







# COMM 7007: Social Mobilities



Fitchburg State University  
Communications Media Department  
MS in Applied Communication: Social Media  
Concentration  
GCE Online-Accelerated  
7 weeks, Tues 29 October—Tues 17 December 2024  
Instructor: Martin Roberts  
Syllabus  
 |  |  | 

## Overview

---

This seminar is an exploration of what it means to live with personal, portable, and hand-held media technologies. We will study these technologies across time and space by situating them within their historical contexts and by studying their use in various settings. We'll also employ a variety of theoretical frameworks and interdisciplinary approaches. Simultaneously, we will attempt to analyze and theorize our own handheld media experiences through and against the course readings.

## Objectives

---

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- analyze technologies past, present, and imagined
- describe the ways in which technologies shape our world the ways in which we shape those technologies
- explain how social media is a result of the intersection between technologies and existing human communication dynamics
- discuss how theory of technology and social media can improve the vocational outlook of a student
- play a productive role in and facilitate conversations that tease out the relationships between values and technology.
- through the skills you will refine in writing your research papers, clearly explain how a specific technology shapes the social world that we live in.

## Course Texts

---

Available as audiobooks (Audible) and ebooks (Kindle), as well as print.

**Kyle Chayka**, *Filterworld: How Algorithms Flattened Culture*. New York: Doubleday, 2024.

**Kate Eichhorn**, *Content*. Essential Knowledge Series. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022.



**Parmy Olson, Supremacy: AI, ChatGPT, and the Race that Will Change the World.** New York: MacMillan, 2024.

**Christine Lagorio-Chafkin, We Are the Nerds: The Birth and Tumultuous Life of Reddit, the Internet's Culture Laboratory.** New York: Hachette Books, 2018.

**Allissa V. Richardson, Bearing Witness While Black: African Americans, Smartphones, and the New Protest #Journalism.** Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Stefania Maurizi, **Secret Power: Wikileaks and Its Enemies.** Pluto Press, 2023.

---

## Documentaries

**Citizenfour** (2014)

**Risk** (2016)

**Super Pumped: The Battle for Uber** (Showtime, 2022)

**We Are Legion: The Story of the Hacktivists** (2012)

**WeWork: Or the Making and Breaking of a \$47 Billion Unicorn** (Hulu, 2021)

**Wikileaks: Secrets and Lies** (2011)

---

## Course Information

---

### Platforms

We'll be using Blackboard for submitting assignments ONLY. For discussion, we will be using [Discord](#).

On Discord, if you don't already have an account, please set one up using your Fitchburg State University email address as ID.

If you already have a Discord account there will be problems setting up an account for the course because each account has to be tied to a different phone number, so you will not be able to use your regular phone number for verification. For this reason, you may use your existing account, but if you use a pseudonym please let me know what this is so I know who you are!

Please be sure to check in to the site at least once daily M-F to check the Announcements page and the Discussion forum for the week.

---



## Assignments & Evaluation

---

### Review

6, weekly from Week 1, one short post responding to readings, 250 words (maximum), due by Sunday of each week (20%)

### Discord

Regular participation in weekly discussion and other channels (20%)

### Commentary papers

2 short analysis papers (500 words, 2 pages double-spaced) based on any of the reading assignments, due on Blackboard by end of Weeks 2 and 4 (Sunday) (20%)

### Book Report

Critical review (1,000 words, 4 pages double-spaced) of any text from the select bibliography. You are expected to read at least one additional chapter from any of the main course books. For texts scheduled in weeks 5-6, you'll need to read ahead. Due on Blackboard by Friday of Week 5 (20%)

**Research paper/report/creative project** 2,000 words, due on Blackboard by Friday of Week 7 (20%)

The culminating written assignment for the course (2,000 words) may consist of various formats: a research paper or report, or a creative project (blog, website, podcast)

A 1-page tentative proposal with ideas for your project, with a short bibliography with sources and/or links, should be posted in the Discussion forum on Blackboard by the end of Week 3, and you will receive feedback during Week 4.

---

By **Wednesday** of each week, I will post an Agenda item in the Discussion forum for the topic of the week, that introduces and contextualizes the reading assignments for the week, identifying key themes, concepts, and/or issues to look out for as you read.

### Commentary Papers

These short papers (750-1,000 words) are due at the end of Week 2 and Week 4 (Sunday). They should consist of analytical close readings of any of the reading assignments for the period Weeks 1-2 or 3-4. You are encouraged to focus in detail on particular sections, arguments, and/or concepts from the readings and develop them.

### Research Paper/Project

The culminating written assignment for the course (2,000 words) may consist of various formats: a research paper or report, or a creative project of your choice.

