Course syllabus (Spring 2014)

Meetings: Thursdays, 3:30-6:00 pm
Location: 1107 Susquehanna Hall
Instructor: Yujie Chen
Email: chenyj@umd.edu
Office: 4118 Susquehanna Hall
Office hours: Thursday 12:30-2:00pm and gladly by appointment

Course Description

This course takes an interdisciplinary approach to comprehend the social and cultural transformations given rise by what many called information revolution, namely the advancements of digital information and network technologies since late 19th century. Students will study the social history of the Internet (and web 2.0) in the context of technological advancement and late-capitalistic mode of production in the era of globalization. The course covers a wide range of topics related to the shifts in the mode and perception of production and consumption in the Internet age, including but are not limited to, the social and specific nature of (new) media, work and entertainment in the web 2.0 age, social production, digital divide, racial profiling and algorithms, political economy of sharing and collaborative culture, transnational labor division and mobility, workplace surveillance and information technologies, and so on. The course is designed to enrich students’ knowledge and sharpen their analytical skills to critically analyze the interplays among technologies, the society, and cultural diversity.

Overarching themes of this course are:
1) The development of the Internet should be grounded in the context of late-capitalism and neoliberalism, and the deep-seated social dominations prior to the emergence of the internet technologies.
2) Avoiding digital dualism, namely the binaries of online versus offline, virtual life versus real life, is essential for students to establish a dynamic approach toward the issues of control, freedom, racial formation, digital divide, privacy, surveillance, and political economy of new media.

Learning Objectives
At the end of this course, diligent students will:
• Be able to take an informed position on the definition of information revolution and network society, on the complex relations between identity diversity and daily
use of digital technology, and on questions like what the driving forces are for the emergence and development of the internet

• Learn the modes and consequences of different work and play practices and hone the ability to discern and analyze why certain practices are promoted while others are marginalized
• Develop deeper understandings of the structure and materiality of global networks which affect the global labor division around digital objects, infrastructure, and technological applications
• Critically assess the competing voices on topics from popular blog posts and academic literature regarding network society and make analytic argument regarding key debates around identity, work, and play on the Internet
• Become familiar with some of the theoretical approaches and methodologies for future engagement in the research streams in digital media studies

Design of the course

The course is organized around a specific set of learning outcomes, fulfilled by interactive in-class discussions, in-class activities, back channel online interactions, and stand-alone projects. Each weekly meeting starts with instructor’s lecture which covers main themes and key concepts. Simultaneously students are posting their thought on required materials and responding to instructor’s lecture on twitter.

Requirements/Expectations

• All Readings are required and substantial for the course. Each student is expected to come to class prepared to answer questions about all of the week’s assigned readings.
• Students are expected to devote a minimum of five hours each week to the readings and assignments from this course.
• Active contributions to the discussions and activities are required during class meetings and online interactions.
• No late submission is accepted.

Required Texts


Other readings, together with required materials in other media format, will be available on the course site in either PDF or via explicit links.
Grades:

Coursework will be weighted as follows:

- Active Engagement: 15%
- Twitter Responses: 10%
- Collaborative real-time note-taking and twitter narratives: 10%
- Mid-term: 15%
- Fieldwork of Digital Work/play practice: 20%
- Collaborative Final Project: 20%
- Individual Final Reflection Paper: 10%

Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+/A/A-</td>
<td>Students demonstrate “excellent” mastery of course subject and exceptional analytical insights through “outstanding scholarship.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+/B/B-</td>
<td>Students demonstrate “good” mastery of course subject and analytical insights into course readings but with less consistency and depth than A scale student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+/C/C-</td>
<td>Students meet the minimum academic standards for this course by completing all assignments but not making substantial contributions to in-class discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+/D/D-</td>
<td>Students do not meet the minimum academic standards for this course. These grades “denote marginal performance” of students who show little interest in critical reading or informed participation in the class or who fail to complete assignments in a timely manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Students fail to understand the subject with “unsatisfactory” performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XF</td>
<td>Student has engaged in academic dishonesty or plagiarism.</td>
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Written Assignments:

You will have several writing assignments due throughout the semester. These papers must be written in 12 point Times New Roman font, double spaced, and sources cited accurately in MLA or APA style. You must turn in your essays electronically by emailing them to the instructor as either Word Documents or PDF files. Please note: no late work is accepted on any assignments except under extraordinary circumstances.

