

IAH 206.734: Self, Society, and Technology

Fan Communities and Internet Culture

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Office Hours: by appt only. Email me and we will set up a zoom.

Course Description:

From its inception, the internet has been a medium for the formation of multivarious communities. Some communities which formed offline moved online. Some were born on the internet. Some communities can only exist in cyberspace. Regardless, each community exists as an affinity-aligned group of real people participating in digital connection and production.

In the contemporary world, internet usage is ubiquitous, but not necessarily examined. Why is the internet the way that it is? How does it work? Who is on the internet? Is the internet *really* a place of community? How do *I* use the internet?

This course asks students to perform as digital anthropologists, exploring the internet space as an ethnographer while also self-reflecting on their own internet lives through discussions, a presentation, and an autoethnography.

Learning Outcomes:

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

- discuss basic internet history
- demonstrate critical media literacy and digital literacy
- interrogate their own digital practices and internet hygiene
- examine digital communities as a participant and observer
- articulate and identify the components and members of an examined digital community

Mission of Integrative Studies in the Arts and Humanities:

The mission of IAH is to empower students to more deeply reflect on, understand, inquire about, and transform the world around them, and to invite all students into lifelong engagement with the arts and humanities. More specifically, IAH enhances students' capabilities to:

- Reflect with intellectual curiosity on their own lives, knowledge, values, needs and desires, experiences, and/or professional or other communities
- Understand and engage with diverse cultures, communities, identities, experiences, and histories
- Explore challenging questions about culture, artistic expression, systems of power, the nature of information and knowledge, or other topics that are essential to understanding what it means to be a human being and a global citizen in the 21st century
- Interact with the wider world in creative, critical, and socially responsible ways

IAH Goals

The goals of IAH courses are to assist students to:

- Cultivate habits of inquiry and develop investigative strategies from arts and humanities perspectives;
- Explore social, cultural, and artistic expressions and contexts;
- Act as culturally aware and ethically responsible citizens in local and global communities;
- Critically assess, produce, and communicate knowledge in a variety of media for a range of audiences; and
- Recognize and understand the value of diversity and the significance of interconnectedness in the classroom and beyond.

IAH 206 Course Description and Diversity Designation:

Per the Center for Integrative Studies in the Arts and Humanities, IAH 209 provides:

Exploration in how technology affects and is affected by our conceptions of ourselves, relations with others, and our ideals. Approaches and materials from philosophy, literature, art, music, and history as well as the natural sciences.

This course is designated as a Diversity (D) course and has been approved toward meeting the University Diversity Requirement. Courses designated as “D” emphasize intercultural and diversity issues, ideas, and perspectives unconnected to geography or nation. The “D” designates a connection between intercultural and diversity topics that emphasizes the intersectionality of diverse identities and critical approaches to dominant narratives, institutions, and practices.

Overall, courses with “D” focus on themes and questions that transcend time, space, and location. The learning objectives and outcomes of the course will emphasize this designation and provide a guide for how this course furthers understanding of diversity at MSU and beyond.

A Note on Summer Courses:

You surely have other things going on in your life this summer: jobs, other classes, vacations, spending time with family and friends. However, this is a 4-credit course at Michigan State University. During the fall and spring semesters, we would have 15 weeks to cover this material; in the summer, we have about seven. I have designed this course to cover four credits’ worth of material in a shorter time; as such, you should not expect this course to be easier than a course you would take in-person during the fall or spring just because it is online during the summer. Please schedule your time accordingly.

Course Materials:

I only require two texts that you must obtain on your own:

- Lorenz, Taylor. *Extremely Online: The Untold Story of Fame, Influence, and Power on the Internet*. First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition, Simon & Schuster, 2023.
- *Don't F**k with Cats: Hunting an Internet Killer*. Directed by Mark Lewis, Raw TV, 2019. Netflix.

The book should be available through the MSU bookstore and the documentary is available with any Netflix subscription. You can totally use a digital version of the book. Do what is cheapest for you! All other readings will be made available to you digitally on D2L.

