University of Toronto, School of the Environment
ENV 361: Social Media and Environmentalism
Winter 2024: Dr. Hanna E. Morris
Friday 10AM – 12PM (Eastern time zone)

Contact Information for Professor:

Dr. Hanna E. Morris, email: hanna.morris@utoronto.ca

Office Hours: **Fridays 3:15-4:15pm**.
My first office hours of the semester will be held on January 19.

Class Meetings:

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

Tutorials (seven total): **January 19, February 2, February 9, March 1, March 8, March 15, March 22**

- Section 0101: Fridays 12-1pm
- Section 0102: Fridays 12-1pm
- Section 0201: Fridays 1-2pm
- Section 0202: Fridays 1-2pm

Tutorial Objectives: During tutorials, TAs will facilitate peer writing workshops and group project work. The goal for tutorials is for students to have the time and space to receive peer reviews and to improve their individual written assignments as well as to develop their final group project.

Contact Information for Teaching Assistants:

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

Sections 0102,0202: Erica Leighton, erica.leighton@mail.utoronto.ca

All course materials are posted on the **Quercus** course site.

Course Overview:

Description: This course will examine a range of issues related to the environment and digital technology, with a broad focus on the history, culture, and political economy of social media and its impact on the environment and environmental activism. It is the second of two new courses in the School of Environment, and builds on the ideas explored in ENV360, but does not require ENV360 as a prerequisite.

Contemporary experiences of environmentalism are 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 pressing societal and environmental challenges. The aim of the course is to engage students in critical thinking about the history, culture, and political economy of social media, and the ways in which it is used to foster or stifle social change and environmental activism.

Topics include the use of social media as a tool for community-building, online protest movements, economic ownership and control of digital media platforms, digital media infrastructure and technology, mass surveillance and its implications, and the impact of misinformation on the delay and obstruction of meaningful climate action.

What you will learn in the course:

- Critical thinking skills for analyzing complex socio-technical systems from multiple perspectives, using methods from multiple disciplines.
- Improved technology literacy, cultural analysis, and communication skills, through a deeper understanding of the history, culture, and political economy of social media.

Required Texts: There is no set text for this course. PDFs of all readings are available on the Quercus course site.

Course Evaluation:

Grading Component	Due Date	Weighting
Introductory Reflection	**January 19**	5%
Midterm Paper	**March 1 (draft)** **March 8 (final)**	5% = 20% 15%
Reading Responses, Replies, and Report	**Reading responses are due weekly before the start of class** (except for the first day of class – 10 total) Reply to at least two other student's reflections by **11pm EST the following Tuesday** End-of-semester Reading Response Report is due **April 10**	25%
Lecture and Tutorial Participation and Attendance	**Weekly**	20%
Final Project Presentation	**March 15 and March 22**	5%
Final Project	**April 12**	25%

Coursework Assignments:

Introductory reflection: Your first assignment will be a short 3-4 page double-spaced introductory reflection piece. In this piece, you will introduce yourself, why you are interested in this course, and what you hope to learn. Please submit this short reflection as a Word Doc or PDF before class (10am) on January 19 via Quercus.

Midterm paper*: For the midterm, a rough draft or comprehensive outline will be due on March 1st and the final version will be due on March 8th. Submit a Word Doc or PDF of the draft and final midterm paper before class (10am) via Quercus on the due date. The grading criteria for the midterm will include depth of critical analysis, coverage of class texts and themes, coherence and comprehensibility. More details on how written assignments in this course will be graded are at the end of this syllabus.

Final project**: The final will be a group project. Please have one group member submit the final project via Quercus on behalf of the entire group by the due date saved as a Word Doc or PDF. List all group members' names and student ID numbers on the cover page.

Final project presentation: The final group project presentation is an opportunity for you to present your work-in-progress project and/or project plans for feedback from peers and your TA. These presentations will be early enough in the semester for your group to be able to implement suggested changes and improvements. You are NOT expected to have the group project fully completed by the date of the presentation. You must, however, have detailed plans and a clear project concept. The presentations will be graded based on clarity of communication and preparedness. Each group member must speak during the presentation.