Academic Integrity: Academic honesty is the cornerstone for the mission of education and for students’ individual growth. We expect our students to uphold high standard of academic conduct. University of Maryland is known for its long-term dedication to ensuring academic integrity. All the written assignments and oral presentations are bound by the basic rule of academic conduct (see University’s Code of Academic Integrity at [http://www.testudo.umd.edu/soc/dishonesty.html](http://www.testudo.umd.edu/soc/dishonesty.html)). The Honor Code Commission requires students to write on their tests and exams the following statement:
I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this examination (or assignment).

All forms of documentation should meet the following demands:

- That all the sources the writer has drawn from in paraphrase or direct quotation or a combination of paraphrase and quotation be listed at the end of the paper under "Bibliography," "References," or "Works Cited," whichever heading the particular style of documentation requires (i.e., MLA style, APA style, Chicago style, footnote);
- That each quotation or paraphrase be acknowledged with a footnote or in-text citation;
- That direct quotations be enclosed in quotation marks and be absolutely faithful to the wording of the source;
- That paraphrased ideas be stated in language entirely different from the language of the source and immediate acknowledgement is required.

If you use any source in your work without correctly citing the work, this constitutes plagiarism. Any intentional plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment and may result in a failing grade—“XF” denoting failure due to academic dishonesty—for the course and will be promptly reported to the Honor Council. To insure compliance with the University’s Honor Code and for more guidelines on the definition and penalties of plagiarism, please follow the link http://www.testudo.umd.edu/soc/dishonesty.html

Active Engagement:

Active engagement with the required materials, instructor’s lecture, and in-class discussions is crucial to your learning experience in this class. Please come to class having read the assigned readings such that you will be able to participate in our twitter interactions, in-classroom activities, debates, and discussions. You do not need to formulate an expert perspective on every assigned reading. Indeed, make sure bring your confusions and questions to the class, either via twitter or in-person discussion, since what confuses you might also confuse your classmates. By bringing them to the entire class, you will enrich in-class debates and discussion.

Twitter Responses:

Students in this class are required to have a twitter account (either use an established one or create a new one for this course). Twitter responses to the readings and instructor’s lecture are closely related to the active engagement. Before the end of each class, the instructor will integrate all tweets in the past week into in-class discussion.

Twitter is selected as an engagement tool for this course because its media environment is very much representative of the web 2.0 interactions and it becomes a site where latest social issues about the internet, digital media, and society are debated in earnest manners. Learning how to navigate on twitter and critically assess your usage of
twitter constitute basic skill-sets for students in the contemporary age. Students need tweet **at least two times each week** with the course hashtag (#amst328).

- One should **comment** on assigned readings (or documentaries);
- One should **respond** to or comment on the instructor’s lecture or other students’ tweets in real-time during class session;

Students are encouraged to point to outside classroom social phenomena, online resources, and offline events via twitter. Students are required to turn in the archived summary of their tweets before the end of the semester. They can archive their tweets via HootSuite or Norton Ditto, Archivist, or the Google Docs spreadsheet found at: http://bit.ly/twitter-archive-gdocs. Twitter responses are worth **10%** of the final grade.

**Note:** for students who don’t have a laptop or smartphone, you can send tweets during class by using the text message feature on your phones. You must text your message (140 characters maximum) to 40404 after setting up your cellphone at www.twitter.com/devices.

**Real-time note-taking and back-channel twitter monitoring**

For each class session, two teams of **three** students will be assigned to conduct collaborative work in class.

1) Real-time note-taking team: students will use Etherpad via Canvas or Google Doc to take notes for each class session. Each team can decide if they want to take turns in the class to take notes or work on the collaborative document simultaneously.

