New Media Communities and the Politics of Speech

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Questions as to the politics of expression on the internet have often clustered around issues of intellectual property, from issues of piracy, transformative works & cultural remixing, and the future of knowledge work in an era where "information wants to be free." This course, however, takes a slightly different angle, examining the ways in which new media communities construct new norms around political speech, the etiquette of criticism, and conceptions of freedom of expression. What has been the place of social media in the recent political polarization of the American public? Has the logic of "trolling" infected our political sphere? What sorts of new conceptions about the public sphere are created when the new spaces in which the public can gather and exchange ideas—Twitter, Facebook, Reddit—are no longer public spaces, but privately-owned servers? Do internet-based fan communities inevitably turn toxic, and, if so, why? Where did the internet's problems with racism, misogyny and harassment stem from, and will it ever outgrow them? Drawing readings from a mixture of academic literature and contemporary journalism, this course is devoted to examining recent events to answer questions such as these.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this class, students should have demonstrated an ability to:
- Describe relationships between internet-based culture and contemporary U.S. culture more broadly
- Recognize and criticize forms of behavior that online cultures frequently engender
- Analyze and debate the scope and influence of technological media on public attitudes
- Discuss their own media use in relation to its technological history and social embeddedness

COURSE REQUIREMENTS OVERVIEW

1) Attendance and class participation, including participation in in-class small group work. (Unexcused absences at 2 or more class sessions will significantly lower your final grade; continued absences will be considered reason for FX grade designation.) (25% of final grade.)
2) Regular participation in discussion boards on course blog postings (20% of final grade)
3) One course blog post (15% of final grade)
4) Group Project 1: New media rhetoric piece, taking the form of a blog post, article, YouTube video essay, or some other form viewed in the course (20% of final grade)
5) Group Project 2: New media rebuttal piece, taking the form of a blog post, article, YouTube video essay, or some other form viewed in the course (20% of final grade)

A	93-100%
A-	90-92%
B+	87-89%
B	84-86%
B-	81-83%
C+	78-80%
C	75-77%
C-	72-74%
D+	69-71%
D	66-68%
F	0-65%

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

The DePaul Student Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: "Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: (a) The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or in part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's. (b) Copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with acknowledgement. (c) Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment which has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency. (d) The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement."

Plagiarism, as defined here, will be considered grounds for failure of a given assignment, and, given repeated offenses, failure of the course.

Consult your student handbook or visit Academic Integrity at DePaul University (http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu) for further details.

ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the course instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential.

To ensure that you receive the most appropriate reasonable accommodation based on your needs, contact should be made **as early as possible in the quarter**. Before approaching the course instructor, make sure that you have previously contacted the:
- PLuS Program (for LD, AD/HD) at 773-325-1677, Student Center #370, and/or
- The Office for Students with Disabilities (for all other disabilities) at 773-325-1677, Student Center #370

REQUIRED READING MATERIALS

None. All reading materials for the course will be made available online on D2L.

TERMS OF ENROLLMENT
1. You agree that this syllabus is a contract, and that you are abiding by its terms and polities (including grading).
2. You understand that any issues or problems you have with grading will be dealt with through the policies laid out in the DePaul Student Handbook.
3. The course instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus, given that 1) new versions are made readily available upon alteration, and 2) timely notification is given to students about any alterations.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 – All of this has happened before (will all of this happen again?)
Week 1 Class 1
Class introduction. No readings.

Week 1 Class 2
Julien Dibble, "A Rape in Cyberspace," in *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World* (1999)

Week 2 – The cultural logics of online cultures
Week 2 Class 1: Anonymity and cultural exchange in online cultures
Andrienne L. Massanari, "Cynicism, Altruism, and Hating Everything, Including Ourselves," in
    Participatory Culture, Community, and Play: Learning from Reddit (2015)

Week 2 Class 2: The matter of trolling
Kathy Sierra, "Trouble at the Koolaid Point" (blog post, 2014)
Whitney Phillips, "Dicks Everywhere: The Cultural Logics of Trolling," in *This Is Why We Can't Have*
    Nice Things (2015)

Racism and the internet
Week 3 Class 1
always_black, "Bow N*****" (2004)

Week 3 Class 2
Lisa Nakamura, "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in *World of*
    Warcraft" (2009)

Week 4 – Polarized politics in the age of social media
Week 4 Class 1: Polarized journalism, social media, and epistemic closure
Julian Sanchez, "Epistemic Closure, Technology, and the End of Distance" (blog post, 2010)

