
SENIOR SEMINAR: DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY in Spring 2019 (CM4090)

Course Code	CM4090	Professor(s)	Jessica Feldman
Prerequisites	None	Office Number	305 Grenelle
Class Schedule	M: 16:55-19:50 in G-207	Office Hours	Wed 3:15-5:15 or by appointment
Credits	4	Email	jfeldman@aup.edu
Semester	Spring 2019	Office Tel. Ext.	

Course Description

Civil Society, a mysterious term for any social group that is not the state or the commercial sector, includes NGOs, activists, social movements, family and friend groups, and more. Organized Civil Society groups long have been understood as essential for democracy and social progress. How has the rapid rise of digital media impacted civil society? What constitutes our newly emerging and highly connected “digital civil society?” This course, developed in and also taught at the Digital Civil Society Lab at Stanford University, considers these questions. While the digital age has expanded the potential for civil society participation, it also brings with it new challenges and threats. The world is increasingly dependent on digital software and infrastructures that are built by private-sector companies and surveilled by government. Our current situation requires new insights into how these digital systems work and how we can safely and ethically engage them for civil society’s purposes. The course explores multiple ways that we can intervene in these issues: legal reform, institutional change, new forms of cultural expression, and through the re-design of our digital tools. What new avenues can we use to help political and associational life flourish using digital media? How might civil society shape digital technologies in turn? The class engages with scholarship, newly designed “activist” tech, and some hands-on workshops to better understand the possibilities and problems of the digital for civil society concerns.

As a senior seminar, in this class, students develop an honors thesis. Students give class presentations on their projects at each stage of their research and present their thesis at the end of the semester.

Course Learning Outcomes

A solid understanding of critical theories and debates in media, communication and cultural studies relating to panic and scandal

An improved ability to critically analyse a range of media forms, their production, circulation and

reception

An improved ability to evaluate and compare examples of media, culture and communications across different contexts

Advanced skills in independent research in media, culture and communications

Students will be able to confidently answer the following question: What is the relationship of advocacy and activism to policy processes and social change?

Students will be able to confidently answer the following question: How is advocacy and activism being practiced in the digital age? And what tools and strategies are being used to intervene/practice?

Students will be able to confidently answer the following question: In particular cases and campaigns, how important is international and local networking, as well as technological savvy and strategy?

Students will be able to confidently answer the following question: How does attention control, persuasion and influence work via particular rhetorical choices in particular contingent situations?

Students will be able to confidently answer the following question: How do particular forms of advocacy relate to theories of power, communication, democracy and social and policy change?

General Education

Course Outline

Course Outline – Readings & Schedule may be adjusted

Week & Dates	Topic
Week 1	Introduction to the Course
	Introductions of people and topics. What is a thesis?! Scheduling.
Week 2	Defining Civil Society / Developing Research Questions
	What laws, norms, institutions, and social practices compose civil society? What is its role in democratic governance?
	Workshopping on developing research questions
	<u>Readings Due:</u> De Tocqueville, Sievers, Bernholz, Wickramasinghe
	<u>Skim/Scan/Don't Freak:</u> Wellesley College Senior Thesis

	Collection
	<u>Assignment due:</u> Reading Response
Week 3	Surveillance, Privacy, Participation / Workshopping Research Questions
	Is the internet good or bad, or both? How do technologies we use for civic participation and discussion also become technologies used against these purposes? How might we think about the technical and ethical problems that pit privacy and participation against each other?
	Guest Workshop with Jayson Harsin: Developing Research Questions, Literature Reviews
	<u>Readings Due:</u> Tufekci, Wood, pick an article from <i>Surveillance and the Global Turn to Authoritarianism</i> , Harvard Senior Thesis Guide on “Developing the Project”
	<u>Assignments Due:</u> • Write a reportback connecting The Glass Room experience show to the readings. • Research Questions
Week 4	NGOs, Nonprofits, Philanthropy
	How do NGOs, Nonprofits, and Philanthropy act as or intervene in Civil Society and the political sphere? Are they good or bad? What are their goals and ideologies? How do they use technology to achieve them?
	<u>Readings Due:</u> Lechterman, Bernholz & Reich, Klees
	<u>Assignments Due:</u> • Reading Response • Bibliography of no less than 20 sources.
Week 5	Values in Technological Design / Literature Review
	How, and to what extent, can a technology embody or enforce political and moral values and design a society? To what extent does society design technology? Who wins and who loses?
	<u>Readings due:</u> Winner, Sandivg et al, Design Justice Zine
	<u>Assignment Due:</u> Reading Response
	More on Literature Reviews; In-Class work on Annotating Bibliography
Week 6	Digital Activism, Digital Organizing
	How do Civil Society actors organize online versus in-person? What kinds of organizing and activism are supported by digital platforms, what kinds are thwarted?