Reading responses: Each week, you will describe at least *three insights you gained* from that week's assigned reading. Due before the start of class in the Quercus reading discussion forum for your tutorial section. You must also reply to at least two other student's reflections by 11pm Eastern on the following Tuesday. Your reply can consist of a few follow-up questions for the student or a short comment (3 – 5 sentences) – please keep all comments courteous and constructive.

Reading response report. In this report, you will firstly reflect on your three favorite readings from the course and why you found these three readings so influential. This reflection should be 3-5 pages double-spaced in length. In addition to and following this short reflection, you must also include copies of all of your previous weekly reading responses and all of your previous weekly replies to peers. You will submit this reading response report saved as a Word Doc or PDF via Quercus by 10am on April 10th. **You must submit this reading response report to earn full credit for all of your reading responses and replies you submitted over the course of this semester.**

Tutorial participation: Seven tutorials, of one hour duration, will be held over the course (**January 19 – Introductions, February 2 – final project groups determined, Feb. 9 – group final project workshop, March 1 – midterm paper workshop, March 8 – group final project workshop, March 15—final project presentations and feedback part 1, March 22—final project presentations and feedback part 2**). You must attend and participate! This entails attending all tutorials and being prepared for, actively contributing to, and participating in the final project workshops.

During the Fridays without scheduled tutorials, I encourage you to meet with your group to work on the final project.

Lecture participation: Just like tutorials, you are required to attend **all** class lectures and actively participate. This entails being prepared for, actively contributing to, and participating in lectures by taking notes, engaging in discussions and class activities, and actively listening to lecture content. There *may* also be one unannounced "pop quiz" during one of the class lectures. Those who informed me and/or their TA of an excused absence ***prior*** to the class during which the "pop quiz" is given will have the opportunity to take a make-up quiz.

* **Additional note about the midterm paper and final project: Details and instructions for both are at the end of this syllabus. The midterm paper and the final project will be partially developed during workshops in tutorials, and then completed outside of class time.

Submitting coursework*:* All assignments should be submitted through Quercus saved as a Word Doc preferably, but PDFs are also acceptable. The final project should also be submitted through Quercus by one group member on behalf of the entire group.

All assignments and the final project should be double spaced, using 12 point font, 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

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (https://uoft.me/pdt-faq)

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 your TA and clearly state the reason for your request. Your TA will respond within a week as to whether your assignment will be remarked. Your assignment will be remarked by your TA.

Communications policy: We will use Quercus for all announcements about the course, and to respond to questions outside of class time. The TAs will respond to substantial questions 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 projects</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 https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/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
- 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:
Course content 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 course 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-onlinelearning/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

Additional services and support:
The following are some important links to help you with academic and/or technical service and support:
- General student services and resources at Student Life
- Full library service through University of Toronto Libraries
- Resources on conducting online research through University Libraries Research
- Resources on academic support from the Academic Success Centre
- Learner support at the Writing Centre
- Information for Technical Support/Quercus Support

Course Schedule: Topics and Reading Assignments

All readings are provided on the course site on Quercus
Dates marked in purple & with an (*) are days tutorials will be held

	Date	Lecture Topic and Readings	Tutorial	Hand in

Unit 1: 20th Century Dreams of Ecological and Cyber Utopias

	Date	Lecture Topic and Readings	Tutorial	Hand in
1	Jan 12	Course Introduction		
2	Jan 19*	Digital Utopia: The Origins of Cyberculture & Cyberspace Readings: • Barlow, J.P. (1996). A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace. https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence • Turner, F. (2006). "Introduction" in *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*. Chicago University Press, pp. 1 -9. • Wiener, A. (2018, November 16). The Complicated Legacy of Stewart Brand's "Whole Earth Catalog." *The New Yorker.* https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-silicon-valley/the-complicated-legacy-of-stewart-brands-whole-earth-catalog	Introductions	Introductory Reflection Reading Response
3	Jan 26	Big Data, Google Earth, & the Optics/Logics of Planetary Control Readings: • Demos, T.J. (2017). "Ch. 1: Welcome to the Anthropocene!", "Ch. 2: Geoengineering the Anthropocene" and "Ch. 3: Against the Anthropocene" in *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, pp. 5-58.		Reading Response

| 4 | Feb 2* | Neoliberalism's "Stealth Revolution" and Long-lasting Legacy
Readings:

• Brown, W. (2015). "Ch. 1: Undoing Democracy: Neoliberalism's Remaking of State and Subject" in *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, pp. 17-45.

