

CSCI 3907-11: Student-led Special Topics

Internet Sociology

General Information:

Course Facilitators: Grady McPeak & Marshall Thompson

Faculty Advisor: TBD

Credit Hours: 1

Semester: Spring 2023

Time: 11:10AM - 12:25PM

Location: Phillips 510

Seats: 15

CRN: 78022

Course Description:

It is not unreasonable to claim that the advent of the Internet has been the most impactful change to the way human communication works since the invention of the printing press. The Internet is everywhere; we are constantly engaging with it and interacting with each other through it. As a whole, communication is faster than ever.

However, a growing chorus of critics argue that in its current form, the Internet is degrading the *quality* of communication between people, both from political and interpersonal perspectives. What exactly are these arguments? What merit do they have? How should we, as computer scientists, react to these arguments? What would a better Internet look like?

This Socratic seminar is a tour through Internet sociology of the present as well as similar social critique of the past; throughout the semester, it will cover material from the fields of philosophy, cognitive science, economics, and political science. The goal of the course is to challenge students to think critically about their place in the world of computer science, and the responsibility that comes with specializing in such a revolutionary field of study.

Readings:

The discussed readings for this course will be excerpts from the following texts:

The Age of Surveillance Capitalism by Shoshana Zuboff, "Thinking and Moral Considerations" by Hannah Arendt, *The Shallows* by Nicholas Carr, *The Disinformation Age* edited by W. Lance Bennett & Steven Livingston, *Sad By Design* by Geert Lovink, *I and Thou* by Martin Buber, *One-Dimensional Man* by Herbert Marcuse, *The People's Platform* by Astra Taylor, and *Psychopolitics* by Byung-Chul Han

All texts will be available for free, either through Gelman Library or through PDFs provided by the instructors.

Course Schedule:

Week	Date	Discussed Reading(s)	Due
0	TBD	<i>The Shallows</i> , Ch. 6, 7. Syllabus, course expectations, and an overview of the semester's other readings. <i>The Social Dilemma</i> , a documentary (optional).	
1	TBD	<i>The Age of Surveillance Capitalism</i> , Ch. 2	
2	TBD	<i>The Age of Surveillance Capitalism</i> , Ch. 5	
3	TBD	<i>The Age of Surveillance Capitalism</i> , Ch. 10, 14	
4	TBD	<i>The Disinformation Age</i> , Ch. 1 - 2	
5	TBD	<i>The Disinformation Age</i> , Ch. 3, 6	
6	TBD	<i>The People's Platform</i> , Ch. 5	Précis 1
7	TBD	"Thinking and Moral Considerations"	
8	TBD	Selections from <i>Psychopolitics</i>	
9	TBD	<i>Sad By Design</i> , Ch. 4, 7	
10	TBD	<i>One-Dimensional Man</i> , Introduction to the first edition + Ch. 1	Précis 2
11	TBD	<i>One-Dimensional Man</i> , Ch. 2	
12	TBD	<i>One-Dimensional Man</i> , Ch. 3	
13	TBD	<i>I and Thou</i> , Pt. 1	Précis 3

Weekly Classes:

The class sessions will be discussions of the weekly readings and related ideas. The instructors will come to class every week with a set of questions related to specific key passages and ideas from the week's reading, in order to help guide the discussion.

Grading Policy:

The students' grade for the semester will be evaluated according to the following rubric:

Participation	25%
Précis 1	25%
Précis 2	25%

Précis 3	25%
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The grading policy places a heavy emphasis on regular class participation in order to incentivize the students to regularly keep up with the weekly readings and come to class prepared to contribute to class discussions in a meaningful way.

The Précis:

A précis is a short, concise, and *precise* paper about a very specific subject. In the context of this class, this will manifest as a 1-1.5 page paper about a topic or passage from the readings. Prompts will be provided by the instructors. In general, the goal of the précis is to encourage students to demonstrate a deep, thorough understanding of the ideas discussed in class as opposed to a more broad and vague one. A rubric for evaluating the précis will be provided.

Diversity and Inclusion:

It is our intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that the students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit.

We as the instructors believe that it is our responsibility to ensure that the discussion environment is as inclusive as possible and to discourage insensitivity towards people on the basis of gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture.

Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let us know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally, or for other students or student groups.

Communication with Course Staff:

Instructor names & emails:

Grady McPeak [gradymcpeak@gwu.edu]

Marshall Thompson [mdt_@gwu.edu]

Faculty advisor name & email:

TBD