Social Media and Environmentalism

Instructor: Robert Soden , Dept. of Computer Science
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Class Meetings:

Lectures:
Fridays 10am - 12 pm, First lecture is on Jan 15th.
Room SS2108.

Tutorials:

- Section 0101: Fridays 12-1pm, Room RW 140
- Section 0102: Fridays 12-1pm, Room WI 524
- Section 0201: Fridays 1-2pm, Room RW 140
- Section 0202: Fridays 1-2pm, Room WI 524

Teaching Assistants:

Sections 0101,0201: Ichha Kohli - ichhakaur.kohli@mail.utoronto.ca
Sections 0101,0202: TBA

Course basics are posted on **Quercus**.

We will use **Piazza** for content delivery and course interaction.
Piazza enrolment: http://piazza.com/utoronto.ca/winter2022/env361

Course theme & objectives:

This course will examine a range of issues related to the environment and digital technology, with a broad focus on the impacts of social media on environmental thinking and policy-making. It is the second of two new courses in the School of Environment, and builds on the ideas explored in ENV261F, but does not require ENV261F as a prerequisite.

Contemporary experience of environmentalism is increasingly mediated through internet technologies. The dynamics of how people engage with social media often determine how they learn about topics such as climate change, environmental policy, and the nature of protest movements. At the same time, the power of governments and corporations to conduct mass surveillance via the internet can have a chilling effect on those who express dissent over social, economic and environmental policy. The current

generation of students has grown up with social media, but rarely gets the opportunity to step back and think critically about its broader consequences, especially in the face of grand societal and environmental challenges. The aim of the course is to engage students in the School of Environment in critical thinking about the impacts and ethics of social media, and the ways in which it is used to foster or stifle social change.

Topics include the use of social media as a tool for community-building and collaborative design, the sharing economy, online protest movements, mass surveillance and its implications, and the impact of misinformation on climate denialism. We will also examine the idea of "fake news" and social media in recent elections, and the impact this has on how people understand and react to current political issues.

What you will learn in the course:
- Critical thinking skills for analyzing complex socio-technical systems from multiple perspectives, using methods from multiple disciplines.
- Methods of problem analysis used in technology design, including the ability to identify multiple stakeholders and their needs, and the use of scenarios for conceptual design.
- Improved technology literacy and communication skills, through:

(1) a deeper understanding of how social media platforms work;

(2) critical analysis of the ways that social media re-shape our relationships with each other and with the environment; and

(3) how to clearly communicate your ideas using a variety of forms.

Required Texts:

There is no set text for this course. Readings will be posted online in piazza week-by-week.

Course Evaluation:

Grading Component	Due Date	Weighting
Assignment 1: Problem Analysis for social media design (group project; group report)	Draft: February 12, 2021 Final: February 26, 2021	5% 15%
Assignment 2: Critical Analysis of an existing social media tool and how it is used (group project; group report)	Draft: March 26, 2021 Final: April 9, 2021	5% 15%
Reading Summaries (10 total)	Due weekly before start of class	20%
Tutorial Participation (8 total)	In tutorials	10%

Final Exam	Final Exam period	30%

Coursework Assignments (40% overall): Each assignment is developed in tutorials, and then completed outside of class time. Submit a complete draft of the assignment before class on the first due date, and you will receive feedback on your draft the following week. You will then have an additional week to make any revisions. Drafts will be graded pass/fail. The grading criteria for the final versions will include depth of critical analysis, coverage of the literature, coherence and comprehensibility, and presentation.

Assignment 1 is completed in teams of 3 students. It involves the first few steps in design for social media, including identifying key stakeholders and their goals, and an initial design using storyboarding. Each team submits and is graded on a single report.

Assignment 2 is conducted in teams of 3 students. You will identify the pros and cons of an existing social media tool, app, or campaign, including both short and long term impacts. Each team submits and is graded on a single report.

Submitting coursework: All assignments are due in Quercus before the beginning of class (Fridays at 10am).

All assignments should be single spaced, using 11 point font with 2.5cm margins and numbered pages. Attach a cover page with the following information:

1) Your name(s);
2) Your student ID(s);
3) Tutorial Section
4) Title of assignment;
5) Instructor's name;
6) Course title & number;

Reading reflections. Each week, you will describe five *insights you gained* from that week's assigned reading. Due before the start of class in Quercus.

Tutorial participation. Seven tutorials, of one hour duration, will be held over the course. You must attend and participate! Full attendance and participation will earn you 10%.

Final exam. A two-hour final exam worth a maximum of 30% will be held during the exam period at the end of term. The exam will be a combination of short and long answer questions based on lectures, readings and assignments. The test will be open book and open notes.

