

## MMC 6936: Big Data Seminar

Spring 2015 / Section 1E86 / Periods 8-10 Mondays, Weimer 3020 / 3 credits

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“Office hours” are times I dedicate to being in the office and are first-come, first-served. Otherwise, make an appointment or drop in.

## ABOUT THE COURSE

### Course Description

This course unpacks the conceptual and theoretical dimensions of big data and how the phenomenon is changing society in general and mass communication in particular.

This is not a methods course, and no experience in databases or statistics is presumed.

### Course Objectives

The course is intended to enable you to:

- Define the conceptual and theoretical dimensions of big data.
- Critique the practice of social science in the wake of big data tools.
- Analyze how “datification” is altering society’s ontological expectations.
- Evaluate how predictive analytics is changing mass communication.
- Debate the ethics of individual privacy vs. data surveillance.

### Required Textbooks

Kitchin, R. (2014). *The data revolution: Big data, open data, data infrastructures and their consequences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN: 978-1446287484 (online: [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9781446287484) or [Barnes & Noble](https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-data-revolution-robert-kitchin/1129114462)). This book offers a broad overview of the subject from an academic perspective.

Tucker, P. (2014). *The naked future: What happens in a world that anticipates your every move?* New York, NY: Current. ISBN: 978-1591845867 (online: [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9781591845867) or [Barnes & Noble](https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-naked-future-peter-tucker/1129114462)). This popular-press book sees predictive analytics in a hopeful light.

## ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

### Tentative Schedule

Date	Topic	Analysis Papers	Final Paper
January 12	1. Overview: The Big Data Era		
January 19	(No class; MLK Jr. Day)		
January 26	2. Overview: Parsing “Big Data”		
February 2	3. Overview: The Practice of Big Data	Paper 1	
February 9	4. Overview: Skepticism and Boosterism	Paper 2	
February 16	5. Overview: Privacy and Ethics	Paper 3	
February 23	6. Research: Social Science	Paper 4	
March 2	(No class; spring break)		
March 9	7. Research: Big Data as a Method	Paper 5	
March 16	8. Research: Big Data as a Topic	Paper 6	
March 23	9. Media: Personalized Advertising	Paper 7	
March 30	10. Media: Mass Communication	Paper 8	
April 6	11. Media: Social Media & Networks	Paper 9	Draft due noon Friday, April 3
April 13	12. Society: Governing	Paper 10	
April 20	13. Society: Social good	Paper 11	Final due noon Friday, April 24

### Readings

Readings for each week of the semester are available from the course page on Canvas.

**About the Canvas links.** Some are for PDFs you can download from Canvas. Most are to external websites. A primary source for news stories about big data is the *New York Times*, for which you can get a free (web and smartphone) [subscription](#) as a UF student and thus avoid monthly article limits. All links were working as of January 1. Please let me know if one becomes broken.

**About the readings.** Traditionally, graduate course are built on scholarly textbooks and research. But the field of big data is so new that little academic work has been published. The Kitchin text is the only academic work in this field I know of (fortunately, it is a good one). Some peer-reviewed research has been published, and *Big Data and Society* journal started in 2014. Yet too much of the work so far has merely equated “big data” with “Twitter.” So I have selected some of the better journal articles across a variety of social science disciplines and supplemented those with news stories, essays, blogs and the *Naked Future* book.

**Keep up with the readings.** Each week’s readings should take about no more than eight to ten hours. I will call on you in class with the expectation that you have read all the assignments. However, circumstances may arise that keep you from completing the reading. In that case, you get one “free pass” during the semester. To claim it, email me ahead of class so I won’t call on you. But do come to class.

Because the two assigned texts are overviews, they are to be read by our second class meeting, on January 26. (UF is closed on January 19.)