A 1-page preliminary proposal with ideas for your project, with a short bibliography with sources and/or links, should be posted in the Discussion forum for the purpose by the end of Week 3, and you will receive feedback during Week 4.

---



## Schedule

---

Week 1: Tuesday 29 October 2024

### Content

Kate Eichhorn, **Content:**

- "A Brief History of Content in a Digital Era"
- "User-Generated Content" (recommended)

See also: Patrick H. Willems, "Everything is Content Now" (YouTube)

---

Week 2: Tuesday 5 November 2024

### Algorithm

Kyle Chayka, **Filterworld: How Algorithms Flattened Culture**

- "Introduction"
  - "The Rise of Algorithmic Recommendations" (ch. 1)
- 

Week 3: Tuesday 12 November 2024

### Chatbot

Parmy Olson, **Supremacy: How the Struggle Between Google and Facebook Shapes Our Future**

- "Prologue"
  - "Hello, ChatGPT" (ch. 13)
  - "A Vague Sense of Doom" (ch. 14)
- 

Week 4: Tuesday 19 November 2024

### Nerd

Christine Lagorio-Chafkin, **We Are the Nerds: The Birth and Tumultuous Life of Reddit, the Internet's Culture Laboratory**

---

Week 5: Tuesday 26 November 2024

### Witness

Allissa V. Richardson, **Bearing Witness While Black**

---



Week 6: Tuesday 3 December 2024

## Whistleblower

Stefania Maurizi, **Secret Power: Wikileaks and Its Enemies**

---

Week 7: Tuesday 10 December 2024

Research projects

Tuesday 17 December 2024: Last day of classes

---

## Bibliography

---

danah boyd, **It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

Amy Bruckman, **Should You Believe Wikipedia? Online Communities and the Construction of Knowledge** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Finn Brunton and Helen Nissenbaum, **Obfuscation: A User's Guide for Privacy and Protest** (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016).

Kyle Chayka, **Filterworld: How Algorithms Flattened Culture** (New York: Doubleday, 2024).

Gabriella Coleman, **Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous** (London and New York: Verso, 2014).

Claire Dederer, **Monsters: A Fan's Dilemma** (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023).

Kate Eichhorn, **Content**. Essential Knowledge Series (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022).

Glenn Greenwald, **No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State** (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014).

Adrian Hon, **You've Been Played: How Corporations, Governments, and Schools Use Games to Control Us All** (New York: Basic Books, 2022).

Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey, et al., **#Hashtag Activism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice** (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020).

Christine Lagorio-Chafkin, **We Are the Nerds: The Birth and Tumultuous Life of Reddit, the Internet's Culture Laboratory** (New York: Hachette Books, 2018).

Taylor Lorenz, **Extremely Online: How the Internet Changed the Way We Live, Love, Work, and Play** (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2022).

Gary Marcus & Ernest Davis, **Rebooting AI: Building Artificial Intelligence We Can Trust** (New York: Pantheon Books, 2019).

Stefania Maurizi, **Secret Power: Wikileaks and Its Enemies**. Pluto Press, 2023.

Gretchen McCulloch, **Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language** (Riverhead Books, 2019)



Angela Nagle, **Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars From 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right** (Alresford, Hampshire, UK: Zero Books, 2017).

Parmy Olson, **Supremacy: AI, ChatGPT, and the Race that Will Change the World**. New York: MacMillan, 2024.

Cathy O'Neil, with Stephen Baker, **The Shame Machine: Who Profits in the New Age of Humiliation** (New York: Crown/Random House, 2022).

Whitney Phillips, **This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture** (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015).

Whitney Phillips and Ryan M. Milner, **You Are Here: A Field Guide for Navigating Polarized Speech, Conspiracy Theories, and Our Polluted Media Landscape** (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2021).

Allissa V. Richardson, **Bearing Witness While Black: African Americans, Smartphones, and the New Protest #Journalism** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Zeynep Tufekci, **Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

Michele White, **Touch Screen Theory: Digital Devices and Feelings** (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022).

Christopher Wylie, **Mindf\*\*k: Cambridge Analytica and the Plot to Break America** (New York: Random House, 2019).

---

## Policies

---

### Late Policy

Assignments that are late will lose 1/2 of a grade per day, beginning at the end of class and including weekends and holidays. This means that a paper, which would have received an A if it was on time, will receive a B+ the next day, B- for two days late, and so on. Time management, preparation for our meetings, and timely submission of your work comprise a significant dimension of your professionalism. As such, your work must be completed by the beginning of class on the day it is due. If you have a serious problem that makes punctual submission impossible, you must discuss this matter with me before the due date so that we can make alternative arrangements. Because you are given plenty of time to complete your work, and major due dates are given to you well in advance, last minute problems should not preclude handing in assignments on time.

