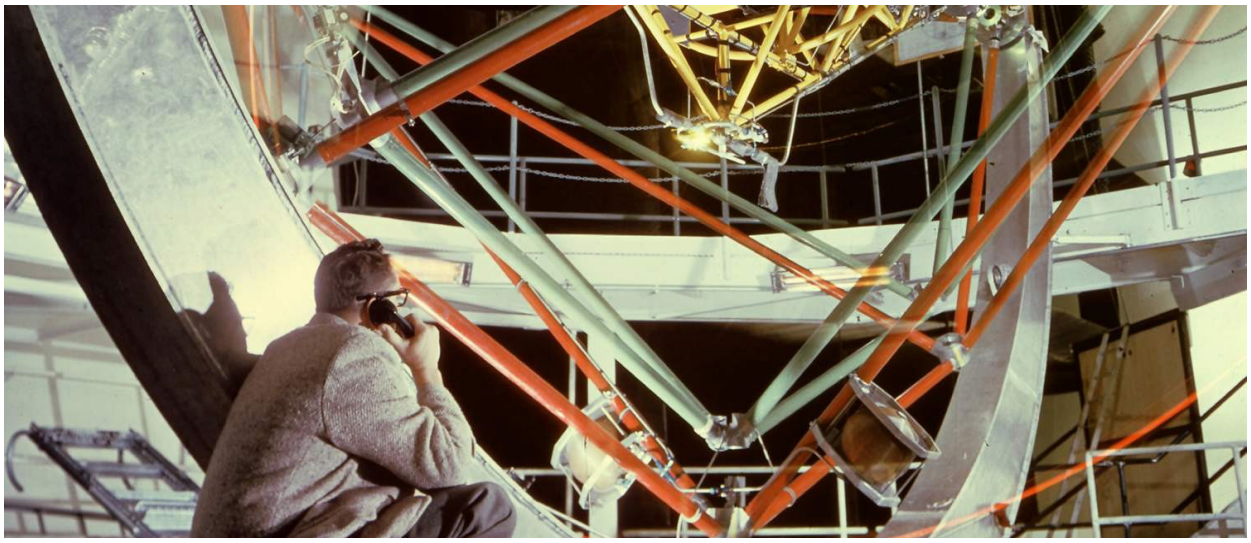
COM 355 Digital Media Futures Outline and Syllabus



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Hours: WF 11:30-12:30 pm;
Classroom:
Term: Fall 2025 (F2025)

Course Description

Digital Media Futures is a comprehensive third-year course designed to explore new digital media technologies. The course covers the evolution of digital media from the emergence of the web GUI interface and HTML in 1991 to current technologies like Generative AI (GenAI) and Extended Reality (XR). Students will engage with critical readings, participate in discussions, and complete projects to understand technological advancements and cultural shifts in digital media.

General Objectives

Writing and speaking with each other share many meaningful common qualities, not just in relation to language, but also in the fact that they are both technologies in the service of communication. We can view them as active technical modes of communication, as well as methodologies for organizing our thoughts. The shift from analogue to digital media over the past 70 years has possibly intensified this relationship between communication and technology. Programmers have created numerous coding languages to power increasingly complex software, while users now have diverse ways to communicate using combinations of imagery, text, and sound. This digital transformation has revealed new epistemological capacities and functionalities in texts that were unimaginable in the print era. With the advent of Generative AI (GenAI), many professionals now believe that even human consciousness must be reconceptualized in terms of digital media. Our course will explore what it means to use language and texts as computational tools that shape our ever-evolving digital environment.

Learning Objectives: By the end of this course, students will:

- Be familiar with an extended history of writing technologies, emphasizing digital texts and computational devices.
- Be able to identify, describe, and evaluate key characteristics of media and representation as distinct tools and technologies to help us both understand and interact with the physical world.
- Be acquainted with key historical examples, as well as relevant theoretical issues and debates in digital media, beginning with cybernetics, hypertext theory, hypertext fiction, digital art, and contemporary gaming discourses.
- Develop digital media reading and writing techniques through hands-on learning
- Develop a multimedia digital research project, encompassing all stages of production, from brainstorming to presenting the final product.