**Assignments**

**Analysis Papers (30%).** These are single-page (roughly 250 to 300 words) papers that analyze the assigned readings for the week. Because brevity is prized, you may wish write two pages and then condense to one. To save space, informal citations (“Smith noted ...”) are sufficient; skip a reference list. The analysis does not have to touch on each reading but it does have to offer insight; a mere summary is worth only 50%. These are due at the start of each class on paper. Eleven are assigned per the schedule above; the top 10 count. (This allows you to skip a week in case you claim a “free pass” from the readings or cover an absence.) The grading rubric:

	<b>Excellent (A) 100-90</b>	<b>Very Good (B) 89-80</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory (C) &lt;80</b>
Analysis and insight (80%)	Offers scholarly insight in at least three of the readings by critically evaluating a theme or by comparing and contrasting readings while offering an alternative argument.	Offers some insight in at least three of the readings by critically evaluating a theme or by comparing and contrasting readings while offering an alternative argument.	Fails to offer insight beyond the obvious or merely summarizes the readings.
Writing (20%)	Writing is lucid, engaging and easy to follow through precise syntax and superior usage of grammar, punctuation and spelling.	Writing is understandable via clear syntax; the relatively few grammar, punctuation or spelling errors do not impede clarity.	Writing is difficult to follow due to garbled syntax or numerous errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

**Class Presentation (15%).** By yourself or with a partner, offer a roughly 20-minute presentation involving fresh material (beyond the assigned readings) on the week’s topic. Don’t just lecture; engage the class in some way. If you use a PowerPoint or Prezi, don’t just read the slides; make the presentation visually interesting with minimum words. The grading rubric:

	<b>Excellent (A) 100-90</b>	<b>Very Good (B) 89-80</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory (C) &lt;80</b>
Content (75%)	Fresh material offers scholarly insight that truly teaches by amplifying or expanding our understanding of the weekly topic.	Fresh material offers some insight into the topic beyond the assigned readings.	Material offers little insight beyond the assigned readings.
Presentation (25%)	Presenters (1) engage the class; (2) use visuals or handouts effectively; (3) speak clearly and with minimal use of notes.	Two of the three met.	One of the three met.

**Class Contribution (15%).** This is a graduate seminar on a new topic being defined in real time. Therefore, you are part of the instruction for this class! The grade will be based on the quality and quantity of contributions based on your own weekly research into the topic. The grading rubric:

	<b>Excellent (A) 100-90</b>	<b>Very Good (B) 89-80</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory (C) &lt;80</b>
Quality (60%)	Meaningful insight that adds significantly to class discussion offered via personal research.	Insight that adds to class discussion offered via personal research.	Material offers little insight beyond the assigned readings.
Quantity (40%)	Fresh contributions made 75% of the time.	Fresh contributions made 50% of the time.	Fresh contributions made less than 50% of the time.

**Research Paper (40%).** This paper examines an aspect of big data. For master's students, the paper is an extended literature review of about 10 double-spaced pages (not counting a title page, abstract and references). For doctoral students, this will be the shell (introduction through methods section) of a research paper of about 15 double-spaced pages (not counting a title page, abstract and references) for which you plan to collect data at a later date. A draft is due by email at noon Friday, April 3, so I can offer feedback. The grade will be based on the final version due at noon Friday, April 24, uploaded to Canvas. Use an academic style: APA, Chicago or Bluebook.

The grading rubric for a master's student:

	<b>Excellent (A) 100-90</b>	<b>Very Good (B) 89-80</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory (C) &lt;80</b>
Topic (60%)	Paper addresses a vital scholarly question or issue and offers a thesis that is both clearly articulated and thought-provoking.	Paper addresses a scholarly question or issue and offers a thesis that is either clearly articulated or thought-provoking.	Paper either fails to address a scholarly question, or offers a thesis that is neither clearly articulated nor thought-provoking.
Sourcing (20%)	Paper cites 25 sources, 10 of which are from academic journals, and uses them to support and illuminate the paper's thesis.	Paper cites 20 sources, 10 of which are from academic journals, and uses them to support and illuminate the paper's thesis.	Paper cites fewer than 20 sources or fewer than 10 from academic journals, or fails to use sources in support of the paper's thesis.
Writing (15%)	Writing is lucid, engaging and easy to follow through explicit and logical topic sentences, precise syntax and superior usage of grammar, punctuation and spelling.	Writing is understandable via explicit topic sentences and clear syntax; the relatively few grammar, punctuation or spelling errors do not impede clarity.	Writing is difficult to follow due to garbled syntax or numerous errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
Style (5%)	Consistently follows an academic style.	Mostly follows an academic style.	Academic style is lacking or is noticeably inconsistently.

