpersonal Privacy**

Read: Boyd Chapter 2- “Privacy”

Discuss: *Civil inattention, social steganography, intensive parenting, publicity*

Do: Buzzfeed Reaction Paper due (written assignment #2)

**Thursday April 12 – Privacy and Surveillance**

Read: Eubanks, Want to Predict the Future of Surveillance? Ask Poor Communities.

<http://prospect.org/article/want-predict-future-surveillance-ask-poor-communities>

Wachter-Boettcher Chapter 6

Discuss: *Data mining, passive data collection, third party cookies, data privacy laws*

**Tuesday April 17 – Algorithms Gone Wild**

Read: Wachter-Boettcher - Chapter 7

Bridle, James (2017). Something is wrong on the internet (warning: this includes some creepy stuff- the videos, however, are less creepy than Bridle makes them sound.) <https://medium.com/@jamesbridle/something-is-wrong-on-the-internet-c39c471271d2>

Discuss: *algorithm, folk theories of algorithms*

Do: Watch Slavin, Kevin. How Algorithms Shape our World. <https://www.ted.com/talks/kevin_slavin_how_algorithms_shape_our_world>

**Thursday April 19 –** **Who Participates?**

Read: boyd, Chapter 6 – inequality

Discuss: *Participation gaps, skill gaps, homophily*

***Tuesday April 24 – Class canceled, Prof. Marwick at UVa***

**Thursday April 26 – Last Day of Class**

Read: Baym, Conclusion

Do: Final exam review

**Monday, April 30, 12pm – Final Exam**

# Class Policies and Procedures

## Disclaimer

In line with the course objectives, class material has been selected to help foster challenging discussions in class and beyond. They have been chosen assuming that you are not only legally adults, but that you understand higher education to involve encounters with ideas and arguments that may question your own beliefs and assumptions. Some of the class material may startle you or challenge you. Some of the material might be considered controversial or even offensive. All reactions will be welcomed in class and respected, and they will be received in the spirit of extending discussion rather than forestalling it.

## E-Mail and Office Hours

I cannot promise a quick turnaround on emails. The best way to talk to me about something specific is to come to my office hours. You do not need an appointment. If you can’t make my office hours because you have class during those times, I offer limited hours by appointment. Internships are not an excuse**.** Please do your best to come to scheduled office hours.

## Attendance Policy

I take attendance at the beginning of each class.

You are allowed two unexcused absences. Each absence above that number will result in a five-point deduction from your final grade. The only excused absences are those for university organized and sponsored activities (student athletes), religious observances, and documented medical reasons. In all instances, you MUST notify myself or your TA prior to missing class. Excused absences do not include leaving early for spring break, internship obligations, or other non-essential situations. **If you miss more than four classes, excused or unexcused, you may fail the class.** Please talk to me as early in the semester as possible about excused absences.

If you miss class, you are responsible for getting the notes from your classmates.

## Written Work

Paper grades are based, in part, on the strength of your ability to communicate effectively through writing. Papers with typos, misspellings, grammatical errors, and the like will receive low grades. All papers must have a thesis statement, an introduction, a conclusion, and a works cited page. All material should be sourced, not only direct quotations. Harvard, APA, Chicago or MLA style is acceptable (if you pick APA, you don’t have to do running headline, etc.). **Papers must be in 12-point** **Times New Roman and double-spaced with one-inch margins**. I expect students who have trouble with written work to come to my office hours or seek help at the Writing Center.

## Late Paper Policy

All assignments must be completed on time in order to receive full credit. Late assignments will be penalized by half a grade for each 24-hour period it is late. After five calendar days, the assignment *will not* be accepted.

## Honor Code and Plagiarism

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has had a student-led honor system for over 100 years. Academic integrity is at the heart of Carolina and we all are responsible for upholding the ideals of honor and integrity. The student-led Honor System is responsible for adjudicating any suspected violations of the Honor Code and all suspected instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the honor system. Information, including your responsibilities as a student is outlined in the Instrument of Student Judicial Governance. Your full participation and observance of the Honor Code is expected

Plagiarism is not tolerated, which includes includes falsifying sources, failing to cite source material, copy-and-pasting material from papers you find on the internet, and using unattributed quotations. [The Writing Center has a useful handout about plagiarism](http://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/plagiarism/).

