Fall 2012 Syllabus – COMM 704

**Media, Technology, and Democracy**

Tuesdays 2:35-5:15 pm
Media Production Center Room 100

Dr. Laura DeNardis

Office Hours: Mondays 11:40 am – 1:40 pm; Tuesdays 12:30-2:30 pm; Thursdays 11:40 am – 1:40 pm
Mary Graydon Center 331C; denardis@american.edu

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The doctoral seminar in Media, Technology, and Democracy is the foundational introductory course for students entering the Ph.D. program in the School of Communication at American University. The seminar examines theories of digital democracy and the impact of new information technologies on the public sphere, media systems, democratic self governance, and individual freedom. A growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship has coalesced around research examining the implications of new media for civic engagement, political activism, and democratic culture in contemporary society. The course draws from this body of scholarship and also introduces students to the specialized concentrations in media, technology, and democracy taken up by the research faculty in American University’s School of Communication. Readings examine a range of issues including: the role of digital technologies in civic engagement; social movements and digital activism; the relationship between technology and political participation; persuasive gaming; public diplomacy, networks, and culture; global Internet freedom; and youth social media policy.

The course has five primary learning objectives: 1. Understand central themes in the doctoral program in communication and make connections between these themes and your own research interests; 2. Become well versed in the growing body of interdisciplinary literature and theory at the intersections of media, technology, and democracy; 3. Become acquainted with some of the Ph.D. faculty and their research areas, including some of the interdisciplinary fields that are part of this program; 4. Gain expertise in methods of intensive secondary literature research and become proficient in searching for and accessing library resources at American University; and 5. Produce a well thought out proposal for original research.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Weekly Analysis Pieces.** (25% of Grade). Each week you will be expected to produce a 1-2 page analysis of the week’s readings. Specific instructions will be provided for each set of readings. For the classes when we are joined by School of Communication professors, please be sure to identify the methods and theories these scholars use in their work.

**Class Participation and Attendance.** (25% of Grade). We will strive for class sessions that are engaging, active, and informative. Our format will combine discussion, in-class screenings and presentations, and analysis. Students are expected to arrive to class each week prepared to contribute their knowledge and insights with colleagues and to work collaboratively on projects.
Mid-Term Critical Essay on New Media and Democracy. (25% of Grade). Some scholars exhibit a utopian and technologically deterministic viewpoint linking certain technological platforms with democratic advancement. Others make dystopian arguments that forms of technology constrain democratic discourse and culture. Still others highlight how the same technologies used to advance democratic freedom are used by repressive governments to enact new forms of surveillance and repression. Please write a 2500-word essay staking out your own position on the linkages between new/emerging forms of media and democracy. Your topic should be specific, include a rich review of secondary literature, and be approved in advance by the Professor. Please plan to make a 15-minute presentation in class on October 30. (Paper due date: October 30)

Final Project – A Research Proposal. (25% of Grade). For your final paper, please develop a research proposal on a topic of your choosing. The proposal should be targeted toward research you could potential place in a top-tier journal in the communication field. Please include the following elements: a statement of research problem; research questions and goals; a review of existing literature; a rationale for conducting the study; an initial theoretical framework; and proposed research methods. Please plan to make a 25-30 minute presentation of your research proposal during our last class meeting on December 11. (Proposal due date: December 11)

RECOMMENDED ONLINE RESOURCES

Berkman Center for Internet & Society - http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/

OpenNet Initiative - http://opennet.net/

Oxford Internet Institute - http://www.oiic.ac.uk/

FirstMonday - http://firstmonday.org/

Center for Democracy and Technology - https://www.cdt.org/

Electronic Frontier Foundation - https://www.eff.org/

Association of Internet Researchers - http://aoir.org/

World Internet Project - http://www.worldinternetproject.net/


Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

August 28, 2012: Overview and Discussion of Youth Digital Media Policy

Guest Discussant: Dr. Kathryn Montgomery, Director of the Ph.D. Program

Reading:


September 4, 2012: Theories of the Digital Public Sphere

Guest Discussant: Professor Patricia Aufderheide

Background Reading for Discussion with Professor Aufderheide:

- Patricia Aufderheide, The Daily Planet: A Critic on the Capitalist Culture Beat, pp. ix-xv; 3-12; 139-53; 331-33.

Readings on Digital Public Sphere:


**September 11, 2012: Democratic Access to Knowledge in the Digital Age**

*Guest Discussant: Robin Chin Roemer*

**Reading:**


**Assignment:**

Write a 2-page critique of a course-related article of your choice that you locate in one of the following journals:

- *New Media & Society*
- *Political Communication*
- *Communication Theory*
- *Journal of Communication*
- *Information, Communication, & Society*
- *FirstMonday* - [http://firstmonday.org/](http://firstmonday.org/)

**September 18, 2012: Digital Activism**


- Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, “Where Have We Been and Where are We Headed?” in *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age*, MIT Press 2011.


**September 25, 2012: Social Media and Political Movements**

*Guest Discussant: Professor Deen Freelon*


**October 2, 2012: Political Organization in the Digital Age**

*Guest Lecturer: Dr. David Karpf*

**Reading:**


**Assignment:**

- Please come to class prepared to direct several specific comments/questions to Dr. Karpf.

**October 9, 2012: Media, Democracy and Ideology**


**October 16, 2012: Questioning Digital Democracy**


**October 23, 2012: Public Diplomacy, Networks, and Culture**

*Guest Discussant: Professor Rhonda Zaharna*

**Reading:**


**October 30, 2012: (New) New Media and Democracy**

*Mid-term papers due. Mid-term presentations in class.*


**November 6, 2012: Influence, Persuasion and Personal Autonomy**

*Guest Discussant: Professor Sol Hart*


- Baruch Fischhoff, “Scientists can become the trusted source for credible, relevant, comprehensible information by avoiding advocacy and letting the science speak for itself,” *Environmental Science & Technology*, 2007.


**November 13, 2012: Political Communication and Media Effects**

*Guest Discussant: Professor Lauren Feldman*


NO CLASS NOVEMBER 20TH

November 27, 2012: Digital Journalism and Democracy

Guest Discussant: Professor Joe Campbell


December 4, 2012: Global Struggles over Internet Freedom

Reading:

- Rebecca MacKinnon, Consent of the Networked: The Worldwide Struggle for Internet Freedom, Basic Books 2012. (Read through page 165)


December 11, 2012: Course Conclusion and Final Presentations
Grading Scale - Letter grades will be distributed on the following scale

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<th>Score Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>94-100</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-93</td>
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<td>80-83</td>
<td>B-</td>
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Academic Integrity - Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's Academic Integrity Code. By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary action will be taken should such violations occur. Please see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code in general or as they relate to particular requirements for this course.

Emergency Preparedness for Disruption of Classes
In the event of an emergency, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal, the AU Web site (www.prepared.american.edu) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean’s office for course and school/college-specific information.

Disability Support
If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please don’t hesitate to consult with me. In addition to the resources of the department, a wide range of services is available to support you in your efforts to meet the course requirements.

Academic Support Center (x3360, MGC 243) offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals, and services for students with learning disabilities. Writing support is available in the ASC Writing Lab or in the Writing Center, Battelle 228.

Counseling Center (x3500, MGC 214) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources.

Disability Support Services (x3315, MGC 206) offers technical and practical support and assistance with accommodations for students with physical, medical, or psychological disabilities. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please notify me in a timely manner with a letter from the Academic Support Center or Disability Support Services so that we can make arrangements to address your needs.