The grading rubric for a doctoral student:

	<b>Excellent (A) 100-90</b>	<b>Very Good (B) 89-80</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory (C) &lt;80</b>
Topic (60%)	Paper addresses a vital scholarly question or issue in a manner likely to be accepted at a conference once data are collected.	Paper addresses a vital scholarly question or issue and offers a thesis that is both clearly articulated and thought-provoking.	Paper either fails to address a vital scholarly question, or offers a thesis that is neither clearly articulated nor thought-provoking.
Sourcing (20%)	Paper cites 25 academic sources, most of which are from top journals, and uses them to support and illuminate the paper's thesis.	Paper cites 25 academic sources from peer-reviewed journals, and uses them to support and illuminate the paper's thesis.	Paper cites fewer than 25 academic sources or fails to use sources in support of the paper's thesis.
Writing (15%)	Writing is lucid, engaging and easy to follow through explicit and logical topic sentences, precise syntax and superior usage of grammar, punctuation and spelling.	Writing is understandable via explicit topic sentences and clear syntax; the relatively few grammar, punctuation or spelling errors do not impede clarity.	Writing is difficult to follow due to garbled syntax or numerous errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
Style (5%)	Consistently follows an academic style.	Mostly follows an academic style.	Academic style is lacking or is noticeably inconsistently.

**Assignment Weighting**

Analysis papers .....	30%
Class presentation .....	15%
Class contribution .....	15%
Research Paper .....	40%

**Grading Scale**

A	100 to 90
B+	89 to 87
B	86 to 83
B-	82 to 80

Grades are based on results, not effort. Details can be found in rubrics in this syllabus. Consult the UF graduate school catalog for details about the [grading policy](#).

**THE FINE PRINT**

**Attendance**

Punctual attendance is expected of graduate students unless an absence is allowed under UF [policy](#). If you are going to be absent, let me know ahead of time.

**Academic Integrity**

UF students live by an honor code that prohibits academic dishonesty such as (but not limited to) cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, engaging in unauthorized collaboration, reusing your master’s thesis or a paper from another class, writing a similar paper for two classes, drawing too heavily on another’s work for your own, and having someone else write your paper.

Be aware of the UF graduate school [academic honesty policy](#) as well the one in the college’s Doctoral Handbook. Students have an affirmative obligation to know what is in the handbook and to abide by it. The handbook includes a detailed description of plagiarism, copies of which are available in Chinese, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, and Spanish. If you are unsure of citation rules or what requires attribution, ask me *before* turning in a paper. Ignorance is not an excuse.

My default practice for an academic integrity violation is a failing grade for the course and to recommend the student be removed from the graduate program.

**Students with Disabilities**

If you would benefit from disability-related accommodations, contact the [Disability Resource Center](#) as early in the semester as possible. The center will provide documentation so appropriate accommodations can be made. The center is in Reid Hall, 392-8565.

**Help with Coping**

The UF [Counseling and Wellness Center](#) is a terrific, free resource for any student who could use help managing stress or coping with life. The center, at 3190 Radio Road on campus, is open for

appointments and emergency walk-ins from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To make an appointment or receive after-hours assistance, call 352-392-1575.

The UF Police can be reached at 392-1111 or, in an emergency, by dialing 911.

### **Course Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online [evaluations](#). You will be notified by email when the evaluations are open, near the end of the semester. Summary [results](#) are available to you and the general public.