## Grade Policies

Please note that more than 2 absences will result in a decrease in your grade. If you miss four or more classes, you may fail the class unless you talk to me about it beforehand.

* An “A” means you did excellent work. You genuinely impressed me by doing work that the very best of Carolina’s proud tradition of academic rigor. If you received an A, you can be sure that it means your work was clear, deep, insightful, creative, and needed very little if any revision.
* A “B” means that you did very good work, meeting and occasionally exceeding my expectations for a student at your stage of development. A “B” is not something to be disappointed about. “B” level work is perhaps less clear and insightful than it could be, but is certainly competent. Careful revision can move this up to an “A.”
* A “C” means that an assignment meets the minimum expectations, but is seriously lacking in significant respects. Usually, this is because the work is hurriedly produced, poorly edited and riddled with typos, or displays only the barest understanding of course concepts.
* A “D” means you are producing work that does not meet my minimum expectations, and an “F” is reserved for work that is missing, incomplete, more than five days late, or is not at the university level.

### Grade Scale

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Letter grade | 100 point scale |
| A+ | 97-100 |
| A | 93-96 |
| A- | 90-92 |
| B+ | 87-89 |
| B | 83-86 |
| B- | 80-82 |
| C+ | 77-79 |
| C | 73-76 |
| C- | 70-72 |
| D+ | 67-69 |
| D | 65-66 |
| F (failing) | 64 or below |

### Rounding Policy

Final course grades will be rounded up to the next whole number when equal to .5 or greater. When the decimal is less than .5 the grade is to be rounded down. In other words, a 79.5 is an 80; a 79.4 is a 79. **No exceptions.** Individual assignment grades will not be rounded.

### Extra Credit

I may add a few extra credit questions on quizzes, on certain assignments, or for attending certain events. This varies by semester. All extra credit opportunities are open to all students, and no extra credit will be given upon request.

### Grade Tracking

Grades will be posted on Sakai. No grades will be sent over email, in accordance with University policy. Any questions regarding grades must be discussed in person during office hours or during a scheduled appointment. Please note that Sakai gradebook grades may not reflect your final grades.

### Grade Challenges

If you disagree with a grade on an assignment, please email me a written, detailed explanation of why you think the grade should be re-evaluated. Do not ask me in office hours or after class to challenge a grade until you have emailed me your explanation. If I find your explanation convincing I will re-grade the assignment. This means the grade may go up, it may go down, or it may stay the same.

# Resources

## Students with ESL/LD Requirements

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students who speak English as a secondary language, students with chronic or temporary disabilities or medical conditions, or students with pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. In the first instance, please [visit their website](https://accessibility.unc.edu/), call 919-962-8300, or email accessibility@unc.edu. Please feel free to speak with me or your TA about any concerns.

## Writing Center

If you are really struggling with writing, I suggest you head to the Writing Center—their entire reason for existence is to help undergrads become better writers.

The Writing Center offers free, one-on-one help with all aspects of writing at any stage in the writing process. To make an appointment, browse the Writing Center’s online resources, or submit a draft online, please visit writingcenter.unc.edu. The main Writing Center office on the lower level of the Student and Academic Services Building is open for appointments Monday through Thursday from 9:00 AM until 8:00 PM, Friday from 9:00 AM until 4:00 PM, and Sunday from 4:00 PM to 8:00 PM. There is also a satellite office in 221 Greenlaw Hall. To make the best use of your time, please bring a copy of your assignment with you. The Writing Center will not proofread papers or talk with you about grades. Many students find visits to the Writing Center well worth their time.

## Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS is committed to creating a safe and affirming environment for all individuals and supporting all students in need.  Walk-in services are available at CAPS (on the third floor of the Campus Health Services Building) Monday-Thursday, from 9-12 and from 1-4, and Friday from 9:30-12 and 1-4. During a walk-in assessment, students complete paperwork on a tablet and meet with a mental health professional to discuss concerns they may have around managing academic and personal demands and to create a plan to help each student reach their goals. All services at CAPS are confidential.