Assignment	Description	Course Value
Participation	Active engagement in class discussions and activities	**10 marks**
Reading Response Forums	Two Forums drafted in class with live Discuss & Response sessions. Each Forum will be worth 5 marks and will typically follow from an assigned reading.	**10 marks**
Data Self-Portrait	Creative project representing personal data visually	**5 marks**
Using GenAI tool to create Apps	Coding exercise using Agentic GenAI to produce new app	**5 marks**
AI Book Production	Collaborative project using AI tools to produce a digital book	**5 marks**
Investigative Study	Short Research Paper on Playing "*Obduction*"	**10 marks**
Interactive Story	Creation of an interactive narrative using Twine software	**20 marks**
Final Research Project	**Interactive Media Project:** • Group Deliverables Distribute • GitHub repository Artist statement • IMP Process Book • Oral/Recorded presentation of research findings to the class	**5 marks** **5 marks** **5 marks** **5 marks**
Final Exam	**Blue Book In-class**	**15 marks**
Total Course	**Sum of all assignments**	**100 marks**

Readings

1. Lisa Gitleman. “Introduction: Media as Historical Subjects.” From *Always Already New*. MIT Press. 2006.
2. Kevin Roose. “A Conversation With Bing’s Chatbot Left Me Deeply Unsettled.” NYT Feb. 16, 2023. (Updated Feb. 17, 2023.

Games

Robert Kurvitz. *Disco Elysium*. Developer: ZA/UM. October 15, 2019.
Rand Miller/ Robyn Miller. *“Obduction.*” August 24, 2016.

Course Policies

Punctuality, Participation, and Attendance

Each weekly in-class session offers students multiple opportunities to discuss and explore course-relevant topics through individual input and group debate. This participation is worth **10 marks** and will be assessed based on the frequency and relevance of each contribution. My teaching approach emphasizes student-led learning, encouraging you to lead discussions as often as I do. Feel free to introduce material and ideas you believe are relevant to the topic at hand. Independent student-led seminars can be scheduled one week in advance upon request. Attendance is expected for every class. Absences due to illness must be confirmed by email at least **4 hours** before class to avoid penalty. In-class activities and general participation account for **10 marks**, based on the frequency, relevance, and quality of your comments, questions, and observations. More than six **unexcused absences (3 weeks of the curriculum)** will result in automatic course failure. Excessive unexcused lateness of 20 minutes or more throughout the course will be considered one absence. Students who expect to miss classes or exams due to religious observances or athletic events must submit a written list of dates to be missed by the end of the second week of classes. Students are expected to make up missed work.

- **If you cannot attend class for any reason other than a physical illness, please notify me at least one day in advance to allow me to prepare alternative access to the material.**
- **Requests for extra time on individual assignments must be submitted in writing (individual emails are fine) at least one week (7 days) before the due date.**
- **For timely assistance, schedule reviews of assignment drafts or requests for assignment-specific advice at least nine days before the due date.**

While alternative submission options for late assignments and extra course material will be provided for each graded task, late assignments and missed classes outside these guidelines will incur penalties. Late assignments will incur a 10% reduction in the task's course value up to 1 week after submission, a 20% reduction from 8 days to 2 weeks after the due date, and a 50% reduction from 15 days to 4 weeks after the due date. Assignments more than 4 weeks late will not be accepted. Late assignments will not receive supplementary commentary beyond their graded evaluation. Following proper communication guidelines helps minimize grading penalties

and ensures you receive critical feedback. Compromising your access to resources, including time needed for assignments, can seriously hinder your ability to learn the skills and approaches required for understanding the course material. This remains a significant risk throughout the term. Informing me early about any challenges you face will allow me to work with you more effectively and prevent the coursework from overwhelming you. Losing access to course materials and instructor assistance significantly increases the risk of withdrawal or failure in the course. Success in this course requires consistent access to and proper use of electronic resources. As a student, you are responsible for maintaining this access, as we assume these resources are available 24/7. If you encounter technical problems with the software or any specific interface during the course, please contact either the professor or one of the IT/Help resources associated with the website promptly.

Course Policy on AI Content Generators for Writing Assignments

Writing practices are being drastically transformed by advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI productivity (e.g. ChatGPT, Grammarly, etc.) are acceptable and in some cases encouraged for use in this course with the following guidelines:

- **Completely AI-generated texts *cannot* be submitted as original work for assessment. However, AI content generators are encouraged for earlier drafts. Learners are expected to revise and submit an original draft for final assessment.**
- **If you work with a genAI tool, like OpenAI's ChatGPT or Claude's Sonnet, please provide the following details on a separate page with your assignment:**

    1. **Name of AI content generator used.**
    2. **Prompt or prompts submitted to the AI content generator along with date the generator was used.**

The following is the current 15-week schedule for COM 355 Digital Media Futures.

Grading Profile						
A= 90-100	**B+**= 86-89	**B**= 75-85	**C+**= 70-74	**C**= 60-69	**D**= 50-59	**F**=0–49

Please note that this schedule is subject to change depending on the progress of the course and classwork.

