COMM 293A: Communication Technologies and Social Change
4 Credits, Spring 2021

Instructor Information

Dr. Jeremy David Johnson (Preferred Name: Jeremy, Pronouns: He/Him/His)

Lecturer, Department of Communication

Email: jjohnson8@pacific.edu (I will respond within 24 hours unless otherwise noted)

Course Time: Wednesdays, 5-8:30 pm PT, via Zoom

Office Hours: TR 12-1 pm PT, or by appointment, via Zoom

This syllabus may be changed at any time during the term due to unforeseen circumstances, life events, and student needs. Any changes will be communicated via Canvas.

Course Description

This seminar will explore the relationship between communication technologies, broadly construed, and social change. The seminar will trace communication technologies from ancient history to today, studying how technologies are used as mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and how communication technologies intersect with activism, social justice, and social change. Methodologically, we will focus on textual analysis and critical theory, considering how technologies mediate and reshape civic discourse. Students will be expected to complete a substantial paper or project using critical, textual, or rhetorical, or mixed methodologies.

Course Texts

Catherine D'Ignazio & Lauren Klein, *Data Feminism* (Open Access Available Here)

Safiya Noble & Brendesha Tynes, *The Intersectional Internet*

Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology*

Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*

Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction*

Zizi Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*

Zeynep Tufecki, *Twitter and Tear Gas*

Please note: if you will have any issues obtaining these books (for example, for financial reasons), please get in touch with me. I don't have access to a scanner right now, but I will

do what I can to get you access. I have, however, selected these texts in part due to their reasonable prices, so I hope that has helped shed some of the burden.

Course Objectives

After successfully completing this course, students should be able to:

1. Describe relationships between communication technologies and inequality, discrimination, and oppression.
2. Identify patterns in digital texts, interfaces, and ecologies that distribute networked power.
3. Identify and cite literature in communication, rhetoric, and technology studies shedding light on race, digital cultures, algorithms, and networked publics.
4. Provide written and oral critiques of contemporary networked social movements and digital systems.

Modes of Instruction

This course will primarily rely on synchronous Zoom discussions but will also integrate asynchronous discussion boards on Canvas. During our Zoom sessions, please have your video on as much as possible. There are very few of us, so if folks are not active, the synchronous sessions are sure to lack energy.

Equipment Requirements

To complete this course, you will need access to a steady internet connection and a device that can read or print PDFs. If you do not have that equipment available to you, please contact me right away and I'll help you sort out other options.

Assignments

Discussion Board Participation

As I will detail more specifically later on, each week we will have 2 students prepare introductory questions and/or remarks and post them to Canvas at least 24 hours prior to our synchronous sessions on Wednesdays. Following our synchronous session, 2 students will post follow-up questions, observations, examples, etc. to enrich our future discussions.

Synchronous Participation

Participation in discussions is especially crucial in a graduate course. I won't be lecturing much, if at all, so I will expect you to be active in asking questions, making observations, providing examples, and diving into the texts together.

Synopsis Readings

During each part of the class, each student will be assigned to read and present a summary of one supplemental article (available on Canvas) during one of the synchronous meetings. Many meetings will have more than one article presented. Each presentation should be around ten minutes long, offering enough information that other students in the course will have an understanding of the article's key points and insights without everyone having to read every article.

Response Papers

At the end of parts 1 and 2 of the course, you'll be asked to write a ~3-4-page response paper. While I will be fairly open to how you respond, these should not be summary papers. You should be taking our materials in new directions and adding your own insights. Ideally, one or both of these papers would be oriented toward your final project topic so you can make use of your research and ideas in your final project. These papers will be due on February 14 and March 28, respectively.

Final Project

In this final project, I'll ask you to explore a specific case, example, or text relating to communication technologies and social change. Our course texts should serve as a foundation for your research, but you should also be doing additional research and analysis. I am open to various methodologies for this final project. The project may be done in any of a number of formats, though an essay of substantive length (~15-20 pages) is the default. If your project takes another form (such as a video/film, podcast, piece of art, detailed lesson plan, etc), you should consult with me first to make sure we're on the same page.

I will ask you to submit a brief proposal (~1 page) by March 1, which we should then discuss in the week preceding Spring Break. Your final project will be due May 3.

Grade Calculation

Assignment Values

Assignment	Point Value
Discussion Board Participation	100
Synchronous Participation	100
Synopsis Presentations	3 x 50
Response Papers	2 x 75
Final Project	500
Cumulative	1000

Point Ranges for Final Grades

930-1000 points	A
900-929 points	A-
870-899 points	B+
820-869 points	B
800-819 points	B-
700-799 points	C
600-699 points	D
599 and below points	F

Course Policies

Pacific Honor Code

The Honor Code at the University of the Pacific calls upon each student to exhibit a high degree of maturity, responsibility, and personal integrity. Students are expected to:

- act honestly in all matters
- actively encourage academic integrity
- discourage any form of cheating or dishonesty by others

inform the instructor and appropriate university administrator if she or he has a reasonable and good faith belief and substantial evidence that a violation of the Academic Honesty Policy has occurred.