• Redden, J. (2011). POVERTY IN THE NEWS: A framing analysis of coverage in Canada and the UK. *Information, Communication & Society*, 14(6), 820-849. | Final project groups determined | Reading Response |

Unit 2:   Social Media and Pro-Democracy Movements of the 2010s

| 5 | Feb 9* | Post-Great Recession Movements for Democracy
Readings:

• Kidd, D., and McIntosh, K. (2016). Social Media and Social Movements. *Sociology Compass*, 10, 785–794.

• Kavada, A. (2015). Creating the collective: social media, the Occupy Movement and its constitution as a collective actor, *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(8), 872-886. | Final group project workshop | Reading Response |
| 6 | Feb 16 | #NoDAPL
Readings:

• Estes, N., & Dhillon, J. (2019). "Introduction: The Black Snake, #NoDAPL, and the Rise of a People's Movement" in Estes, N., & Dhillon, J. (Eds.) *Standing with Standing Rock*. Minnesota University Press, pp. 1-10.

Additional Readings Continued on Next Page | | Reading Response |

		• TallBear, K. (2019). "Badass Indigenous Women Caretake Relations: #STANDINGROCK, #IDLENOMORE, #BLACKLIVESMATTER" in Estes, N., & Dhillon, J. (Eds.) *Standing with Standing Rock*. Minnesota University Press, pp. 13-18. • Brown, A. (2019, March 7). A Lakota Historian on What Climate Organizers Can Learn From Two Centuries of Indigenous Resistance. *The Intercept.* Retrieved from https://theintercept.com/2019/03/07/nick-estes-our-history-is-the-future-indigenous-resistance/		
	Feb 23	*Reading Week - No Lecture*		
7	March 1*	The Empire Strikes Back: Threats of Silicon Valley Tech-bros and Authoritarian "Strong Men" Readings: • Sellers, C., Dillon, L., Ohayon, J. L., Shapiro, N., Sullivan, M., Amoss, C., Bocking, S., Brown, P., De la Rosa, V., Harrison, J., Johns, S., Kulik, K., Lave, R., Murphy, M., Piper, L., Richter, L., Wylie, S., EDGI. (2017, June 19). "Executive Summary" and "Introduction" in *The EPA Under Siege*, pp. 1-8. • Calma, J. (2022, December 5). Climate Misinformation explodes on Twitter. *The Verge*. https://www.theverge.com/2022/12/5/23494220/elon-musk-twitter-climate-misinformation-rise-analysis • Tufecki, Z. (2017). "Ch 9: Governments Strike Back" in *Twitter and Teargas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. Yale University Press, pp. 223-260.	Midterm paper workshop	Midterm Draft Reading Response

| 8 | March 8* | Digital Media Infrastructure
Readings:
• Merchant, B. (2019, February 21). How Google, Microsoft, and Big Tech Are Automating the Climate Crisis. *Gizmodo.* https://gizmodo.com/how-google-microsoft-and-big-tech-are-automating-the-1832790799

• Parks, L. (2015) "'Stuff You Can Kick': Towards a Theory of Media Infrastructures" in Svensson, P., & Goldberg, D.T. *Between Humanities and the Digital*. The MIT Press, pp. 355-373. | Final group project workshop | Midterm Paper

Reading Response |

Unit 3: Imagining the Internet and Tech Otherwise

| 9 | March 15* | Disaster Capitalism and Apocalyptic Fantasies
Readings:
• O'Connell, M. (2018, February 15). Why Silicon Valley billionaires are prepping for the apocalypse in New Zealand. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/feb/15/why-silicon-valley-billionaires-are-prepping-for-the-apocalypse-in-new-zealand