Course Syllabus and Schedule

Week	Topics	Assignments
Week 1 **Sept. 3-5**	**Introduction to Digital Media** • Overview of course objectives and expectations. Questions and possible changes to syllabus	**Wednesday/Friday:** Read the syllabus I hand out on Wednesday and have a few comments or questions ready for Friday. This assignment typically gives us a chance to discuss broader areas of focus and argument to be built together over the next 14 weeks.
Week 2 **Sept. 10-12**	**Technology and Epistemology** • Media Databases and 2000 years of Media Development: Do these factors affect our concept of knowledge and how we use it?	**Wednesday:** Early In class dialogue about why organized databases are so important to building knowledge **Friday: Reading Response Forum #1** Read L. Gitelman Intro to *Always Already New*. Discussion Question will be **provided (Due Week 3)**
Week 3 **Sept. 17-19**	**The Digital Epoch: 1960-2022** **Hypertext and Digital Networks:** • Early Visions of Digital Media and Information Organization • The rise of the "Web" and User Generated Content	**Wednesday**: **Reading Response Forum #1 Due** **Friday: Data Self-Portraits Assigned:** How does data help us understand who we are? **(Due week 5)**
Week 4 **Sept. 24-26**	**Digital Creativity: Interactivity and Digital Storytelling** • Social Media and Interactive Game Studies.	**Wednesday:** Assign in-class participatory play Review of **Disco Elysium** and Individual "playing/reading" of **Obduction** **Friday:** Class Session Play Review of **Obduction**
Week 5 **Oct. 1-3**	**Twine Workshop: Working with Interactive Tools** • Non-linear narrative planning and incorporating advanced multimodal tools.	**Wednesday:** Data-Portraits due **Friday:** Twine Workshop and Building Interactive Stories and Assign **Twine Interactive Story** (TIS) concept pitch **(due Week 6)**

Week	Topics	Assignments
Week 6 **Oct. 8-10**	**Generative Systems Epoch 2017/23-Present Day** **Introduction to Generative AI** • Basics of artificial intelligence and machine learning • Early applications of GenAI in digital media **Generative AI in Content Creation** • Human in the Loop: An Introduction to Cybernetics **Generative AI and Interactive Media** • Gaming as a Model for an Interactive System • Class Workshop Using "Disco Elysium" and "Obduction"	**Wednesday: Forum #2 Reading Response** Discussion on Societal Impacts of GenAI: Kevin Roose and Early Sycophantic Chants. "A Conversation With Bing's Chatbot Left Me Deeply Unsettled." NYT Article **(Due Week 8)** **Friday:** TIS Concept Pitch due/Twine Workshop
Week 7 **Oct. 15-17**		**Wednesday: Experiment with GenAI for Twine Stories** **Friday: Reading Response #2 Due**
Week 8 **Oct. 22-24**		**Wednesday: Gaming Workshop with Disco Elysium** **Friday: Investigative Papers on Assigned Game (Due week 11)**
Week 9 **Oct.29-31**	**Working with Agentic GenAI** • Introduce Replit/Agentic Coding using GenAI	**Wednesday: Discussion on Gaming Narrative:** Vibe Coding app assigned: **(due week 12)** **Friday: Reading Response Forum #2 Due**
Week 10 **Nov. 5-7**	**Ethics and Societal Impacts of GenAI** • Potential societal impacts of widespread GenAI	**Wednesday: Twine Workshop** **Friday: Twine Stories Due for Final Assessment; Vibe Coding app also due**

Week	Topics	Assignments
Week 11 **Nov. 12-14**	**Immersive Art and Digital Media: Reality and Media Convergence** • Living in a Media System: Cybernetics in the 21st Century	**Wednesday:** AI Book Production Introduced **(Due Week 13)** **Friday:** Final Interactive Media Project Introduced: Project Tracks and Groups Formed; deliverables distributed **(Due Week 15)** **Investigative Papers on *Obduction* Due**
Week 12 **Nov. 19-21**	**Introduction to Extended Reality (XR) Visit XR Labs** • Simulation and Extended Reality Strengths and Issues	**Wednesday:** IMP Workshop in GitHub repository Artist and Technical statement produced in READ ME (500 words) **Friday: XR Labs Visit**
Week 13 **Nov. 26**	**The Convergence of GenAI and XR** • Can AI, VR and blockchain technology transform STEM?	**Wednesday**: IMP Process Book (5 pages) showing research, sketches, tests, failures, code snippets, diagrams, playtest data, iteration notes. Include aesthetic and craft reflections. **Friday: AI Book due**
Week 14 **Dec. 3-5**	**p(doom) or p(evolve)?** • GAI software is more than just another set of media tools, since they also function as a means for organizing people and their social relations. Have we made ourselves obsolete?	**Wednesday and Friday**: In-class IMP Presentation (7 minutes + 3 min for Q&A)
Week 15 **Dec. 10** **Exam Week**	**Course Wrap-up and Final Presentations (Last Class)**	**Wednesday:** Demo Video Groups will show core loops, affordances, and a brief “why it matters.” **TBA**