

HSS 404:033 - The Social Media Dilemma



Spring 2025

T/TH 8:30-9:50 – CKB 106

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Office & Hours:

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M & W by appt

Course Description

How do we experience the digital world? How are those experiences different from the *analog* world? The physical or empirical world? Which is the “real” world? How does our experience with the digital change based on who we are and where we live? This course introduces concepts and methods drawn from sociology to analyze humans and/in digital environments, with a particular focus on social media. By learning about theory and case studies of current events, we will investigate privacy, identity, work, law, and justice as they become intertwined with digital technology. In addition, as part of the university-wide VITAL Active Learning Initiative, this class will feature immersive and collaborative assignments as follows:

Our semester is divided into several modules organized by specific outcomes. In two of these modules, students collaborate in groups to develop either a podcast episode or an audio/visual learning and information guide. Students will listen to and review each other’s work, and the content creators will be required to reflect on their collaborative and individual process, as well as their own final product. In Project Module 1, students investigate core concepts of digital sociology, design ethics, and current policy debates about social media. In Module 2, students explore data, algorithms, information, and surveillance. Research, writing, and presentation work in this course ranges from analysis of current headlines and ethical concerns to the tasks and issues facing the developers and administrators of social media.

Prerequisites for this class include completion of the GUR in English (3 credits), Cultural History (6 credits), Basic -Social Sciences (6 credits) and either the Lit/Hist/Phil/STS (3 credits) or the Open Elective in Humanities and Social Science (3 credits).

Required Texts and Course Materials to Purchase

1. **Video:** Black Mirror, Season 3, Episode 1, "Nosedive" on Netflix or available for purchase on [Amazon Prime](#)

All other texts have been made available on Canvas, and are organized by date. Should you need to access an article from *The New York Times*, [you can create an account through Van Houten Library](#).

Recording audio and/or video will be a required part of this course. Your group can determine the best tools and/or programs for recording, editing, and producing content. Two options we will discuss during the first weeks of the semester include Audacity and VoiceThread. Familiarize yourself with these options by reviewing them here: <https://www.audacityteam.org/> and here: <https://voicethread.com/>.

Ongoing Course Objectives

- Demonstrate an understanding of disciplinary theories that emerge through course notes/instruction and course readings
- Demonstrate eventual proficiency with core concepts in the sociology of technology, and their application to the building of technology infrastructure and the development of law and policy.
- Demonstrate improvement with this analysis over the course of the semester by responding effectively to instructor feedback and directives.
- Demonstrate proficiency with information literacy by producing multi-layered, bibliographic research components in Module Presentations ("episodes" or "guides"),
- Demonstrate consistent engagement with classmates and the professor through team collaboration on episodes/guides
- Demonstrate leadership and initiative capabilities by facilitating conversations within collaborative groups, responding effectively to classmates and delegating or dividing tasks effectively and efficiently
- Demonstrate meaningful and impactful reflection of finished products by providing effective peer and self-review

Coursework Overview

Class Meetings: This class meets face-to-face on Tuesday and Thursday at 8:30 AM. Classwork is part of each lecture and discussion session. To complete the activity for credit, **your presence is required**. Classwork activities cannot be made up, but the lowest score will be removed from the final average.

In weeks 3-5 of a project cycle, students will collaborate to determine topics, divide research tasks, and create content. Meetings are flexible and can include alternate locations. Options and procedures for determining meeting locations and checking in with Dr. Hunt will be discussed during week 1 of our course.

Project Module Schedule Guidelines

Weeks 1-2: Content Introduced. Formal, structured class meetings include traditional lecture and discussion. Core content (theory, readings, etc) that will be central to the groups' episode/guide will be introduced.

Week 3-4: Initial Team Collaboration & Pitch Meeting. Groups meet using classroom or alternate space to determine a topic and plan preliminary bibliographic research. During weeks 2-3, groups meet with Dr. Hunt to pitch ideas and turn in required outlines and action plans.

Week 5-6: Share Findings. Groups meet independently to share findings and develop drafts. Formal, structured class meetings will include presentation of projects and class-wide reflection/assessment in final weeks of a project cycle.

Module Exams: Course content and reading will differ in each unit. It is imperative that students keep pace with the course reading / lesson schedule, as the units build upon each other. 2 exams will be administered to assess learning at the close of each module. They include multiple choice questions on the assigned readings, as well as short-answer questions demonstrating student's engagement with the assigned work. Critical feedback on these questions will direct students toward what he or she needs to focus on more specifically in preparation for future assignments. There will be NO final exam for this course.

*** Other Course Policies ***

Late assignments:

For **Module Projects**, completing tasks on time is essential. Your group is depending on your active and timely contributions to produce successful content by the end of the module. Task lists and outlines will be created during the "prep week" of each module, and will include group-determined deadlines. Self- and group-evaluation assessments will be completed by the end of each module, and will include an assessment of whether/how you have completed tasks on time. Rubrics for Module assessment include on-time completion of tasks, and will be worth 15%.

