Platformed Politics and Networked Publics
(Section #, Course Time, Location)
Fall 2018

Instructor: Jeremy David Johnson   E-mail: _____
Office: _____   Class Location: _____
Office Hours: _____

Course Description

This course considers the impacts of technological platforms (eg. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) on rhetoric and political discourse. Drawing from theories of what is "public," the course asks students to reflect on the changes brought by graphical user interfaces, algorithmic arrangement, and cross-platform circulation. Students will develop familiarity with a variety of platforms, will engage scholarly literature, and will create their own multimedia projects or critical analyses.

Course Objectives

1. Students will be able to identify a variety of methods for understanding the political dynamics of networked platforms.
2. Students will develop substantive critiques of networked platforms, offering specific attention to race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and other intersectional concerns.
3. Students will be able to trace the historical, ideological, and material conditions that give rise to networked platforms and their designs.
4. Students will be able to offer constructive suggestions for improving networked spaces, on institutional, corporate, and personal levels.

Course Texts*

David Eggers, *The Circle*, Vintage, 2013
Safiya Noble and Brendesha Tynes, *The Intersectional Internet*, 2016
Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*, Penguin Books, 2011
Zizi Papacharissi, *A Private Sphere*, Polity, 2013
Damien Smith Pfister, *Networked Media, Networked Rhetorics*, Penn State Press, 2014
Cass Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media,* Princeton University Press, 2017
Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, Yale University Press, 2017
Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Googlization of Everything*, University of California Press, 2012
Sara Wachter-Boettcher, *Technically Wrong*, W.W. Norton & Company, 2017

*I will provide supplemental readings via the course management system. Most of these books are available for $10-20. Please contact me if the above texts are a significant financial burden for you.

Course Assignments

Written assignments should be delivered in Microsoft Word or PDF format, double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font and standard 1" margins.

Written assignments are due via the course management system at noon on the date indicated on the course schedule.

Reflection Papers (20%), Variable Dates:
Twice throughout the semester, you will be asked to write an approximately three-page paper responding to the readings from one day of class. You will sign up for two class periods. You will turn in the paper normally, but you will also read it out loud and provide three questions to prompt class discussion. These papers should be provocative and insightful, and should not simply summarize the material.

Topic Proposal, *Due September 13:*
Though this assignment is not formally graded, it is mandatory and must be completed before you can begin your platform study and critical essay/project. This will be a one-page assignment that asks you to identify and rank two platforms you would be interested in studying. I would like you to write a few sentences as to why each platform interests you.

Platform Study (25%), Due October 9:
You will provide an approximately ten-page analysis of the history and impacts of a platform of your choice. Your analysis should cover the platform's development, its philosophical and ethical dynamics, its political ramifications (if any), and any significant controversies. Your essay can briefly nod to implications for networked publics, political discourse, and rhetorical theory, but you should be careful not to overlap material with your critical project or essay. More information will be provided in an expanded assignment description.

Critical Essay/Project (25%), Due December 6:
You will build from your platform study to offer critical analysis of your platform. The default format for this assignment is a ten-page essay exploring your platform's impacts on networked publics, political discourse, and rhetorical theory. Your assignment should engage scholarly literature from class as well as other literature you find.

As an alternative, you can create a multimedia project, combining, for example, a YouTube video with an annotated bibliography. Your multimedia project should be creative, cohesive, and insightful. **You must consult with me first if you wish to create a multimedia project.**

Exams & Participation

Quizzes (20%):
At approximately the mid-way point of the semester and on the penultimate day of class, you will take two quizzes. These quizzes will follow an essay format, asking you to reflect on course readings and discussions as you consider a rhetorical text I will provide on the exam day.

Class Participation (10%):
This is a discussion-based class, so your participation is necessary. I will not lecture, but will rather ask for your thoughts as we work through the course material together. You should be active and courteous, contributing to a healthy and insightful classroom environment.
This is an intensive upper-level course. You will be expected to read approximately 100-150 pages per week. Part of class participation is having familiarity with the reading and being able to discuss with the class. I am not expecting that you have read every single word of every single article, but I expect you to understand each article's main arguments and to engage each article critically.

Attendance:
You are expected to attend each class. You may miss up to two days without penalty. Beyond two absences, for each absence, I will deduct 2% from your overall grade. If you need to miss class, please let me know in advance. You will be expected to get notes and catch up on work in a timely fashion.

Grading
This course will use a 1000-point system for tracking your grades. This should make it easy for you to track your own grade and to identify any discrepancies. Each assignment percentage above corresponds to a point value; for example, the reflection papers, worth 20% of your grade combined, are each worth 100 points.

Access
If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation or have questions about physical access, please notify me as soon as possible. A disability can be defined as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities." This includes a variety of invisible disabilities, including chronic physical and/or mental illness. I will work with you to make sure you can succeed in this class, and welcome you to use any necessary university resources to make your success possible.

Academic Integrity
Dishonesty of any kind is unacceptable. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to: plagiarism, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of dishonesty by others, having unauthorized

possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Academic dishonesty will result in academic sanctions and may result in automatic failure of the course. For more information on this policy, please see information from the university handbook: (url here)

Classroom Climate

In this course, we will be discussing a variety of topics, some of which are highly debated, very personal, and sometimes outside of your comfort zone. I encourage you to stretch your comfort zone and to use the concepts discussed in class to think about your experiences and position in the world. Many of our beliefs (including mine) may be challenged this semester. This process has enormous potential and usefulness. However, I expect you to treat your classmates with respect and care.