• Roose, K. (2023, December 6). Silicon Valley Confronts a Grim New A.I. Metric. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/06/business/dealbook/silicon-valley-artificial-intelligence.html

• Wallace-Wells, D. (2023, March 27). A.I. is being built by people who think it might destroy us. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/27/opinion/ai-chatgpt-chatbots.html | Final project presentations | Reading Response |

10	March 22*	Retreat? Or Build Alternatives? Readings: • Vadukul, A. (2022, December 15). 'Luddite' Teens Don't Want Your Likes. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/15/style/teens-social-media.html • Barendregt, W., Becker, C., Cheon, E., Clement, A., Reynolds-Cuéllar, P., Schuler, D., & Suchman, L. (2021). Defund Big Tech, Refund Community. *Tech Otherwise*. https://doi.org/10.21428/93b2c832.e0100a3f • Holthaus, E. (2022, December 7). Elon Musk wants eco-apartheid. Project Mushroom wants justice. *Project Mushroom.* https://newsletters.projectmushroom.xyz/elon-wants-eco-apartheid/	Final project presentations	Reading Response
11	March 29	*University Closed – No Lecture*		
12	April 5	Conclusion Readings: • Benjamin, R. (2019). "Introduction" in Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code. Polity Press, pp. 1-32.		Reading Response

*April 10 – reading response report due by 10am EST

*April 12—final project due by 10am EST

MIDTERM PAPER: Opportunities and Challenges for Environmental Activism Online

Draft Paper Due**: March 1st by 10am EST

Final Paper Due: March 8th by 10am EST

Length:

~12 page double-spaced paper, 12 point font

Please note: **You must cite <u>at least</u> FIVE course readings and <u>at least</u> TWO outside texts.**

> **On March 1st in tutorials, there will be a midterm paper workshop with the opportunity to receive feedback from peers and your TA. You MUST upload a draft paper to Quercus AND bring a printed version to your tutorial. Your draft will be graded out of 5 points and must demonstrate substantial work already completed including your selected case studies, texts you will cite, and a plan/structure for your paper.*

Instructions:

Drawing upon assigned readings and discussions from lectures, please write a critical, comparative essay reflecting on: (1) the opportunities afforded by social media for building social movements and motivating social change, and (2) the obstacles / challenges for organizing and sustaining social movements online. You must choose two social movements – one that we have discussed in class (e.g., Occupy, Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, Umbrella Movement, #NoDAPL) and one of your own choosing that we have not discussed in class and that is environmental in focus. Please analyze, compare, and contrast your two selected case studies to build your essay's thesis / overarching argument.

FINAL PROJECT: Imagining the Internet Otherwise: Envisioning a New Social Media Platform for Climate Justice

Final Project Due: April 12th by 10 am EST*

*The final project should be submitted through Quercus by one group member on behalf of the entire group

Length:

~16 page double-spaced paper, 12 point font

Please note: **You must cite at least SEVEN course readings and at least THREE additional outside texts.**

The final project will be completed in teams of 2-5 students, all of whom should be attending the same tutorial section.

For the final project, imagine and propose an "ideal" new social media platform for the climate justice "community." This is a chance to be creative and work together with your peers to imagine how social media could be different and "better" than the current options.

You will have the chance to work on this project with your group during two final project workshops to be held during tutorials on February 9 and March 8. These workshops will give you an opportunity to develop your project and coordinate tasks between group members, but you will need to finish your group project outside of class.

Instructions:

Using Project Mushroom's Manifesto as an example (see below), what would the values, mission, and vision be for a new climate justice social media platform that you are collaboratively building as a group?

Write a 1-2 sentence mission statement, a 1-2 sentence vision statement, and set at least four values with 4-5 paragraph-long explanations for your rationale behind each value, drawing upon course readings, lecture content, and relevant outside texts.

In addition to detailing the values, mission, and vision for your proposed platform, please address the following in your proposal in essay/paragraph form. Please note: In your group project paper, **you must clearly apply course readings and themes**:

- What would your social media platform be called? Briefly explain why you chose the name / what it represents or connotates.

- What would be the platform's functions / capabilities / features? Why?