Grades:

Here is the breakdown of assignment weights and the 4.0 grade scale we will be using in this course:

Assignment Type (#)	Weight
Intro Video (1)	5%
Group Discussion Plan (1)	5%
Group Discussion Videos (5)	40%
Digital Community Proposal (1)	5%
Digital Community Presentation (1)	15%
Feedback and Q&A for Presentations (2)	10%
Written Autoethnography and revision (1+1)	20%
TOTAL (13 assignments)	100%

Points	93-100	87-92	80-86	75-79	70-74	65-69	60-64	0-59
Final Grade	4.0	3.5	3.0	2.5	2.0	1.5	1.0	0

PLEASE NOTE: Each assignment is worth a significant percentage of your grade. We are working with an accelerated schedule in the summer, so there are less assignments, but that means each is worth more. I am very cognizant of the University's and my students' competing expectations of a summer workload. It's a tricky balance to figure out how to sufficiently evaluate your learning without crushing you under work. The University expects students to do about 8 hours of work per week total. Those 8 hours *include* lectures, readings, meetings, etc. It does not mean you should be doing 8 hours of homework. In fact, you should not be doing a large amount of homework, because you hate doing it and I hate grading it! Instead, this course is a bit reading- and lecture-heavy, but I am really hoping you enjoy both of these components in the course.

Assignments:

I will talk about all of these in the intro video, but here are some descriptions to refer to:

- Intro Video
 - Just your typical online intro video. I wanna know who you are!
- Group Discussion Plan
 - This will be a group plan decided amongst assigned members for when you all plan to meet on zoom each week to discuss course materials and discussion questions.
- Group Discussion Videos
 - I hate discussion board posts and I'm sure you all do too, so this is a way to check your reading without making you do busywork tasks! You will meet weeks 2-6 for about 5 minutes per person in your group (15 min for 3-person groups; 20 for a four-person group) AND RECORD IT and upload the recording or send a link. More details on D2L. These should be

ACTIVE conversations, not just simply answering the questions I put online. I want y'all to reflect on your place on the internet and CRITICALLY connect it to course materials. Plus, this is community building within our classroom!

- Digital Community Presentation
 - Starting in Week 3, you will commence a deep-dive into a digital community of your choosing (but with my approval), as both participant and observer. In Week 7, you will record and present on your community for about 12-15 minutes to your other discussion group members, then take about 5 minutes of feedback and answer Q&A questions. More details to follow on D2L.
- Digital Community Proposal
 - This is a short proposal (1-2 paragraphs) in which you detail which community you want to explore, why, and how. This should include examples of posts, blogs, social media accounts, etc. which are part of the community.
- Feedback and Q&A for Presentations
 - This is self-explanatory, but I want your to ask engaging questions about your group members' presentations.
- Autoethnography and Revision
 - "Autoethnography is a method of qualitative inquiry that unites autobiography (telling about one's life) and ethnography (studying culture) by utilizing lived experience as evidence with which to explore cultural phenomena" ([Source](#)). In this case, you will be examining your place on the internet, how you use it, and what communities you are a part of. The first version will be due in Week 2. I will give feedback by Week 4, and then, equipped with a LOT (I hope!) more knowledge, you will revise it and turn in an expanded, deeper version in Week 6.

General Weekly Rhythm:

Notice below how little assignment work you have to do, but, in turn, how much learning work you need to do per week.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Weekend
Learn:	Watch Lecture(s)	Read	Read	Read		
Do:	<i>presentation exploration or prep</i>	<i>presentation exploration or prep</i>	<i>presentation exploration or prep</i>	Weekly Discussion, Other Assignments		Look/read ahead for next week!
Turn in:					Weekly Discussion, Other Assignments	

The above is just a suggestion. Do the course however is best for you (it's asynchronous!). That said, you MUST be in agreement with your group members for discussions so you can all record together.

Semester-at-a-Glance:

Normally, week 1 of a class is easy-breezy, but because we are in a compressed timeframe during the summer, you will have to get going on some work RIGHT away. Sorry, it's unavoidable!

- **Week 1 (July 1-7): Internet History & Language**
 - Readings:
 - *The Modern World*, pp. 5-24
 - [A Brief History of the Internet](#)
 - *Because Internet*, pp. 63-108
 - [Voldemorting](#)
 - [Emoji](#)
 - [How We Write Sarcasm](#)
 - Lectures:
 - Course Intro
 - Marshall McLuhan/Media Studies
 - Ethnography and Digital Anthropology
 - Due: Intro Video and Group Plan
- **Week 2 (July 8-14): Social Media, Blogging & Vlogging**
 - Readings:
 - *Extremely Online*, pp. 1-97
 - *TikTok*, pp. 91-119
 - Lecture:
 - Social Network Theory
 - Due: Group Disc 1 and Autoethnography draft
- **Week 3 (July 15-21): Parasocial Relationships & Celebrity**
 - Readings:
 - [Taylor Swift is Not your BFF](#)
 - [In Defense of Parasocial Relationships, incl. video](#)
 - [The Pitfalls of Parasocial Relationships](#)
 - [On Stan Culture](#)
 - *Extremely Online*, pp. 101-202
 - [WaPo Interview with *The Judges*](#)
 - Lecture:
 - Interview with Josh Highsmith from *The Judges*
 - Due: Group Disc 2 and Proposal
- **Week 4 (July 22-28): Fanfiction & Fan Communities**