### Mandatory Reporter

Fitchburg State University is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students that is free of all forms of discrimination and harassment. Please be aware all FSU faculty members are "mandatory reporters," which means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I am legally required to share that information with the Title IX Coordinator. If you or someone you know has been impacted by sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, FSU has staff members trained to support you. If you or someone you know has been impacted by sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, please visit <http://fitchburgstate.edu/titleix> to access information about university support and resources.



## Health

### Health Services

Hours: Monday-Friday 8:30AM-5PM Location: Ground Level of Russell Towers (across from the entrance of Holmes Dining Hall) Phone: (978) 665-3643/3894

### Counseling Services

The Counseling Services Office offers a range of services including individual, couples and group counseling, crisis intervention, psychoeducational programming, outreach ALTERNATIVE ECOSYSTEMSs, and community referrals. Counseling services are confidential and are offered at no charge to all enrolled students. Staff at Counseling Services are also available for consultation to faculty, staff and students. Counseling Services is located in the Hammond, 3rd Floor, Room 317.

### Fitchburg Anti-Violence Education (FAVE)

FAVE collaborates with a number of community partners (e.g., YWCA Domestic Violence Services, Pathways for Change) to meet our training needs and to link survivors with community based resources. This site also features [resources](#) for help or information about dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. If you or someone you know is in an abusive relationship or has been a victim of sexual assault, there are many places to go for help. Many can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. On campus, free and confidential support is provided at both Counseling Services and Health Services.

*Community Food Pantry* Food insecurity is a growing issue and it certainly can affect student learning. The ability to have access to nutritious food is incredibly vital. The Falcon Bazaar, located in Hammond G 15, is stocked with food, basic necessities, and can provide meal swipes to support all Fitchburg State students experiencing food insecurity for a day or a semester.

The university continues to partner with Our Father's House to support student needs and access to food and services. All Fitchburg State University students are welcome at the Our Father's House Community Food Pantry. This Pantry is located at the Faith Christian Church at 40 Boutelle St., Fitchburg, MA and is open from 5-7pm. Each "household" may shop for nutritious food once per month by presenting a valid FSU ID.

## Academic Integrity

The University "Academic Integrity" policy can be found online at <http://www.fitchburgstate.edu/offices-services-directory/office-of-student-conductmediation-education/academic-integrity/>.

Students are expected to do their own work. Plagiarism and cheating are inexcusable. Any instance of plagiarism or cheating will automatically result in a zero on the assignment and may be reported the Office of Student and Academic Life at the discretion of the instructor.

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to: - Using papers or work from another class. - Using another student's paper or work from any class. - Copying work or a paper from the Internet. - The egregious lack of citing sources or documenting research.

*If you're not clear on what is or is not plagiarism, ASK. The BEST case scenario if caught is a zero on that assignment, and ignorance of what does or does not count is not an excuse. That being said, I'm a strong supporter of [Fair Use](#) doctrine. Just attribute what you use—and, again, ASK if there's any doubt.*

## Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)



If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with the instructor, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please inform the faculty member as soon as possible.

### **Technology**

At some point during the semester you will likely have a problem with technology. Your laptop will crash; your iPad battery will die; a recording you make will disappear; you will accidentally delete a file; the wireless will go down at a crucial time. These, however, are inevitabilities of life, not emergencies. Technology problems are not excuses for unfinished or late work. Bad things may happen, but you can protect yourself by doing the following:

- Plan ahead: A deadline is the last minute to turn in material. You can start—and finish—early, particularly if challenging resources are required, or you know it will be time consuming to finish this project.
- Save work early and often: Think how much work you do in 10 minutes. I auto save every 2 minutes.
- Make regular backups of files in a different location: Between Box, Google Drive, Dropbox, and iCloud, you have ample places to store and backup your materials. Use them.
- Save drafts: When editing, set aside the original and work with a copy.
- Practice safe computing: On your personal devices, install and use software to control viruses and malware.

### **Grading Policy**

Grading for the course will follow the FSU grading policy below:

4.0: 95-100  
3.7: 92-94  
3.5: 89-91  
3.3: 86-88  
3.0: 83-85  
2.7: 80-82  
2.5: 77-79  
2.3: 74-76  
2.0: 71-73  
0.0: < 70

### **Academic Resources**

[Writing Center](#)

[Academic Policies](#)

[Disability Services](#)

[Fitchburg State Alert system for emergencies, snow closures/delays, and faculty absences](#)

[University Career Services](#)