

Social Media & Society

Spring 2015

Instructor: Matthew Cretul, M.A.M.C.
Room: Weimer Hall G030
Periods: M/W/F period 4 (10:40-11:30)
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Required Text

We'll be using a smaller paperback book this semester. It will be the basis for a number of quizzes throughout the semester, as well as the final paper:

Title: *#digitalvertigo: How Today's Online Social Revolution Is Dividing, Diminishing, and Disorienting Us*

Author: Andrew Keen

ISBN: 1429940964

Note

If you'd like to purchase electronic versions of the book through Amazon or Google for your Kindle, smart phone, or laptop, that will be fine. I simply ask you show me your e-copies of the book sometime before the second week of classes.

Additional Readings

Some weeks we will not be using the textbook, and instead you will read a set number of news articles, opinion columns, or other outside materials. These will be posted on the course site on Sakai. On those weeks they will be the basis for the quiz, not the books.

Course Description

In 2012, Facebook reported that it had passed the 1 billion mark for actively monthly users. To put that in perspective, that's about one out of every seven people on planet Earth. That's 1/7 of the Earth entering into a system that connects, in some way, with everyone else. That's 1/7 of Earth sharing photos, posting status updates, telling people where they are, and building an online identity. All of the stuff being made, sent out, and read on these social networks is what we're going to call "social media." This amazing stuff – social media – has been used for overthrowing oppressive dictators. But it's also changed every aspect of how we think of privacy and culture. It is, like everything else us humans create, as good or evil as we make it.

The purpose of this class will be to explore and discuss the ups and downs of all this business of being connected. The key question this class will address is this: Ultimately, is increased use of social media making society better? Or is it making it worse? But here's the trick. This is a question without a decisive answer.

By the end of this course, you will be asked to take your own stab at an answer, backing it up with support from authors we read, as well as other readings and videos from the class.

Course Objectives

The objectives of the course are as follows:

Discuss the societal implications of the growth of social media, including:

- Defining social media
- Our culture
- Cooperation
- Privacy
- Journalism
- Business and Media
- Politics
- Democracy
- Sports and Entertainment
- Health

Course Policies

1. **Attendance.** I will take attendance the first three class meetings. Students who miss both of the first two class meetings after they've added the class will be administratively dropped. For the remainder of the semester, I will not take attendance every day. However, there is a good chance that something brought up in lecture may find its way onto the quizzes. If you miss lecture because of an unexcused absence, and in the process miss points on a quiz because you didn't get the material; that will be on you. If you miss a class due to illness or emergency, it is – your – responsibility to obtain notes from someone else in the class and make sure you know about announcements of assignments, etc., made in class. Under most circumstances, you will not be able to make up quizzes, though I will drop the lowest quiz grade. (So don't skip class – you might need that dropped quiz score for a time when you're actually sick).

2. **Class participation.** This class is designed around discussion, so it's important that everyone discusses. That means you need to read any assigned sections of the books, or the readings posted on Sakai, before the class period. That also means you need to pay attention in class while I am presenting on a topic. You will be allowed to use a laptop, tablet or smartphone in this course because of the nature of the stuff we're talking about, but please stay focused on the topic at hand. Some ground rules for debate: You must be respectful at all times. That means be respectful to me and be respectful to the other students. It's unlikely that we'll all agree on opinionated topics, and debate is going to be encouraged, but debates must be kept civil. No name-calling, no yelling, no getting personal, and no sarcasm. If you have a point to bring up, bring it up. Don't be afraid to challenge the readings or interject with something else you found. Also, don't be afraid to derail the topic, as long as the topic you'd like to discuss is relevant to the nature of the class. While I may respectfully ask that we stay on our original topic, I'll make a note to come back to that topic later. If, for some reason, I cannot see your hand raised for discussion, just shout it out. I won't be mad at you. I promise.

3. **Flexibility.** I believe the semester plan outlined in the calendar is realistic. Nonetheless, I reserve the right to adjust the course content based on the class's collective ability to maintain pace and the needs of guest speakers. Any official changes to the plan will be posted in the "Announcements" section of the Sakai site, and an e-mail will be sent out to the Listserv. This means it is your responsibility to check the Sakai site and your e-mail on a regular basis. "I didn't get the e-mail!" will not be accepted as an excuse.

4. **Behavior.** During the course of the semester, we will have guest speakers visit our class either in person or via the Web. I expect you to show them the utmost respect and courtesy. In addition, you will be required to show your fellow classmates appropriate respect at all times. You will be asked to leave class, and face a possible grade reduction, if you engage in any rude or aggressive behavior toward guest speakers, classmates, or the instructor. This counts for interactions in-person and online. Students will be expected to participate in class discussions, turn off all cell phones BEFORE class starts. Be on time for class. If you miss in class quizzes, or are late, you will be penalized.