- Readings:
 - *Understanding Fandom*, pp. 5-31, 123-190, 235-254
 - *Fanfiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, pp. 41-78
 - [History of Fandom](#)
 - BONUS: [The MsScribe Story](#) (The TEA is HOT)
- Lectures:
 - Communities of Practice
 - Participatory Cultures
- Due: Group Disc 3
- **Week 5 (July 29-Aug 4): Memes & Virality**
 - Readings:
 - *Because Internet*, pp. 237-264
 - *Internet Memes and Society*, pp. 6-53
 - Lecture:
 - Virality/Contagion Theory
 - Due: Group Disc 4
- **Week 6 (Aug 5-11): Social Affect & Politics on the Internet**
 - Readings:
 - [Why Is Everyone on the Internet So Angry?](#)
 - [Why Social Media is Making You Miserable](#)
 - *Affect and Social Media*, pp. 101-112, 178-187
 - [Yes, You Should Be Outraged about Facebook](#)
 - [Blame It on the Internet](#)
 - BONUS: [In Defense of Complaining](#)
 - Lecture:
 - Stumptgamers Interview
 - Due: Group Disc 5 and Autoethnography Revision
- **Week 7 (Aug 12-15): The Darkweb, Criminality, & Hacktivism**
 - Readings:
 - [anonymous Origins](#)
 - [The Pirate Bay](#)
 - [Silk Road 1](#) & [Silk Road 2](#)

- [Chatbot Abuse](#)
- *Don't F**k with Cats* documentary on Netflix
- Lecture:
 - Short Course Wrap-Up
- Due: Final Pres. and Feedback
- **NOTE THAT THIS IS A SHORTER WEEK!!!**

Course Policies:

TRIGGER/CONTENT WARNINGS: Some of the content of this course may be difficult to contend with, especially during the week we talk about criminality on the internet. During the week on fanfiction, there is no avoiding a discussion of erotic writing. During the week regarding social media and social affect, there will be mentions of suicide and abuse. Please exercise appropriate caution when engaging with these materials.

EMAIL: I'm a HUGE stickler for [proper email etiquette](#). Please be respectful. I'm a night owl, not a morning person, but I also try not to answer my email in the late evening. I will also check my email on the weekends, but less frequently than during the week.

DISCUSSION: This should be an open and welcoming environment. We are here to exchange ideas and learn from each other, not to shut each other down and diminish each other. Again, please be respectful.

ACCOMODATIONS: Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services, and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation (VISA) form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc.).

If you do not have a VISA but need a reasonable (or even unreasonable) accommodation, please let me know and I'll try make it happen. This goes triply for folks with non-visible disabilities or who pass or mask or compensate. No need to do that here.

LATE WORK: Normally I do not accept any late work unless there are extenuating circumstances. During a summer course like this, late work can snowball quickly. Because of the timeframe, I can't really offer extensions. As a happy medium, I will overlook about a day of lateness past the due date.

CHATGPT AND OTHER AI TOOLS: You shouldn't really be able to complete the outlined assignments in this course with generative AI tools, so this will be less of a concern for us. That said, please avoid using these tools, which are NOT trustworthy sources of information. If you use them for writing help or to think through something, go ahead, but

be mindful of how you use this kind of software. You should disclose your use of these tools if you do use them.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: [Article 2.III.B.2](#) of Student Rights and Responsibilities states: “The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards.” In addition, the Center for Integrative Studies in the Arts and Humanities adheres to the policies on academic honesty specified in General Student Regulation 1.0, [Protection of Scholarship and Grades](#); the all-University [Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades](#); and [Ordinance 17.00](#), Examinations.

Therefore, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use www.allmsu.com or other social media websites to complete any course work in this course. Students who violate MSU regulations on Protection of Scholarship and Grades will receive a failing grade in the course or on the assignment.

Faculty are required to report all instances in which a penalty grade is given for academic dishonesty. Students reported for academic dishonesty are required to take an online course about the integrity of scholarship and grades. A hold will be placed on the student's account until such time as the student completes the course. This course is overseen by the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education.

SPLS FEEDBACK: Michigan State University takes seriously the opinion of students in the evaluation of the effectiveness of instruction and has implemented the Student Perceptions of Learning Survey (SPLS) to gather student feedback (<https://spls.msu.edu>). This course utilizes the online SPLS system, and you will receive an e-mail during the last two weeks of class asking you to fill out the SPLS web form at your convenience. I hope that you will be willing to give me your frank and constructive feedback so that I may instruct students even better in the future.