THE POLITICS OF DIGITAL LABOR

TUESDAY & THURSDAY, 9:00AM TO 10:15AM
WEBSTER HALL, ROOM 113

Instructor: Prof. Nicole Grove
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Office Hours: Thursdays 10:30-12pm, Saunders 608
About the Course

This course will explore the political economy of constant connectivity, and the changing landscapes of work and labor under late capitalism. As human sociability is increasingly organized and performed online, liking, sharing, updating, posting, and searching have become forms of ‘digital labor’ which are uncompensated, but create value for others in the expansion of the spaces of capital accumulation. In the meantime, or own perceptions of ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ time become more and more blurred, and the content or data generated through these activities are surveilled by governments, captured by corporations, and turned into portraits and profiles that affect our lives in ways that we are often unaware of. During the semester, we will discuss recent debates on the topic of digital labor, examining how theories of capital accumulation provide insight into what we do on the internet, and how that information is used. Questions explored in this class will include: how is our data appropriated, surveilled, and made sensible in diffuse contexts for the purpose of value creation? How do algorithms direct our activities on and offline toward particular forms of value creation, and how is this changing the movement of the global economy? How does the increasing automation of work previously performed by humans affect the possibilities and precarities of social, political and economic life? How are these precarities distributed along gendered and racialized lines? Finally, how might we think about labor organization and public alternatives to the corporate web in light of the realities of contemporary and emergent forms of digital labor and technological digitalization?

This course has both Writing Intensive (W) and Oral Communication (O) Focus Designations. The response and research papers, individual and group presentations, as well as class discussion will facilitate the requirements for these designations. The course is designed to be interactive and thus relies significantly on student participation – please come to class prepared and ready to discuss the readings! The assignments are designed to: 1) help you gain experience in writing, research, and oral presentation; 2) introduce you to interdisciplinary inquiry; 3) encourage you to practice critical approaches to reading and writing; and 4) introduce you to the use of digital ethnographic methods for political inquiry.
BOOKS AND READINGS

These books are available for purchase at the UH bookstore. All other reading materials are available online or can be found on Laulima.

*Recommended readings are intended to give you a deeper understanding of the issues discussed, and to provide you with a wider range of sources to explore topics you’d like more information about.

GRADING
*Research paper outline, **7 points [W]**
*Research paper (10 pages), **15 points [W]**
*Response papers (3 papers/6 points each), **18 points [W]**
*One presentation on a reading, **10 points [O]**
*Group project & presentation, (10 pts research / 15 pts presentation) **25 points [O]**
*Class Participation, **15 points [O]**
*Attendance, **10 points**

ORAL COMMUNICATION ASSIGNMENTS [O]
The 15 minute individual presentation on a reading and 20 minute group project presentations will contribute to improving your public speaking skills, and help you to better understand the key arguments of the texts by organizing your ideas about them as well as providing support for these ideas orally. As part of these requirement for these assignments, you will meet with me before and after your oral presentations to help you better prepare and communicate ideas clearly while addressing any concerns you may have, as well as to receive post-presentation feedback on strengths you might build upon. Students may use notes for their presentations but should not read from them.

WRITING INTENSIVE ASSIGNMENTS [W]
The response papers, research paper outline, and final research paper, and are designed to help you better understand the course content through writing, to develop clear and effective strategies for communicating central themes and ideas, and to learn to think critically and make substantive arguments. Individual meetings with the instructor at various stages of the written assignments will be scheduled throughout the semester.
**RESEARCH PAPER AND OUTLINE [W]**

You will write a research outline and a 10-page paper for this course on a topic that we have agreed on together – *please do not start writing before we’ve discussed your paper outline*. Your research outline should be more than one, but no more than two pages in length, and should include a research question, a preliminary thesis or answer to your research question, 3-4 sections (suggested) for the body that outline the topics and sub-topics substantiating your thesis, a conclusion, and a preliminary bibliography.

Students are required to meet with the instructor individually during office hours after they turn in their outlines and before beginning work on their final papers to ensure a clear, overall structure and well-organized argument for the paper, as well as to discuss any supplemental reading materials that might be helpful. A sign-up sheet will be made available the week before Spring Break for individual meetings about the final paper assignment. **Students who do not to show up to their meeting without notifying the instructor beforehand will have 2 points deducted from their paper.**

The paper must be 10-pages long (not including the bibliography) and written in 12 point, Times New Roman font. It must include a title, introduction stating the topic and why it was chosen, a body with no more than four subheadings, a clearly identified conclusion, and a bibliography including ONLY sources listed on the syllabus, those referenced in course texts, or texts that have received pre-approval for use during our one-on-one meeting about the paper (please see me for any questions about this). Research Outlines are due on the date indicated on the syllabus. **RESEARCH PAPERS ARE DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF INSTRUCTION. NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.** Please note that all students have the option of receiving feedback on their papers before submitting them for a final grade if they turn in a draft before Wednesday, April 30th.