5. **Contacting me.** The best way to ask a general question about the course is by posting the question on the "General Questions" area of the forum on the course website. That way, my answer can be seen by a lot of people, as you were most likely not the only person to think of the question. If your question is specific to you, or concerns an issue with your grade, please e-mail me at the address listed on the top of this syllabus. You can also contact me on Twitter @CretulTweets, but not about grades or personal issues.

Grades:

Your grade in this course will be the result of four different items. Below I will give a brief overview of what those four items will be. **These are not the specific instructions. As the deadlines for the larger items, such as the written argument, get closer, I will post a more detailed overview of each assignment on the course website.**

Weekly Quizzes: Beginning week 2, we will have small quizzes every week, with the deadline set at 5 p.m. Saturday. The quizzes will be about 10 multiple-choice questions or two or three very short essay questions. The questions will come directly from the readings assigned that week, regardless if the readings were from the books or links to news stories.

Some of the questions may also come from discussions that arise during class. The quizzes will be posted on the Sakai site by 5 p.m. Wednesday each week. The quiz will be locked after the Saturday, 5 p.m. deadline. Your quiz grades will be averaged together to form your one quiz grade.

Topic Presentation: As a class, you will be assigned into seven different groups of five people. Your groups will be assigned a basic theme from a given week. You will be asked to do a 50-minute presentation (roughly 10 minutes per team member) in lecture and assemble a 3.5 page draft describing what you presented. What you present is your decision, but it should be on the topic of that given week (Such as social media and health, twitter and politics, sports and social media, etc.) and the work of the entire team should mesh together into one coherent presentation. Each member of the team should contribute a half page to the written draft. Your grade will be determined on both an individual rubric and a team participation rubric.

Social Media Diary: Each student will be randomly assigned a week during the semester where you will be tasked to keep track of your social media use. You will take personal notes of how long you use social media, what kinds of social media you use, when you use it, and what kinds of people you interact with. You will condense down each of your day's notes into a few short paragraphs and post them on the course website. Each day's diary entry needs to be posted by 11:59 p.m. The week will begin on Sunday. You will post six daily diary entries. On the seventh day, the Saturday of your week, you will post a short, three to five paragraph reflection entry that sums up what you've learned from the process of recording your social media use.

Argument Paper: This will be your final assignment in the class, and will act as the "final exam." You will be asked to write a 3-page to 5-page argument paper. You will answer the following question in your allotted space: "[AUTHOR] is [CORRECT/INCORRECT] about [TOPIC] because . . ." You will use quotes from the textbook, the other textbook, online news articles, other books, studies, etc., to back up your original claim. There is almost no decisive correct answer to your statement, so you will have to form your own answer and back it up with proof in the form of at least five outside sources. You will be asked to use some form of citation while writing, be it MLA, APA, or Chicago, but that choice is yours.

Grading: Grades will be determined as follows:
Collective Weekly Quiz Average (Lowest dropped) = **30%**
Topic Presentation = **20%**
Collective Media Diary = **15%**
Final Argument Paper = **35%**

There might be opportunities for extra credit later in the semester. However, you should not rely on them for your grade. I do not use minus grades, only plus grades. I'd rather give the extra points as a bonus as opposed to using decreased points as a punishment. However, I do not round grades. The mathematical percentage you receive will be the grade you receive.

The scale will be as follows:
A = 90% to 100%
B = 80% to 86.9% B+ = 87% to 89.9%
C = 70% to 76.9% C+ = 77% to 79.9%
D = 60% to 66.9% D+ = 67% to 69.9%
E = 59.9% or lower

You can check how letter grades relate to grade points assigned at this website:
<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>

Course Evaluation. Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu> Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>

The University of Florida Honor Code was voted on and passed by the Student Body in the Fall 1995 semester. The Honor Code reads as follows:

Preamble: In adopting this Honor Code, the students of the University of Florida recognize that academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students who enroll at the University commit to holding themselves and their peers to the high standard of honor required by the Honor Code. Any individual who becomes aware of a violation of the Honor Code is bound by honor to take corrective action. A student-run Honor Court and faculty support are crucial to the success of the Honor Code. The quality of a University of Florida education is dependent upon the community acceptance and enforcement of the Honor Code.

The Honor Code: "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity."

On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied:

"On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

For more information about academic honesty, contact Student Judicial Affairs, P202 **Peabody Hall, 392-1261**.

Disability Awareness. Students with Disabilities who may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to notify the instructor and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) so that reasonable accommodations may be implemented. DRC is located in room 001 in Reid Hall or you can contact them by phone at 352-392-8565. University counseling services and mental health services: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx> or via telephone at 352-392-1575.