

MMC 6726 Social Media and Virtual Worlds
University of Florida College of Journalism and Communication Online Masters in
Digital Media

COURSE: Social Media and Virtual Worlds
Number: MMC 6726
Credits: 3
Meeting time: Available on-demand
Web Site: <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/>

INSTRUCTOR
Donna Z. Davis, Ph.D.
dzdavis@ufl.edu
Phone: 352.514.5500
Office Hours: Via Skype by appointment

Required Reading:

Boellstorff, T. (2008). *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.

McGonigal, J. (2011). *Reality is Broken: Why games make us better and how they can change the world*. Penguin Press, New York.

Reeves, B. & Read, J.L. (2009). *Total Engagement*, Harvard Business Press, Boston, Massachusetts.

Recommended:

Robbins, S. & Bell, M. (2008). *Second Life for Dummies*, Wiley Publishing, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

You are also responsible for reading excerpts from the e-books/sites provided on the course website. Specific reading assignments for each text are TBA.

Additional readings will be required throughout the course. You are expected to regularly check the class site for those readings.

Course Description/Purpose:

This course will offer an introduction to the research and communication uses of 3D virtual environments and online games. The course will primarily use Second Life as a virtual platform. Students will be required to create an online persona (avatar) and will be given basic training on navigating, building and communicating in the environment. Students will need computers with graphics cards and Internet speeds that can load and run Second Life. The program is free and can be downloaded from <http://www.seconlife.com>. System requirements are also available on the Second Life website.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course you should be able to:

- ❖ Rethink concepts of structure and space (how virtual and real are both similar and different) and why that's important to effective communication
- ❖ Identify the effects of immersion, presence and interactivity in this mediated environment
- ❖ Translate nuanced communications using text, voice and animations
- ❖ Discern the multiple meanings of online identity
- ❖ Begin to critically analyze the strengths and weaknesses of virtual communities not only as research populations but as a growing global and highly engaged audience
- ❖ Create enterprise game concepts both in 2D and 3D, designed to influence behavior

COURSE POLICIES:

The course will be comprised of brief lectures, online discussions, various multi-media (including books, videos, etc.), class activities performed in the virtual world and on the course website, and a final project. Students are expected to watch all pre-recorded lectures and contribute to the class blog and discussions as the course participation requirement.

Blog postings and comments: You are expected to write a weekly blog post or "thought paper" (approx 250-500 words based on the readings or topics assigned). Blog posts will be due by noon each Monday throughout the term. Additionally, students will be required to read and comment on at least 2 of the posts of their fellow students. Comments must add something of value to the conversation thread and are due NO LATER THAN noon each Friday throughout the term.

Assignments: In addition to the blogs, students will (1) be responsible for producing, recording and uploading one discussion session during the term and (2) write and present a publishable research paper that addresses issues or opportunities utilizing virtual worlds or games in a communication context or create a communications plan that incorporates use (or potential use) of virtual worlds and/or games as a tool of engagement. Late work will not be accepted.

Policy on Late Work and Participation

One of the most valuable experiences in a graduate program is what you learn from your peers. Each of you brings a unique perspective to class. It is possible to lose all 15 points if you do not participate in class discussion. Points will be deducted for late work (10 percent per day unless pre-arranged/excused), spelling errors, or unintentional grammatical mistakes. Requirements for class attendance and make up exams, assignments, and other work as consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

UF POLICIES:

University Policy on Accommodating Students with Disabilities: Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. You must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking the quizzes or exams. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

University Policy on Academic Misconduct: Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Student Honor Code at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/students.php>.

****Netiquette: Communication Courtesy:** All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions and chats. Failure to meet these requirements will result in removal of the post and loss of points for that week.

Getting Help:

For issues with technical difficulties for E-learning in Sakai, please contact the UF Help Desk at:

- Learning-support@ufl.edu
- (352) 392-HELP - select option 2
- <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>

** Any requests for make-ups due to technical issues MUST be accompanied by the ticket number received from LSS when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You MUST e-mail your instructor within 24 hours of the technical difficulty if you wish to request a make-up.

Other resources are available at <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/getting-help> for:

- Counseling and Wellness resources
- Disability resources
- Resources for handling student concerns and complaints
- Library Help Desk support

Should you have any complaints with your experience in this course please visit <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaints> to submit a complaint.

GRADING POLICIES:

Your work will be evaluated according to this distribution:

Assignment	Percentage of Grade	Due Date
Weekly blog posts	25%	Due weekly by noon the day prior to class
Weekly blog comments	20%	Ongoing - weekly
Discussion leader presentation	25%	Assigned first week of class
Final paper/project	30%	Presentation the final week of the semester Final paper due Monday of finals week

WEEKLY BLOGGING:

Blog posts should provide your analysis or insight relative to the readings and at least two questions you had as a result of the reading.

Weekly blog posts are awarded points according to levels of completion:

3 points: Completed task fully and on time

2 points: Blog did not fulfill word requirements or fully achieve assignment tasks

1 points: Blog post was posted late

0 points: No blog post listed

The General University policies regarding grading are found at:

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>.