**DIGITAL GROUP PROJECT AND GROUP PRESENTATION [O]**

Students will spend the second to last week of class working together in groups doing in-depth research on an issue of their choice related to the topic of digital labor. The instructor will work closely with each group using digital ethnographic methods to explore the social, historical and political dynamics of their topic. Students are encouraged to be creative about their research and how they want to present their work. Group presentations should be approximately 20 minutes long, and will illustrate a substantive profile of the group’s research. Students may use short videos, Prezzi, Powerpoint, games, maps or anything else that may enhance the quality of their presentation.
PRESENTATION ON A READING [O]
Each student will present on a reading of their choice at the beginning of the class session. This presentation should be approximately 15 minutes long, and should show both a substantive grasp of the material as well as evidence of critical reflection on the arguments presented in the text. The instructor will distribute a presentation schedule during the second week of class, and presentations will begin the third week. One-on-one meetings with the instructor prior to the presentation will be scheduled to go over content and the organization of the presentation to help facilitate effectiveness in communicating main ideas. **Students who do not show up on the day they are scheduled to present or come unprepared to give their presentation will receive zero credit for the assignment.**

RESPONSE PAPERS [W]
Students will write three 3-4 page essays (12pt, New Times Roman font) documenting their perspectives on a series of experiential assignments during the semester. Each assignment is meant to give students a more substantive understanding of the different topics discussed in class. Responses must be submitted by the due dates indicated on the syllabus - NO EXCEPTIONS. The instructor will submit feedback and a grade for each response paper to students within two weeks of turning in their assignments.

CLASS PARTICIPATION [O]
Questions and comments about course material or topics discussed in class allow you to think critically about, recall and engage information in an immediate context. Class participation may also be regarded as an indirect way to critique student presentations and encourage group interaction. Please come to class having done the assigned readings and be prepared to discuss them with your colleagues! Class participation is worth 15 percent of your final grade and is a requirement for O focus credit.

ATTENDANCE
Attendance is critical to class participation. Late arrival to class beyond 10 minutes will be considered the same as being absent. One letter grade will be deducted from your final grade if you have more than FOUR unexcused absences.

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CLASS SCHEDULE

**Week 1 - Introduction // A Data Scientist in Disneyland**

**Tues, Jan 12:** Introduction to the Course; Foreman, ‘You don’t want your privacy: Disney and the meat space data race’. Available at https://gigaom.com/2014/01/18/you-dont-want-your-privacy-disney-and-the-meat-space-data-race/

**Thurs, Jan 14:** Karl Marx. ‘Capital’, Selections TBD.
Week 2: Critical Thinking-Theory-Approaches // Social Media and Accelerated Living

**Tues, Jan 19:** Fuchs, Chs. 1 and 2, ‘What is a Critical Introduction to Social Media?’ and ‘What is Social Media?’, pp. 1-50.

**Thurs, Jan 21:** Fuchs cont. Wajcman, Ch 1. ‘High-Speed Society’, pp. 13-36.

Week 3 – Digital Labor and Immaterial Labor


*Response Paper 1 prompt given in class.

Week 4: Authenticity, Sharing and the Labor of Coolness

**Tues, Feb 2:** Harris, ‘The Drama of Consumer Desire,’ in Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America (Laulima).


Week 5: Algorithmically Judging You: Big Data and the Politics of Reputation


*RESPONSE PAPER #1 DUE Thursday.

Week 6: Google, Ideology, and the ‘Hidden Logics’ of Searching

Tues, Feb 16: Fuchs, Ch. 6 ‘Google: Good or Evil Search Engine?’

Thurs, Feb 18: Pasquale, Ch. 3 'The Hidden Logics of Search' and discussion of short films, 'Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory' and Wilson's, 'Workers Leaving the Googleplex'.

*Response Paper 2 prompt given in class.

Week 7: ‘Living with Apple’: Constant Connectivity and the Pace of Hyperexistence


‘Recommended: Wajcman, Ch. 3 ‘The Time Pressure Paradox’. pp. 61-86.

Thurs, Feb 25: Bogost, cont. Sections 5-10, pp. 35-74.

Week 8: Facebook: Sociality and Surveillance // Film, ‘Terms and Conditions May Apply’

Tues, March 1: Fuchs, ‘Facebook: A Surveillance Threat to Privacy’. In class viewing of film, ‘Terms and Conditions May Apply.’

Thurs, March 3: In class discussion of film.

Week 9: Feminizing and Racializing Digital Labor


*RESPONSE PAPER #2 DUE Thursday.

Week 10: Feminized and Racialized Digital Labor cont.

Tues, March 15: Nakamura, ‘Don’t Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft.’ In Scholz (ed.) Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory (Laulima).

Week 11: Spring Recess (March 21-25)

Week 12: The Robots are Here


*Response Paper 3 prompt given in class.

*RESEARCH OUTLINES DUE IN CLASS on Thursday.

Week 13: The Labor of Content Moderation and the Materiality of eWaste

Tues, April 5: Film, in Class ‘Exporting Harm: The High Tech Trashing of Asia’ before next Tuesday, April 5. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yD5WGV3jGek


*RESPONSE PAPER #3 DUE Thursday.

Week 14 – Alternative Socialities, Reverse Surveillance, and Digital Labor in the Anthropocene

Tues, April 12: Fuchs, Ch. 11 ‘Social Media and Its Alternatives’ pp. 253-266, and Wacjman, Ch. 6, ‘Time to Talk: Intimacy through Technology’, pp. 137-162.


Week 15 - Finding Time


Thurs, April 21: In class discussion of research paper assignment.

Week 16 - Group Research

Tues, April 26: – Group project research, in class.
Thurs, April 28 – Group project research, in class.

Week 17 - Group Presentations
Tues, May 3: Group presentations

*RESEARCH PAPER DUE Tuesday, May 3rd in class.