

**Soc 167 – Virtual Communities + Social Media**  
**University of California, Berkeley**  
**Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2pm-6pm**  
**Summer Session D: July 3 – August 11**  
**In-Person ONLY: Wheeler 222**

**Instructor: Edwin Lin, Summer 2023**                      **Email: edklin@berkeley.edu**  
**Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:15-1:45pm or by appointment**  
**Sign-Up @ <http://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/icwie>**  
**487 Social Sciences Building OR**  
**Zoom OH Link: <https://berkeley.zoom.us/j/99441395960>**

***Overview of Course Content:***

With the explosion of virtual communities and social media, technology and its effect on society has become a daily reality, invading all areas and aspects of our social lives. This ranges from pop culture, sports, and entertainment to political participation, sexual intimacy, and family. Everyone taking this course has some exposure to virtual communities and social media—even if one is unaware of the extent and depth of this exposure in their lives. As a result, this course is not about discovering new ideas and never-before-seen concepts, but rather providing some tools and perspectives to understand aspects of society that we are somewhat familiar with. Put another way, this course seeks to understand a growing aspect of our society through a sociological lens of understanding.

Explicitly, the goals of this course are: 1) to teach key themes and theories that will deepen one's ability to analyze virtual communities and social media, 2) to consider specifically to what extent are virtual communities and social media are changing our society, and 3) to provide a space for you to reflect and personally interact with what virtual communities and social media means in your own life.

***About This Syllabus:***

This syllabus is essentially a contract between you (the student) and me (the instructor). Many policies are listed in the syllabus that may not be relevant to you now, but may come up as the semester goes along. Please keep this handy and refer to it for detailed information about the course, such as grading, email, office hours, late assignments, DSP, extensions, etc.

***Email Policy:***

I am usually very good about answering emails, but please leave at least 2 days for me to get to you, especially over the weekend (I may not get to you until Monday/Tuesday). Also, please keep emails to questions that are relatively easy to answer, such as questions about logistics, instructions, office hours, etc. **For questions about class content or your papers, please talk to me before/after class or by appointment in office hours.**

During busy weeks, I get upwards of 50 emails a day from students. As a result, sometimes I will only be able to provide short, curt answers. I apologize if it comes across as rude or uncaring, but it is simply due to the volume of responses I have to get through in a reasonable time frame.

***Office Hours:***

Feel free to come into office hours for anything, course or life related! Please sign up at the link at the top of the syllabus if you know in advance that you'd like to come in. If you do not sign up, you are still welcome to drop in, but I do sometimes step out of the office/Zoom call when there is no appointment to run a quick errand.

If office hours are full or you cannot make the times, you may email me to set up another time. If you have a very short question, you can try to drop by and sneak in before/after a student for a quick question (as not every student will use the entire 15 minutes they signed up for)—but be prepared to wait patiently as well.

Office hours can be done in-person (487 Social Sciences Building) OR online via Zoom (<https://berkeley.zoom.us/j/99441395960>).

***Grade Breakdown:***

Attendance and Participation	15%
Group-Led Discussion	10%
Disconnect Paper	15%
Virtual Community Project	30% Total
Proposal	10%
Paper	20%
Take Home Final	30%

**\*\*\*If English is not your first language**, or you have trouble writing in English, there are resources on campus to help in writing your papers. I have posted some such resources on bCourses under “Files” and “Writing Resources.” You can also check out the Student Learning Center (SLC) at their website <http://slc.berkeley.edu> for more information.

***Structure of our In-Person Class***

The class will be held in person. This is the expectation of the course and attendance is essentially mandatory. Attendance will be taken on a weekly basis and participation in the class is part of the grade. See below for more details about attendance and participation

**You are responsible for all materials discussed in our times together, as well as any announcements made or questions answered.** I make it a point to make lecture attendance valuable in helping with assignments, quizzes, and tests. I will also do my best to make these times manageable, interesting, and engaging! Finally, as we do not have discussion sections, there will also be important moments throughout the semester for our lectures to be used as a space for processing information.