Projects submitted late will lose 1 grade point per day (ie from a B to a C). Work submitted 48 hours after the stated deadline **will receive NO credit**. If you do not receive a return receipt within four hours of sending projects, **it is your responsibility** to follow up and ensure your projects have been received.

Plagiarism, or presenting someone else's words, thoughts, or ideas - including LLM such as ChatGPT - as your own is cheating, and will not be tolerated. The NJIT Honor Code will be upheld, and any violations will be brought to the immediate attention of the Dean of Students. NJIT enforces strict academic integrity policies, and any plagiarized material **will** result in a failing grade for the assignment and possibly for the course. Academic probation and possible

suspension or expulsion from the university may also be pursued by NJIT administration in cases of plagiarism. **Three very important things to remember:**

- 1) Various plagiarism-detection tools are employed in this course.
- 2) There have been numerous cases of students attempting to submit papers written by students enrolled in earlier versions of this class. These students have received failing grades and academic probation – and the students supplying the papers have also been punished.
- 3) If you're struggling with the final project or concerned about these policies, I'm happy to work with you! Plagiarism is [not worth the risk to your future.](#)

Final Grade assessment formula:

Module Projects (see rubric breakdown for weight of individual components)	50%
Collaboration Assessment	15%
Final Project Reviews	10%
Exams	15%
Attendance and Participation	10%

Final Grade assignments:

A =89.6-100; B+=87-89.5; B =80-86.5; C+=77-79.5; C =69.5-76.5; D+ =66.5-69.5; D = 59.5-64.5; F =59.4 or below

Project 1: What's the Problem?

Introductory Week: Defining Topics and Active Learning

9/2: Introduction and Course Overview

9/4: Kennedy, Lawrence, Rountree, "[Social Media Regulation](#)"; Wynn-Williams, excerpts from [Careless People](#)

Project Cycle Week 1: Defining the Problem

9/9 – Lecture and Discussion

Readings:

- *The Daily*, "[Did AI Just Get Too Smart?](#)"
- Sherman, "[Supreme Court Avoids Ruling on Law Shielding Internet Companies from Being Sued for What Users Post](#)"

9/11 – Lecture and Discussion

Readings:

- Kramer et al, "[Experimental Evidence of Massive-Scale Emotional Contagion](#)"
- Reader, "[States Get Serious About Limiting Kids' Social Media Exposure](#)"
- People Make Games, "[How Roblox is Exploiting Young Game Developers](#)"

WEEK 2: Initial Team Collaboration

9/16 – Lecture and Discussion

- Module Project Overview
- Initial Team Meeting

Readings:

- Allen, Martell, et al, "[Birds of a Feather Don't Fact Check Each Other](#)"

9/18 – Flex Class: Brainstorm and Plan for Pitch Meeting

WEEK 3: Drafting

9/23 – Pitch Meeting Round 1 (schedule TBA)

9/25 – Pitch Meeting Round 2 (schedule TBA)

Task 1 Due by Friday, 9/26 at 5 PM

WEEK 4: Finalize and Publish

be prepared to accommodate a conference request this week

9/30 – Flex Class

- **Task 2 due by 10 AM**

10/2 – Flex Class

WEEK 5: Present Projects

10/7 – Lecture and Discussion

Presentations: Groups 1 and 2

10/9 – Lecture and Discussion

Presentation: Groups 3 and 4; Module 1 Review

All final versions of slides/projects due Friday, 10/10 by 5 PM

Exam 1, Part 1: October 14; Exam 1, Part 2: October 16

Project 2: Data & Surveillance

Project Cycle Week 1: Defining the Problem

10/21 – Lecture and Discussion

- Module Introduction and Project 2 Planning

Readings:

- Excerpts from [Unmasking AI](#)

10/23 – Lecture and Discussion

- Excerpt from Lupton's *Digital Sociology*
- Wieczorek, "[The Ethics of Self-Tracking](#)"

WEEK 2: Defining the Problem Cont'd

10/28 – Lecture and Discussion

- Carney, "[Leave No Dark Corner](#)"; Watch *Nosedive* prior to class

10/30 – Lecture and Discussion

- Dick, "[Autofac](#)";
- Ramanathan and Ramirez, "[Black Friday is a Trap](#)";

WEEK 3: Initial Team Collaboration

be prepared to accommodate a conference request this week

11/4: Flex Class

- Task 1 due by 10 AM

11/6: Flex Class

WEEK 4: Debrief & Review

11/11: Podcast planning share-out, podcasting best-practices, & exam review

11/13: **Exam 2**

WEEK 5: Plan and Record

be prepared to accommodate a conference request this week

11/18: Flex Class

11/20: Flex Class

11/25: UNIVERSITY FOLLOWS A THURSDAY SCHEDULE

Optional Conferences

FINAL WEEK: Present and Submit Projects

12/2: Episode Pitch: Groups 1-2

12/4: Episode Pitch: Groups 3-4

12/9: Project 2 Due