Week 4 Class 2: Special focus—the 2017 election
TBA, as election is ongoing

Week 5 – Cultural critique in the era of Big Outrage
Week 5 Class 1: The highbrow origins of pop culture critique
Molly Haskel, "The Big Lie," in *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in Movies* (1974) (excerpts
    from chapter)
Pauline Kael, "Stanley Strangelove" (1972)

Week 5 Class 2: Pop culture critique in the era of social media
Students will be broken up into groups to tackle the following:
Joshua Rothman, "In Facebook's Courtroom" (*The New Yorker* piece, 2014)
Alyssa Rosenberg, "How We Talk About Politics Is Infecting How We Talk About Culture" (*The*
    Washington Post article, 2014)
Choire Sicha, "The Life Cycle of Outrage" (*Slate* article, 2014)
Amanda Hess, "The Rigid Conventions of Outrage" (*Slate* article, 2014)
TBA pieces of pop cultural criticism from BuzzFeed, Gawker Media sites, or elsewhere

Week 6 – Fandom, appropriation, and copyright law
Week 6 Class 1: Fandom and its reproductions
Abigail de Kosnik, selections from *Rogue Memory: Archives and Repertoires of Digital Culture* (2016)

Week 6 Class 2: Legal entanglements
Lawrence Lessig, "Transformers," in *Free Culture: The Nature and Future of Creativity* (2005)

Week 7 – The dark side of fandom
Week 7 Class 1: Betrayed fans and their enemies
Will Brooker, "The Fan Betrayed," in *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (2002)

Week 7 Class 2: Consumer revolts
Becky Chambers, "Everything You Need to Know About the *Mass Effect 3* Ending Controversy" (blog post, 2012)
Devin Faraci, "Fandom Is Broken" (blog post, 2016)
DUE: GROUP PROJECT 1

Week 8 – Fandom, critique and harassment
Week 8 Class 1: Geek culture and its objects
Andrienne L. Massanari, "Open Platforms, Closed Discourse," in *Participatory Culture, Community, and Play: Learning from Reddit* (2015)
Anita Sarkeesian/Feminist Frequency, "Women as Background Decoration (Part 2)" (YouTube video & associated transcript, 2014)

Week 8 Class 2: Gamergate
Katherine Cross, "'We Will Force Gaming to Be Free': On GamerGate and the License to Inflict Suffering" (blog post, 2014)
Ian Steadman, "Tropes vs. Anita Sarkeesian: On Passing off Anti-Feminist Nonsense as Critique" (blog post—please view embedded YouTube videos, 2014)

Week 9 – Utopian possibilities of new media communities … and their limits
Week 9 Class 1: New platforms, new communities, new possibilities
Anna Anthropy, "The Problem with Videogames," "The New Videogame," "Appendix A: What to Use," in *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters* (2012)
Micha Cárdenas, "A Game Level Where You Can't Pass" (blog post, 2013)

Week 9 Class 2: Hesitations
Anna Anthropy, "Empathy Game [artist's statement]" (2015)

Week 10 – Epilogue: How to fix the internet?
Week 10 Class 1: Polarized journalism, social media, and epistemic closure
Danielle Keats Citron, "'Don't Break the Internet' and Other Free Speech Challenges," in *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace* (2014)

Week 10 Class 2: Outro
TBA/makeup/overflow/student-directed material

Week 11
DUE: GROUP PROJECT 2

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Course blog participation

Each student will be responsible for one blog post, summing up either the readings or the general themes of one day of the course, as a way of animating the discussion for that day. This should be around 600 words in length, and will be worth 15% of the student's grade.

In addition, regular participation in the discussion around each post will be expected of each student. This participation counts for 20% of students' grades.

Group Project 1: New media rhetoric piece

As an exercise in course form matching course content, the primary assignments for this course will not take the form of traditional written scholarly work. Instead, your two main group projects for the course should take inspiration from the new media objects we are examining in the course. This could mean writing a blog post, editing together a YouTube video essay, or imitating some form of online journalism—as long as it does not resemble a traditional academic paper, it will be considered fair game. This first project should forward a very definite argument about something contentious, in the spirit of week 5's examination of the culture of outrage. In-class presentations on these projects will be expected.

Group Project 1: New media rebuttal piece

Much like the first group project, this will take the form of a blog post, a YouTube video essay, or an imitation of online journalism—with a twist. This time around, following a grand tradition of the spread of "rebuttal" pieces that pop up whenever strong rhetoric is advanced on the internet, you job will be to argue against *the specific arguments put forward by another group in the class during your first group project*. Using the best means at your disposal, demolish the previous team's arguments—or, at the very least, appeal to the biases of a different audience!