While you may disagree with each other or with me (in fact, I welcome debate), I expect that you value your classmates' opinions and ideas in class. At no point this semester should any student feel silenced or muted. I take the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of students very seriously, and will work to create an inclusive, safe, and challenging classroom environment.

Electronic Devices Policy

As someone deeply invested in technology, I understand that many of us are connected constantly via cell phones, tablets, laptops, etc. However, during this class, I ask that you do not use electronic devices for purposes outside the parameters of the class. I encourage students to use laptops and tablets to take notes, to look up information relevant to our discussions, and to generally supplement the classroom experience using technology. If I find your technology use to be disruptive (eg. if you are doing something you should not be doing, or if your technology is distracting your classmates), I will ask you to turn it off or sit in the very back of the classroom. I reserve the right to dock points from your participation grade if you are not using technology appropriately.

If you ever need to leave on your cell phone or electronic device, you must communicate that with me prior to class. I understand that emergencies arise and that some communications (eg. job calls) are vital. I will be flexible with such occasions if and only if you tell me first.

Course Schedule

Date	Day	Topic & Readings *Indicates readings will be posted on the course management site
8/23	R	**Course introduction** Discuss syllabus and course expectations What is a platform, and what is a public?

8/28	T	**Arguing for Publics** Selections from John Dewey and Walter Lippmann* *Sign-ups for Reflection Paper Days*
8/30	R	**The Power of Search** Vaidhyanathan, Introduction & Chapter 1
9/4	T	**Knowledge and Publics in Google** Vaidhyanathan, Chapter 4 & Chapter 5
9/6	R	**Blogs and Public Deliberation** Pfister, Chapter 1 & Chapter 2
9/11	T	**Publics and Counter-Publics** G. Thomas Goodnight, "Public Discourse"* Robert Asen, "Critical Engagement through Public Sphere Scholarship"* Karma Chavez, "Counter-Public Enclaves"*
9/13	R	**The Networked Public** Tufekci, Chapter 1 & Chapter 2 *Due: Platform Topic Proposal*
9/18	T	**The Networked Public, Part II** danah boyd, "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics"* Papacharissi, Chapter 5
9/20	R	**Polarization** Sunstein, Chapter 3 & Chapter 8
9/25	T	**Polarization Part II** Emma Grey Ellis, Red Pilled Boxell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro, "Is the Internet Causing Political Polarization?"
9/27	R	**The Networked Self** Excerpts from Turkle's *The Second Self* and *Alone Together** Kafai, Fields, and Cook, "Your Second Selves"*

10/2	T	**Social Interaction and the Self** Sunstein, Chapter 1 & Chapter 5
10/4	R	**Privacy and Publicity** Papacharissi, Chapter 2 & Chapter 3
10/9	T	**Civility and Responsibility** Thomas Benson, "Rhetoric, Civility, and Community"* Jillian York, Google's Anti-Bullying AI Mistakes Civility for Decency *Due: Platform Study*
10/11	R	**Collaboration and Democracy** Amber Davisson, "Google Maps as a Site of Rhetorical Invention in the 2008 Presidential Election"* Rowan Conway, The Next Wave of Digital Democracy?
10/16	T	*Quiz #1*
10/18	R	**Silicon Valley & Technological Utopianism** Wachter-Boettcher, Chapter 9 Eggers, Book I
10/23	T	**Silicon Valley & Technological Utopianism, Part II** Eggers, Book II and Book III
10/25	R	**Platformed Racism** Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández, "Platformed Racism"* Selections from Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression* Noble and Tynes, Chapter 2
10/30	T	**Interface Politics** Selfe and Selfe, "The Politics of the Interface"* Michelle Kendrick, "Invisibility, Race, and the Interface"* Noble and Tynes, Chapter 12
11/1	R	**Cyber-sexism and Femininity** Jessica Brophy, "Developing a Corporeal Cyberfeminism"* Wachter-Boettcher, Chapter 4

11/6	T	**Gaming, Publics, and Politics** Chris O'Brien, "Twitch Plays Politics" Shira Chess, "I Am What I Play and I Play What I Am"* Noble and Tynes, Chapter 7
11/8	R	**Gamergate** Adrienne Massanari, "Gamergate and the Fappening"* Caitlin Dewey, The Only Guide to Gamergate You Will Ever Need to Read
11/13	T	**Networked Algorithms** Ted Striphas, "Algorithmic Culture"* Franklin Foer, "Facebook's War on Free Will"
11/15	R	**Algorithmic Bias and Personalization** Leigh Alexander, Is an Algorithm Any Less Racist than a Human? Ryan Holmes, The Problem Isn't Fake News, It's Bad Algorithms Engin Bozdag, "Bias in Algorithmic Filtering and Personalization"*
11/20	T	**Hashtags and Activism** Jennifer Reinwald, "Hashtags and Attention through the Tetrad"* Tufekci, Chapter 5
11/22	R	**Thanksgiving Day – No Class**
11/27	T	**Filter Bubbles** Pariser, Introduction & Chapter 1
11/29	R	**Filter Bubbles, Part II** Pariser, Chapter 4 & Chapter 5
12/4	T	**Information and Democracy** Larry Diamond, "Liberation Technology"* Brenda Dervin, "Information <--> Democracy"*
12/6	R	**The Future of Democratic Engagement** Papacharissi, Chapter 1 Tufekci, Epilogue *Due: Critical Essay/Project*

12/11	T	***<mark>Quiz #2</mark>*** Course Wrap-up