2) Back-channel twitter team: during each class session, this team of three students will monitor class tweets in real time. The team is responsible for identifying key questions, heated debates, and insightful comments on twitter, and presenting them as a twitter narrative before the end of each class session using online story-telling application like Storify.

Together, collaborative real-time note-taking and back-channel twitter story-telling account for **10%** of the final grade.

**Midterm Exam:**

Midterm exam will be held during the lecture on March 13 (week 7). The format of these exams may include identifications, short answers, and an essay question. Exam books will be provided. You will review for these exams in section to get a strong sense of the material that will be covered. If you have to miss an exam for university-approved reasons, you must reschedule the exam with the instructor.

**Practicing Digital Labor**

To complete this assignment, you need to accomplish two goals.

1) Choose one of the following digital labor types and work as such for a week:
• Amazon Mechanic Turks at Amazon.com
• Gigwalker at Gigwalker.com
• Providing real time traffic information on Waze, a crowdsourced navigation app on the smartphone
• Become a translator on Ratonwork.com (only if you are bilingual or trilingual)
• Online Game play worker as Gold farmer
• Become a language learner on duolingo.com
• Others you can think of (be creative!)

2) Document your work experience, such as how to set up your account, how to navigate the work platform, and so on. Observe how your digital labor are organized on the media platform and examine your own experience by critically engaging with relevant academic literature and readings from the course materials.

Students will write up a formal paper with minimum length of five pages (excluding bibliography) which should include their critical thoughts on their practice of digital labor and the social and cultural context of the digital labor practice of their choice. You need email your paper to chenyyj@umd.edu before the class on April 10. No late work will be accepted. A detailed rubric for the assignment will be distributed two weeks prior to the due day along with the detailed explanations.

Final Project

The final project for this course is design to simulate group collaborations. The group needs draw inspirations from one of the prior individual projects of digital labor practice and design a project focusing on an everyday digital media technology and critically explore how the technologies are used to make different types of digital labor visible or invisible. Each group should turn in a research proposal (300-500 words in length) by April 24. The group proposal should demonstrate your selection of the technology, explain your ideas for the project, point to the relevant framing literature we have learned in the semester, and explain how your group intend to complete the project (e.g.: listing the resources and techniques your group plan to use, internal division of labor, etc). Students are strongly encouraged to consult with the instructor prior to the due date of the proposal.

Upon the approval from the instructor, the group will spend the following week working collaboratively to conceive, design, and explore their group project. The class will spend the week 15 (May 8) exploring each group’s project together. The collaborative final project constitute will be graded based on 1) the depth of perspectives, 2) the complication of the argument, and the flow of the presentation. The collaborative final project is worth 20 per cent of the final grade and grades will be given for individual work, not necessarily assigned as the same to the entire group.

Final Reflection Paper
The final assignment to conclude this semester is a reflective paper (500-700 words in length). You must pick two key concepts, terms, or ideas studied in this course and in the paper discuss how your knowledge and understanding of the chosen concepts have changed throughout the semester. The goal of this paper is to prompt you to think broadly about how the ideas explored and discussed in this course have impacted your knowledge about the information age, contemporary work and entertainment habit in particular. You must email your final reflection paper to chenyj@umd.edu by 5pm, May 8. No late submission will be accepted.

**Excused Absence due to Illness (IMPORTANT)**

For a medically necessitated absence from a single lecture, recitation, or lab, students should

a.) make a reasonable attempt to inform me prior to the absence

b.) submit a self-signed note, attesting to the date of their illness. Each note must also contain an acknowledgment by the student that the information provided is true and correct. Such documentation shall be honored as an excused absence unless the absence coincides with a Major Scheduled Grading Event.

c.) Providing false information to University officials is prohibited under Part 9 (h) of the Code of Student Conduct (V-1.00(B) UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT) and may result in disciplinary action.

d.) Students who experience a prolonged absence(s), or an illness during a Major Scheduled Grading Event are required to provide written documentation of the illness from the Health Center or from an outside health care provider that verifies the dates of treatment and indicates the time frame that the student was unable to meet academic responsibilities. No diagnostic information shall be given.