	Survey of methodologies, how to write a methods section. <u>Readings Due:</u> Tufekci, Karpf, Gerbaudo, Treré <u>Assignment Due:</u> Reading response. Full Literature Review.
SPRING BREAK!	
Week 7	Methodology & Epistemology
	What methods work for which questions? How are epistemology and power related?
	Readings Due: Sample Methods Sections, Methodology Literature Assignment due: Draft of methods section. Workshopping of methods
Week 8	Design Pluralism
	What happens when those traditionally excluded from the design process become the ones who are driving it? <u>Alternative platforms and postcolonial computing.</u> Readings due: Phillip et al, Scholz, Srinivasan Due: Reading response Due: Begin Research
Week 9	Democratic Participation & Practices / Research Report-backs
	What various models of democratic participation do we have? What can we imagine? How does/can digital technology intervene in democratic process (for better or worse?) Discussions of: Representative Democracy & Elections, Participatory & Direct Democracy, their promises and problems.
	Readings Due: Stanford Encyclopedia, Persily, Landemore Due: Reading Response Due: Short reportback on status of research; difficulties Workshopping of research progress and difficulties
Week 10	Participatory & Mission Oriented Design / Research Report-backs
	How do users and organizations participate in technological design? How can we imagine designing technology to serve the goals of Civil Society Organizations?
	Readings Due: Civic Hall, Participatory Design Reader,

	Ushahidi studies
	Due: Reading response
	Due: Research check-ins and meetings as necessary
Week 11	Catching up on readings, discussions, presentations, questions
	Due: Short reportback on status of research; difficulties
Week 12	NO CLASS – Easter Monday
	You should be writing this week.
Week 13 & Week 14	Workshop Final Projects: In-Progress Presentations & Meetings
	Due the day of your presentation: Draft of “findings” section/research write up.
Final: Mon May 13	FINAL EXAM PERIOD: Presentations of Final projects

Textbooks

This course doesn't have any textbook.

Attendance Policy

Students studying at The American University of Paris are expected to attend ALL scheduled classes, and in case of absence, should contact their professors to explain the situation. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of any specific attendance policy that a faculty member might have set in the course syllabus. The French Department, for example, has its own attendance policy, and students are responsible for compliance. Academic Affairs will excuse an absence for students' participation in study trips related to their courses.

Attendance at all exams is mandatory.

IN ALL CASES OF MISSED COURSE MEETINGS, THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMMUNICATION WITH THE PROFESSOR, AND FOR ARRANGING TO MAKE UP MISSED WORK, RESTS SOLELY WITH THE STUDENT.

Whether an absence is excused or not is ALWAYS up to the discretion of the professor or the department. Unexcused absences can result in a low or failing participation grade. In the case of excessive absences, it is up to the professor or the department to decide if the student will receive an "F" for the course. An instructor may recommend that a student withdraw, if absences have made it impossible to continue in the course at a satisfactory level.

Students must be mindful of this policy when making their travel arrangements, and especially during the Drop/Add and Exam Periods.

Grading Policy

Course requirements and grading

- Students will give one short (about 10 mins) presentation on a reading of their choosing: 10%
- Assignments: Reading Responses & Write-Ups of Assigned Visits/Talks: 20%
- Assignments: Draft bibliography, research question, etc.: 10%
- In-class workshopping of your own project, including in-class presentations: 10%
- In-class workshopping of others' projects. You will be evaluated based on your constructively critical engagement with other students' projects, ability to connect their work to texts and concepts from class as appropriate, engagement with conceptual questions: 10%
- Attendance and daily participation: 10%
- Final Honors Thesis: 30%

Important notes on assignments

- Work may NOT be submitted by email. It must be submitted on Blackboard and (when appropriate) in printed copy.
- ALL written work, including papers and reading responses, must use correct citations. Any work without complete and correct references in MLA, APA, or Chicago format will NOT be accepted. It is your responsibility to learn correct citational methods if they are unfamiliar.
- Work submitted late will be penalized by a fraction of a letter grade per day, ie. A becomes A-, A- becomes B+, etc.
- Any work found to be plagiarized will automatically receive a zero and may result in an F for the course. It is your responsibility to understand how to avoid plagiarism.
- First assignments will be monitored for writing skills, and students whose writing needs to improve will be referred to the Writing Lab before the following assignments will be accepted for grading.

Other

Assignments:

Reading Responses/Writeups: Most weeks you will write a reflection on the readings **due at 9 am the day of class**. These should take you about 30-45 minutes to complete each, and be 200-300 words in length. Summarize in 1-2 sentences what you think the thesis/primary argument of each reading is (“key takeaways”) and one or two critical question(s) you have for discussion. What are aspects of the readings you found interesting and would like to discuss? What parts of the readings were confusing that you would like to spend more time on? You are also encouraged to share related articles, videos or applications you'd encourage the rest of the class to know about.

Drafts of Thesis Sections (such as Biblio, Methods, etc.): Think of these as “mini-papers” that will come together at the end of the class to be revised and form your final thesis. I assign them throughout the class in order to workshop them and in order to break the thesis writing down into steps and make it more manageable.

Final Honors Thesis: This paper should use our course readings, talks, visits, and topics as a background for the analysis of an object of study related to the class topics. Class and outside readings will serve as grounds for analysing/critiquing/appreciating primary research material. The paper should be organized in a scholarly format: introduction to topic/research question, literature review on topic, method of analysis, presentation of data, analysis of data, conclusion that discusses contribution to existing literature on the topic, and bibliography. These papers are usually in the 30-50 page range.