Course Description
This course will introduce graduate students to relevant theories and scholarship examining the social, psychological, and interpersonal aspects of social media use, using relevant theories in fields such as communication, social psychology, and sociology. We will be reading both classic and new research in this area. Topics include: computer-mediated communication theory; self-presentation and online identity; social capital; interpersonal relationship initiation, maintenance, and dissolution; and psychological implications of social media use. The course will be structured as a discussion-focused learning experience.

Course goals
The purpose of this course is to provide students with an overview of critical concepts for understanding the ways in which social technologies – especially but not limited to social media – reshape social interactions, and the implications of this for relationship development, self-presentation, the structure of social networks, and other important processes. The reading list covers both foundational work and state of the art scholarship in this vibrant and emerging arena of scholarship. This course will focus on relevant theoretical frameworks and tracing the history of CMC scholarship from the mid-1980s to today.

Reading
There is a fair amount of reading included in this course, which you will need to engage with in order to contribute to class discussions. That said, it’s acceptable to skim periodically if you are certain a particular article is not going to be particularly useful for your research focus. But I hope will not be the case. And it will be apparent when it is.

Also, note that a fair number of “in press” articles and manuscripts are included in the syllabus. If these are draft documents, professional courtesy demands that you not share these files and that you contact the author for permission to cite or quote; they may have a more recent draft.

Unless otherwise noted, all readings are in CTools. If you can’t find or are having trouble with a file, please let me know immediately so I can fix it. The two books you may wish to purchase are:

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Anchor. (Used copies available on Amazon at low cost. May be found online as well.)

**Weekly Responses (20%)**

Each week’s readings share a focus, which will vary week to week. Throughout the semester you should upload six (6) one to two-page reaction papers to cTools. (You should do this for the weeks you find most relevant to your own research and most interesting.) In your paper, you will respond to the readings, addressing questions such as: What did you find particularly interesting, counter-intuitive, or troubling about this work? What research question(s), methods, or future research was suggested by the readings in your opinion? What alternative explanations should the author(s) have considered? How does this work speak (or ignore) other work we’ve discussed this semester? What concepts are particularly useful for your own project? There is not a standard structure for these papers. You should use them as a platform for working through and synthesizing your thoughts about the readings and topic area, and we may organize class discussions around the ideas you raise. I am NOT looking for a summary of the readings or for you to “prove” that you have done the reading – that is my assumption. I am looking for reactions, responses, and ideas sparked by the readings. This is an exercise designed to encourage intellectual engagement, not a strategy to confirm who has done the readings.

Although it is not required, I encourage you to find one article or chapter that extends, contradicts, complements, or offers insight into the topic and readings of that week. In your reaction paper, you could describe briefly why you chose your article and how it relates to the topic at hand.

These response papers should be posted to cTools no later than Sunday at noon and ideally earlier than that. Note that you are responsible for reading through your peers’ contributions before class on Monday.

**Participation: 15%**

You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and the ideas they represent in thoughtful ways. Note that, as with most communication, quality counts more than quantity. Dominating class discussions or saying something just to hit a participation metric is not the goal here; providing insights, building on others’ ideas, respectfully disagreeing, and contributing to the discussion in meaningful ways is.

**“Black Mirror” Short paper (15%)**

Black Mirror is a British TV series that is now available on Netflix. It addresses many issues salient to social media scholars and which we will discuss in class throughout the semester. Please select an episode and write a short (2-3 page) paper drawing together themes from the episode and scholarship on the topic you choose. Group work (max group size: 3) is allowed, though group projects must reflect the substantive work of all parties and the length of the paper is expected to be longer (i.e., roughly twice as long for two-person teams). This paper can take one of three forms:

1. A short literature review that builds to a specific research question and employs a relevant theory.
2. An analysis of a particular phenomenon explored in the episode. You will pretend that you are a researcher and the episode is your dataset. Using one of the theories or analytic lenses from class or your own research, analyze the practices, outcomes, and/or processes explored in the episode.
3. Your choice! Suggest a format that would be useful to you, and get it approved by me at least a week before the paper is due.
**Research paper and Presentation: 50%**
More information about the research paper and presentation will be provided at a later date. I am happy to work with you to find a topic and approach that supports your long-term research goals. The final paper should be approximately 15 pages.

On March 9, you will turn in a short description of your paper and present the idea to the class in order to receive feedback. This should include your idea/thesis and a rationale for why this topic is important to study. Group work (max group size: 3) is allowed, though group projects must reflect the substantive work of all parties and the length of the paper is expected to be longer. I do not recommend group work for first or second year students.

**Reading Schedule**
The readings may be adjusted. Any adjustments will be announced via cTools.

**Week 1 (Jan. 12): Overview**
Prep work for day one: BEFORE YOU DO THE READINGS, write a 1-page reaction paper that describes (1) your working definition of “social media” and (2) your response to the following question: “What are the most interesting and important research questions related to social media at this time (to you)?”


Note: if you haven't read boyd & Ellison (2007), please do so before reading Ellison & boyd, 2014.

**Week 2 (Jan. 26): Affordances**


Week 3 (Feb. 2): Historical perspectives on mediated interactions


http://pdf.aminer.org/000/088/670/beyond_being_there.pdf


Week 4 (Feb. 9): SIP, Hyperpersonal, & Warranting


Recommended:

**Week 5 (Feb. 16) Networks & Social Capital**


Grannovetter, M. (1986). This week’s citation classic.


Recommended:


**Week 6 (Feb. 23) : Self Presentation**


Week 7 (Mar. 9): Self Presentation/Deception/Privacy
One-pager on paper idea due.


Recommended:


Week 8 (Mar 16) – Mobile Communication. Guest Instructor: Scott Campbell


Week 9 (Mar. 23): Identity


**Week 10 (Mar 30): More on Identity and Identity Signals**  
**Black Mirror assignment due.**


Leavitt, A. (In press).“This is a Throwaway Account“: Temporary Technical Identities and Perceptions of Anonymity in a Massive Online Community. Online:  
[http://alexleavitt.com/papers/2015_CHI_Leavitt_ThisIsAThrowawayAccount_AnonymityReddit.pdf](http://alexleavitt.com/papers/2015_CHI_Leavitt_ThisIsAThrowawayAccount_AnonymityReddit.pdf)

*Recommended:* Bernstein et al. (2011), 4chan and /b/: An Analysis of Anonymity and Ephemeralit in a Large Online Community. Online:  

**Week 11 (April 4) **  
**Online/Offline/Proximity**


Recommended:

Week 12 (April 13): Adolescents & Social Media


Week 13 (April 20): New Directions


Eslami et al. (In press). “I always assumed that I wasn’t really that close to [her]” : Reasoning about invisible algorithms in the news feed.” Paper to be presented at CHI.


For your 4th paper, read one of the following:

Final exam period (April 28, 8-10am): Presentations
Final paper due. [We may find another time to meet if everyone agrees.]