Religious Observances: Please inform me at the start of the semester if you are going to miss any major scheduled grading events due to religious observances so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Other Absences: Official information can be found here: http://www.faculty.umd.edu/teach/attendance.html

- If you are missing a day without any assignments due: keep in mind that, save for religious observances or official University-excused absences, you will not receive credit for active participation points.

- If you are missing a major scheduled grading event: due to University policies regarding fairness, I will not reschedule any major grading event without one of the following:
  o An official excuse from a university office signed by university personnel
  o A doctor’s note or a copy of a hospital bill
Inclement Weather and Campus Emergencies

In the event of a severe weather or a campus emergency, the course will follow the official UMCP schedule on closing and delays as announced on the campus website (http://www.umd.edu/emergencypreparedness/weather_emer) and adjustments to the course schedule will be announced in class, via email, and on blackboard.

Special Accommodations:

University of Maryland is proud to provide appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities. Students who need special accommodation are encouraged to inform me at the beginning of the semester so that I can make arrangements for our exams. In addition, please make an appointment with the Disability Support Services (DSS) so that you can learn the procedures and fill out the necessary paperwork.

DSS Website: (http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS)
Office number: (301) 314-7682 Location: 0106 Shoemaker Building

Writing Center:

In addition to our office hours and accommodated appointments, students at all stages of their writing are encouraged to utilize the English Department’s Writing Center (http://www.english.umd.edu/academics/writingcenter) located at 1205 Tawes Hall. There is always room for improvement and the writing advice you will receive will benefit you in whatever career path you pursue. You may contact the Center at writadmin@umd.edu or 301-405-3785.

Note: This syllabus is subject to changes at any time according to instructor’s discretion.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (Jan. 30): Introduction and Overview of the course

In-class Watch and discussion: Sleep Dealer

Week 2 (Feb. 6): Contextualize the Networked Era: From Industrial Revolution to Web 2.0
• Beniger, James. The Control Revolution: Technological and Economic Origins of the

Week 3 (Feb. 13): Historicize Media Audience and the critique of prosumers

Week 4 (Feb. 20): Revolutionary or not: theoretical approaches
The class will be divided into three groups for this week. Each group takes on one of the following theoretical approaches and presents their group work to the rest of the class.

1) media convergence & media specificity [media studies approach]:

2) cultural industry and politics:
• van Dijick, Jose, The culture of Connectivity, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. [chapter 1 & 2]

3) digital economy and global capitalism [political economy approach]:
Week 5 (Feb. 27): Social media: participatory surveillance and social production

- van Dijick, Jose, *The culture of Connectivity*, chapter 3, 4

Week 6 (March 6): Reproduction of Identity and Digital Divide

- danah boyd “White Flight in Networked Publics: How Race and Class Shaped American Teen Engagement with MySpace and Facebook” (*Race After the Internet*)
- Oscar Gandy, Jr. “Matrix Multiplication and the Digital Divide” (*Race After the Internet*)

Week 7 (March 13)

AAST Minor Announcement

Mid-term Exam

Week 8: Spring Break (March 16-23)

Week 9 (March 27): Binary or Indistinguishable: Work and Play in the virtual games

- Jin, Dal Yong, *Korean Online Gaming Empire*, [chapter 5]
In-class Watch *Chinese Gold Farmers Documentary Preview*


Explore: The 10 worst jobs in IT, http://www.bestcomputerscienceschools.net/worst-it-jobs/

Week 11 (April 10): the Materiality of Digital Labor: Virtual labor mobility and division

• Assignment-Practicing Digital Labor due this week.
• Xiang, Biao. Global Bodyshopping [excerpt]

Week 12 (April 17): Informationized work infrastructure

• Watch: Terms and Conditions May Apply

Week 13 (April 24): Crowdsourcing and the work of the crowds

Turn in final project proposal

• Digital labor chapter 5 and 6

Group work on final project

Week 14 (May 1)

Group presentation

Week 15 (May 8)
Final Paper is due on