ENV361S, Winter 2018
Social Media and Environmentalism

Instructor: Prof. Steve Easterbrook, Dept. of Computer Science
Office: BA3259, Bahen Centre, 40 St George Street.
sme@cs.toronto.edu

Class Meetings:
Lectures: Fridays 10am - 12 pm, Room BA1240; First lecture is on Jan 5th.
Tutorials: (a) Fridays 12pm (Room TBA); (b) A second Tutorial section will be scheduled.

Teaching Assistants: Brian Pentz, Department of Physical and Environmental Sciences.

Course basics are posted on Blackboard. We will use Piazza for content delivery and course interaction. Consider these multiple platforms as a “meta” opportunity to think about the key themes in the course. Piazza enrolment: http://piazza.com/utoronto.ca/winter2018/env361

Course theme & objectives:
This course will examine a range of issues related to the environment and digital technology, with a broad focus on the impacts of social media on environmental thinking and policy-making. It is the second of two new courses in the School of Environment, and builds on the ideas explored in ENV261F, but does not require ENV261F as a pre-requisite.

Contemporary experience of environmentalism is 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 grand societal and environmental challenges. The aim of the course is to engage students in the School of Environment in critical thinking about the impacts and ethics of social media, and the ways in which it is used to foster or stifle social change.

Topics include the use of social media as a tool for community-building and collaborative design, the sharing economy, online protest movements, mass surveillance and its implications, and the impact of misinformation on climate denialism. We will also examine the idea of “fake news” and social media in recent elections, and the impact this has on how people understand and react to current political issues.

What you will learn in the course:
● Critical thinking skills for analyzing complex socio-technical systems from multiple perspectives, using methods from multiple disciplines.
● Methods of problem analysis used in technology design, including the ability to identify multiple stakeholders and their needs, and the use of scenarios for conceptual design.
● Improved technology literacy and communication skills, through:
  (1) a deeper understanding of how social media platforms work;
  (2) critical analysis of the ways that social media re-shape our relationships with each other and with the environment; and
  (3) how to clearly communicate your ideas using a variety of forms.
Required Texts:
There is no set text for this course. Readings will be posted online week-by-week.

Course Evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Component</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 1: Problem Analysis for social media design (group project; group report)</td>
<td>Draft: February 9, 2018 Final: February 16, 2018</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 2: Critical Analysis of an existing social media tool and how it is used (group project; solo report)</td>
<td>Draft: March 23, 2018 Final: March 29, 2018</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Reflections (8 in total)</td>
<td>Due each class (except Jan 5, Feb 9, Mar 23).</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tutorial Participation</td>
<td>In weekly tutorials</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>Final Exam period</td>
<td>30%</td>
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Coursework Assignments (50% overall): Each assignment is workshopped in tutorials, and then completed outside of class time. Bring a complete draft of the assignment to class on the first due date, and you will receive feedback on your draft during that week’s tutorial. You will then submit a revised version the following week. Marking rubrics for each assignment will be available one week before drafts are due. The criteria in the rubrics include depth of critical analysis, coverage of the literature, coherence and comprehensibility, and presentation.

Assignment 1 is completed in teams of 2-3 students. It involves the first few steps in design for social media, including identifying key stakeholders and their goals, and an initial design using storyboarding. Each team submits and is graded on a single report.

Assignment 2 is conducted in teams of 4-6 students. You will identify the pros and cons of an existing social media tool or app, including both short and long term impacts. Each team member will submit and be graded on an individual report, giving your perspective on the team’s analysis.

Submitting coursework: All assignments are due in hard copy at the beginning of class (Friday 10am). Late assignments can be submitted to the dropbox located at the School of the Environment. All assignments should be single spaced, using 11 point font with 2.5cm margins 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;

Reading reflections. Each week, you will describe five insights you gained from that week’s assigned reading. Due in hardcopy at the start of the next lecture (except in weeks when a draft assignment is due). Can be handwritten (legibly) or typed; bullet points or prose – your choice.

Tutorial participation. Ten tutorials, of one hour duration, will be held over the course. Please attend and participate! Full attendance and participation will earn you 10%.

Final exam. A two-hour final exam worth a maximum of 30% will be held during the exam period at the end of term. The exam will be a combination of short and long answer questions based on lectures, readings and assignments. You may bring a one-page (8.5”x11”) single-sided summary sheet to the exam, which may be typed or handwritten.
Class Policies:

Late Penalty for assignments: If you are having difficulty completing your work for any reason, please discuss this with Prof. Easterbrook before the due date, to arrange an alternative schedule. If you have not agreed an alternative plan prior to the due date, work submitted up to one week late will receive half marks; after this, it will not be accepted. Note: If you are unavoidably absent from the university, please contact the instructor as soon as you return, to discuss the situation.

If you are unable to attend a tutorial, please email your TA and state the reason why. You may be asked to provide documentation such as a note from a physician, police or registrar.

Requests to re-mark an assignment must be submitted in writing to Prof. Easterbrook and clearly state the reason for your request. Prof. Easterbrook will respond within a week as to whether your assignment will be remarked. Your assignment will be remarked by your TA.

Communications policy: Please do not email the course instructors and TAs unless your questions are urgent or personal. We will use Piazza for all announcements about the course, and to respond to questions outside of class time. The instructors will respond to substantial questions on Piazza 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. Assignments, reading summaries and exams 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.

Every written assignment must include an Academic Integrity Checklist, signed by you (see the course website). Read the checklist carefully before you sign it.

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.
• On tests and exams:
  ○ Using or possessing any unauthorized aid, including a cell phone
  ○ Looking at someone else’s answers
  ○ Letting someone else look at your answers
○ Using material copied word-for-word from any source (including lecture and study group notes) without quotation marks and a citation for the author/source.
○ Misrepresenting your identity
○ Submitting an altered test for re-grading

● Misrepresentation:
○ Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including doctor’s notes
○ Falsifying institutional documents or grades

Participation:
Students are expected to attend every class and tutorial having completed the required readings or videos, etc., and ready to participate fully in the discussion through both attentive listening and speaking. Cell phones should remain off and out of sight. Students wishing to use computers to take notes should refrain from using the internet during class unless this is part of an in-class assignment.

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

Outline of Topics
More detail and suggested additional readings are provided on the course site on Piazza.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Lecture Topic</th>
<th>Hand in</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 5</td>
<td>Introduction: Is Social Media Sustainable?</td>
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<td>Jan 12</td>
<td>Climate Denial: The Merchants of Doubt</td>
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<td>Jan 19</td>
<td>Does the Internet Make Us Smarter or Stupider?</td>
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<td>Jan 26</td>
<td>Open Source, Open Data, Open Science?</td>
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<td>Feb 2</td>
<td>Intellectual Property: Who owns your content?</td>
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<td>Feb 9</td>
<td>Crowdsourcing: The wisdom of crowds?</td>
<td>Draft Assignment 1</td>
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<td>Feb 16</td>
<td>Social and environmental movements on the internet</td>
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<td>Feb 23</td>
<td>No Lecture – Reading Week!</td>
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<td>Mar 2</td>
<td>Dark Web: the ethics of hacking, cracking and trolling</td>
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<td>Mar 9</td>
<td>Governance, surveillance, and the suppression of dissent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 16</td>
<td>Sustainability of our internet habits</td>
<td>Draft Assignment 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 23</td>
<td>Will the Internet Save us?</td>
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