Class Policies:

Late Penalty for assignments: If you are having difficulty completing your work for any reason, please discuss this with your TA *before* the due date, to arrange an alternative schedule. If you have not agreed to an alternative plan prior to the due date, <u>work submitted up to one week late will be penalized 10% per day late for up to 7 days; after this, it will not be accepted</u>. Note: If you are unavoidably absent from the university, please self-declare in ACORN and contact your TA as soon as you return to discuss the situation.

If you are unable to attend a tutorial, please complete the ACORN self-declaration form and send your TA a screenshot.

Requests to re-mark an assignment must be submitted in writing to Prof. Soden and clearly state the reason for your request. Prof. Soden will respond within a week as to whether your assignment will be remarked. Your assignment will be remarked by your TA.

Communications policy: Please do not email the TAs unless your questions are urgent and/or personal. We will use Piazza for all announcements about the course, and to respond to questions outside of class time. The TAs will respond to substantial questions on Piazza within 24 hours (except on weekends). *Exception: do not expect responses to questions about assignments within 24 hours of the due date*.

Academic Integrity:

Very few of us have truly original ideas – we almost always build on ideas and information provided by others. However, it is a serious offense to represent someone else's words as your own, or to submit work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program. <u>Assignments, reading summaries and exams</u> will be reviewed for evidence of these infractions. Penalties for these offences can be severe and can be recorded on your transcript. Trust your own ability to think and write and make use of the resources available at U of T that can help you do so (e.g. professors, TAs, writing centres). See the U of T writing website, especially the "How Not To Plagiarize" document at http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/using-sources/ and the website of the Office of Student Academic Integrity.

The following is a list of examples (not complete) of what constitutes an academic offence:
- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
- Copying material word-for-word from *any* source (including lecture and study group notes) without quotation marks and a citation for the author/source.
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
- Making up sources or facts, including references to sources that you did not use.
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment including:
    - Working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work
    - Having someone rewrite or add material to your work while "editing".
    - Lending your work to a classmate who submits it as his/her own without your permission.
- On tests and exams:
    - Using or possessing any unauthorized aid, including a cell phone
    - Looking at someone else's answers

- ○   Letting someone else look at your answers
- ○   Using material copied word-for-word from *any* source (including lecture and study group notes) without quotation marks and a citation for the author/source.
- ○   Misrepresenting your identity
- ○   Submitting an altered test for re-grading
- ● Misrepresentation:
  - ○   Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including doctor's notes
  - ○   Falsifying institutional documents or grades

Communication

We all need to communicate respectfully. "The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engage with each other, and respect one another's differences. U of T does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities."

Privacy rights and appropriate use of course material:

This course, including your participation, will be recorded on video and will be available to students in the course for viewing remotely and after each session.

Course videos and materials belong to your instructor, the University, and/or other source depending on the specific facts of each situation, and are protected by copyright. In this course, you are permitted to download session videos and materials for your own academic use, but you should not copy, share, or use them for any other purpose without the explicit permission of the instructor.

Technology Requirements:

Please see https://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/covid-19/tech-requirements-online-learning/Links

Advice for online learning:

https://onlinelearning.utoronto.ca/getting-ready-for-online/Links

Accommodation:

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: accessibility.services@utoronto.ca or http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/as

Outline of Topics

All readings are provided on the course site on Piazza.

	Date	Lecture Topic	Tutorial	Hand in

Part 1: Foundations

	Date	Lecture Topic	Tutorial	Hand in
1	Jan 14	Course Introduction		
2	Jan 21	Social Computing and Design Research		Reading Summary
3	Jan 28	Thinking Critically about Algorithms and Big Data		Reading Summary

Part 2: Causes for Concern

	Date	Lecture Topic	Tutorial	Hand in
4	Feb 4	The Environmental Consequences of Computing *Guest Lecture - Prof Miriam Diamond*	Group work on Assignment 1	Reading Summary
5	Feb 11	From Persuasion to Addiction?	Group work on Assignment 1	Reading Summary
6	Feb 18	Misinformation *Guest Lecture - Prof Steve Easterbrook*	Black Mirror Writer's Room	Reading Summary Draft Assignment 1
	Feb 25	*Reading Week - No Lecture*		

Part 3: Sources of Hope

	Date	Lecture Topic	Tutorial	Hand in
7	Mar 4	Sharing Knowledge *Guest Lecture - Emily Jacobi, Digital Democracy*		Reading Summary

				Final Assignment 1
8	Mar 11	Collaboration	Group work on Assignment 2	Reading Summary
9	Mar 18	Activism *Guest Lecture - Embry Owen, Mutual Aid Philly*	Group work on Assignment 2	Reading Summary

Part 4: Ways Forward

10	Mar 25	Pro-Social Media? Redesigning platforms and their policies		Reading Summary Draft Assignment 2
11	April 1	Governing the Social Media Commons	Debates: Regulating Tech Companies?	Reading Summary Final Assignment 2
12	Apr 8	Dismantling & Withdrawal	Final exam review session	Reading Summary