Violations will be referred to and investigated by the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. If a student is found responsible, it will be documented as part of her or his permanent academic record. A student may receive a range of penalties, including failure of an assignment, failure of the course, suspension, or dismissal from the University. The Academic Honesty Policy is located in Tiger Lore and online at http://www.pacific.edu/Campus-Life/Safety-and-Conduct/Student-Conduct/Tiger-Lore-Student-Handbook-.html

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

I am committed to making sure you succeed in this course. The process for receiving accommodations through SSD is laid out below—and you should follow it—but I hope you'll be comfortable reaching out to me to discuss any accommodations you need.

If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations, please contact the Director of the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) for information on how to obtain an Accommodations Request Letter.

3-Step Accommodation Process:

1. Student meets with the SSD Director and provides documentation and completes registration forms.
2. Student requests accommodation(s) each semester by completing the Request for Accommodations Form.
3. Student arranges to meet with his/her professors to discuss the accommodation(s) and to sign the Accommodation Request Letter

To ensure timeliness of services, it is preferable that you obtain the accommodation letter(s) from the Office of SSD as early as possible in each term. After the instructor receives the accommodation letter, please schedule a meeting with the instructor during office hours or some other mutually convenient time to arrange the accommodation(s).

The Office of Services for Students with Disabilities is located in the McCaffrey Center, Rm. 137. Phone: 209-946-3221. Email: ssd@pacific.edu. Online: http://www.pacific.edu/disabilities

Pronoun Usage

Knowing and applying the names and pronouns that students wish to use is a crucial part of developing a productive learning environment that fosters safety, inclusion, personal dignity, and a sense of belonging across campus. Please let me know your preferred name and your pronouns anytime throughout the semester. You can also change your Canvas profile to display your pronouns, as I have done.

Student Care

I am committed to your well-being. If you are experiencing personal, financial, medical, emotional, or other challenges that are preventing you from being successful in this class, please contact the Care Managers in the Office of the Dean of Students to the discuss resources and support that are available to you. These resources include, but are not limited to, counseling services, advising, disability services, and victim advocacy. I will work with the Care Managers and with any necessary services to ensure your success.

Course Schedule

Part 1: Race, Technology, and Digital Cultures		
Week	**Date**	**Reading**
1	1/13	*Data Feminism*, Intro, Chapters 1-2
2	1/20	*The Intersectional Internet*, Intro & Part 1
3	1/27	*The Intersectional Internet*, Part 2
4	2/3	*Race After Technology*, Intro & Chapters 1-2
5	2/10	*Race After Technology*, Chapters 3-6

Part 2: Algorithms, Models, and Social Justice		
Week	**Date**	**Reading**
6	2/17	*Data Feminism*, Chapters 3-5 Jeremy David Johnson, "Algorithm"
7	2/24	*Algorithms of Oppression*, Intro & Chapters 1-3
8	3/3	*Algorithms of Oppression*, Chapters 4-6 & Conclusion
9	3/17	*Weapons of Math Destruction*, Intro & Chapters 1-5
10	3/24	*Weapons of Math Destruction*, Chapters 6-10 & Conclusion

Part 3: Networked Publics and Social Change		
Week	**Date**	**Reading**
11	3/31	*Data Feminism*, Chapters 6-7 & Conclusion
12	4/7	*Affective Publics*, Prelude & Chapters 1-2
13	4/14	*Affective Publics,* Chapters 3-5
14	4/21	*Twitter & Tear Gas*, Intro & Part 1
15	Async	*Twitter & Tear Gas*, Parts 2-3

Synopsis Readings

These articles are all posted on Canvas under Files. You are, of course, welcome to read all of the articles, though you will only be assigned one for each part of the course.

Part 1
Jaime Banks, "Multimodal, Multiplex, Multispatial"
André Brock, "'When Keeping it Real Goes Wrong'"
Jessica Brophy, "Developing a Corporeal Cyberfeminism"
Leigh Gruwell, "Wikipedia's Politics of Exclusion"
Jeff Rice, "Urban Mappings"
Cynthia Selfe and Richard Selfe, "The Politics of the Interface"
Niels van Doorn, "Digital Spaces, Material Traces"
Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?"

Part 2
Estee Beck, "The Invisible Digital Identity"
David Beer – "Power Through the Algorithm?"
Casey Boyle – "The Rhetorical Question Concerning Glitch"
Kevin Brock and Dawn Shepherd, "Understanding How Algorithms Work Persuasively
Through the Procedural Enthymeme"
Taina Bucher, "Want To Be On the Top?"
John Cheney-Lippold, "A New Algorithmic Identity"
Ted Striphas, "Algorithmic Culture"
Emily van der Nagel, "'Networks That Work Too Well'"

Part 3
Amber Davisson, "Beyond the Borders of Red and Blue States"
Dustin Edwards, "Circulation Gatekeepers"
Anne Demo, "Hacking Agency"
Jenny Edbauer (Rice), "Unframing Models of Public Distribution"
Jiyeong Kang, "Call for Civil Inattention"
Adrienne Massanari, "#Gamergate and The Fappening"
Nick Paliewicz and Guy McHendry – "When Good Arguments Do Not Work"
Damien Pfister – "The Logos of the Blogosphere"