- Do you plan to moderate the content shared on the platform or set rules of conduct? Why or why not? And how so?

- How would you fund the platform (e.g., would you use an advertiser-based model, investor-based, donation-based, publicly-owned, co-operatively owned, grant-funded, crowd-funded, etc.)? Explain why you chose this funding model.

- What challenges do you anticipate may arise in the operation of your platform? How will you try to address these potential challenges?

Example: (Clarifying Note: your proposals should be <u>much</u> longer than the example provided below and with <u>much </u>more detail added-in by <u>drawing upon course readings, concepts, and themes.</u> ALSO: Please do NOT use the exact same values as the ones listed below – come up with new ones, or at least variations on the ones listed below if these values resonate with your group).

Project Mushroom's Manifesto https://newsletters.projectmushroom.xyz/about/

The scorched-earth policies of billionaires on a warming planet are undermining democracy. We are building the world that needs to exist because there is no time to waste.

MISSION
To cultivate timely and accurate information that supports community resilience and safety during the climate emergency.

VISION
We help illuminate possible paths toward a liberated, habitable and joyful future for people and the environment alike.

VALUES
- *Community: We work to build strong long-term relationships with people whose stories we share and those who use our services.*
- *Justice: We recognize that the climate emergency, and the inequality it reproduces, is a symptom of capitalism and colonialism and work to help repair these injustices.*
- *Safety: We amplify community-led systemic change and aim to protect all life, especially that which has been harmed by oppressive systems and left most vulnerable to extreme weather impacts.*
- *Joy: We embrace our role as stewards of the Earth and center joy, first and foremost, in our reporting and services.*

← **Thread**

Eric Holthaus ✔ @EricHolthaus · 4h ···
Replying to @EricHolthaus
🍄 Project Mushroom is being built as a decentralized and community-owned platform for people to connect without fear of harassment.

As we grow, we are looking to join forces with other organizations working for justice and a better world.

Sign up here:

	tryprojectmushroom.com
🗔	Waitlist
	A website made with Typedream.

💬 2   ↻ 30   ♡ 104   ⬆

Eric Holthaus ✔ @EricHolthaus · 4h ···
🍄 Project Mushroom envisions:

🍄 Newsletter creation, including setup, maintenance and discoverability
🍄 Live events, including support for creators
🍄 Mastodon-based social media network built for safety & joy
🍄 Onboarding assistance for all of your followers to join you

💬 2   ↻ 13   ♡ 90   ⬆

Eric Holthaus ✔ @EricHolthaus · 3h ···
🍄 Project Mushroom is working with ex-Twitter employees, open-source advocates, and justice champions to build a complete social community ecosystem where people can feel heard, valued, and interact personally with their favorite creators.

Join us:

	tryprojectmushroom.com
🗔	Waitlist
	A website made with Typedream.

💬 4   ↻ 40   ♡ 104   ⬆

Assignment Grading Criteria

The primary criteria used in evaluating written work are the following:

1) *Mechanics*: Your work must be completely free of grammatical errors, spelling errors or major factual errors. References can be in any style but the same format must be used consistently and they must be accurate.

2) *Writing style*: Your papers should be written in a clear and unambiguous style which assists, rather than impedes, communication with the reader.

3) *Structure*: Your written work should have a clear focus, provided by the research question, and a structure which logically flows from that focus.

4) *Precision and accuracy*: Precision means saying exactly and specifically what you mean, avoiding ambiguity and vague generalities. Accuracy refers to absence of major factual errors.

5) *Analysis*: Your analysis should display understanding of the topic and, based on that understanding, originality of thought. Course readings and themes should clearly be applied and should clearly inform your analysis. You should also fully address all aspects of the prompt / assignment instructions.

The primary criteria used in evaluating oral presentations are the following:

1) Success in communicating key concepts succinctly and accurately, thereby demonstrating sound understanding of the work being presented.

2) Mechanics of communication, such as manner of speaking (including good diction and tone), structure of the presentation, and level of organization.

3) Ability to respond appropriately and fairly to questions and contribute to and stimulate unstructured discussion among peers.