PROJECTS:

Discussion leaders: Each student will lead the class discussion by preparing a 45-minute session on the topic scheduled for class that day. Students will sign up for which week they will lead at the beginning of the term. As discussion leader, students should prepare to engage thought and debate about the topic having read through the materials and identified additional examples of the topic to share. These examples can be current case analyses of virtual culture or games as examples of corporate or organizational internal and external communication. Discussion leaders may use questions raised in the class blog posts to enhance their presentation. Likewise, the presentation should stimulate discussion on the class blog!

Final paper/project: (subject to revision)

Each student will prepare a final paper in APA style suitable for journal publication. The paper should be approximately 12-15 pages in length and include an introduction, a literature review, concept development and evaluation plan. References are required.

Final papers could include (but are not limited to) beginning to develop research questions and propose methods that incorporate virtual worlds such as building and analyzing use of virtual learning/training space; participant observation of a community of interest; content analysis of profiles/group messages/chat logs; experiments that test engagement and outcomes; creation/analysis of machinima -- filmmaking in the virtual environment; hosting virtual special events for fundraising or campaigns; information distribution in virtual environments; and use of VWEs or enterprise gaming to build and empower community.

Final dates and specifics will be provided on the course website.

More details on this project will be provided. **You will produce and upload a 5 to 10-minute PowerPoint, Keynote or Prezi presentation of your project for the last class session.**

Grading Scale: Grading will be determined using the following criteria:**90-100 (A)**

The document is excellent, exceeding all the objectives of the assignment. The information is ethical, thorough, and ideally suited to the audience. The style is clear, concise, and appropriate to the subject, purpose, and audience. The organization and design of the document make the information understandable, accessible, and usable. The mechanics and grammar are correct.

80-89 (B)

The document is good. It meets the objectives of the assignment, but requires minor improvements or exhibits easily correctable errors in organization, style, design, grammar, or mechanics.

70-79 (C)

The document is adequate. It omits useful information or requires significant improvement in organization, style, design, grammar, or mechanics. It may be formally correct but superficial in its discussion.

60-69 (D)

The document is disappointing. It meets some of the objectives of the assignment but ignores others; the discussion is inadequately developed, omits important information, or displays numerous or major errors in organization, style, design, grammar, or mechanics.

50-59 (F)

The document is unsatisfactory. It omits critical information, does something other than the assignment required, or displays major or excessive errors in organization, style, design, grammar, or mechanics.

For more information, see: <http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html>

Course Schedule

WEEK ONE

Introduction to Virtual World Environments (VWEs) and Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs). Life on the grid: What are online 3D virtual worlds? Review current grids and their purposes and audiences. Create online personas, explore, experiment and practice. Readings: Boellstorff, Chapters 1-3. **Discussion leaders assigned**

WEEK TWO

THEORY: Gaming theory and the role of sociality, immersion, presence and interactivity. Readings: Yee (2008), Kiousis (2002), Nardi (2006).

WEEK THREE

Understanding virtual culture and avatar identity. Readings: Boellstorff, Chapters 4-7 and Reeves and Reed, Chapter 5, Davis (2013).

WEEK FOUR

Who are “gamers” and what makes them tick – An exploration of Uses and Gratifications (more theory!). Readings: McGonigal, Chapters 2-6 and Reeves and Reed, Chapter 2.

WEEK FIVE

METHODS: Conducting research in virtual worlds – Ethnographic study, surveys and interviews. Readings: Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce & Taylor (2012) and Davis (2013).

WEEK SIX

Nonprofit and educational uses of Second Life. Readings: Neely, Davis & Bowers (2011) and case studies (American Cancer Society and others TBA).

WEEK SEVEN

Healthcare in virtual worlds and the Quantified Self movement. Readings: Beard, Wilson, Morra & Keelan (2009) and Tilley & Kaihoi (2011).

WEEK EIGHT

Gaming for social change. Readings: McGonigal, Chapters 12-14.

WEEK NINE

Enterprise gamification: Using Farmville and Angry Birds models for engaging internal audiences. Gaming for business – Corporate uses of virtual environments. Readings: IBM and US Department of Defense case studies and Reeves and Reed, Chapters 3-4 and 7-9, Siemens Plantville case study and Bunchball white papers (2012).

WEEK TEN

Materiality and virtual economy– Why virtual goods/digital artifacts hold value. Readings: Reeves and Reed, Chapter 6; McGonigal, Chapter 11 and Leonardi (2010).

WEEK ELEVEN

Getting lost in the rabbit hole: Ethics, risks and challenges of online gaming – Addiction, deception and bullies. Readings: Reeves and Reed, Chapter 11

WEEK TWELVE

Final presentations and course review

This syllabus represents my current plans and objectives. As we go through the semester, those plans may need to change to enhance the class learning opportunity. Such changes, communicated clearly, are not unusual and should be expected.