The class is structured in an impacted 6-week summer session with 2 4-hour sessions per week. I will NOT use all 4 hours, as this is exhausting and overwhelming (and ultimately you will learn to hate the class if I do so). The class will be broken down into a discussion/lecture portion, followed by a break (either short or long), and finally a student group-led discussion (detailed below). I will plan roughly 3-hours of content per class.

### ***Attendance and Participation:***

Please come to class prepared to discuss the day's reading. I hope to get to know everyone and really want to encourage everyone to participate in our discussions. "Participation" does not mean simply speaking out a lot. The content, quality, and depth of your participation are more important than how many times a week you speak. At the same time, showing that you are constantly engaged in our class discussions is also valuable.

For those of you who may dislike participating in large groups or spontaneous participation, there are several options that I am happy to work out with you—please send me an email or talk to me after class. One option that I would like to invite everyone to participate in is emailing me news stories, social media, YouTube videos, and other web links that you find interesting and relevant to our class—I will show these at the beginning of class as a fun way to investigate course material. Of course, this is not necessary—if you regularly participate in classroom discussions, you will do just fine on your participation grade. If you are at all concerned about participation, please see me *early* in the semester in office hours to talk about this.

In terms of attendance, you are allowed to miss two classes, but after that, your grade will be negatively impacted. **Once you miss more than 4 classes, you will automatically fail the class.**

### ***Group-Led Discussion:***

In groups of around 4-6 people (created randomly in our first week of class), you will be expected to prepare a creative and interactive group-led discussion/presentation on one of the week's topics. The discussion/presentation should last around 30-35 minutes, and everyone must participate in some capacity during the time. The week before your group-led discussion, I will meet with the group after class to briefly talk through the lecture and readings. I invite you to be very creative with these student-led times, from playing games and creating fun activities to presenting interesting examples/case studies and leading debates and discussions.

These group-led discussions will receive a group grade and they will be graded based on 1) level of preparation, 2) the value and engagement of the discussion, and 3) content and meaningful insight through planned material (*do not be redundant with lecture material*). Don't worry—they will not be graded particularly hard as long as thoughtfulness, effort, and organization is shown through them.

### ***Disconnect Paper:***

During the first two weeks of the semester (plan as needed), for 36 hours you are to disconnect completely from any form of virtual community or social media. This means no text messages, emails, Internet, chat messengers, online spaces, online apps, online games, etc. You will write a short paper about this experience and connect it to one of the readings from the first two weeks of class. See assignment on bCourses for more detailed information about this assignment.

### ***Virtual Community Paper:***

During this semester, you will be asked to choose and immerse yourself with an online virtual community. This can certainly be a community that you are already a part of, but the interaction must be distinct, involved, deliberate, and intentional—driven for research and social discovery purposes and not just your own entertainment. In other words, you must reach out to the community in a proactive and initiative-taking way to incite a response and deepen your interaction with and understanding of it. The paper is broken down into two parts: a proposal and a paper.

The proposal will ask you to choose and describe your virtual community. It will also require you to apply some basic course concepts to your virtual community and what might be interesting about it.

In the VC paper, you will be asked to make an argument relating your experience to course themes and readings. You will come up with a thesis that utilizes course material and the data you collected to prove your argument.

### ***Take-Home Final Exam:***

Your final exam will be a take-home exam. You will submit the exam via bCourses. It will be in essay format requiring you to answer questions that synthesize and evaluate material in the course. It will also require you to cite readings as examples of your argument. More information as the semester moves along.

### ***Readings***

All readings will be posted on bCourses. There is no plan to create a course reader, as typically most students do not purchase them (due to their high cost). If this is a significant problem for you, please do speak to me.

### ***Readers (Graders)***

Your reader (depending on the size of the course) will be grading all assignments in the course. While you may direct questions to them, their paid hours are mostly devoted to grading assignments. That said, if you do have any questions about your grade on an assignment, you should reach out to them first to discuss it. The re-grade policy is found below on the syllabus and on bCourses.

For the most part, any questions you have about the assignments themselves (while working on an assignment) should be directed to me, the professor.

### ***Grading Scale for the Class:***

A+ (98-100)	C (73-77)
A (93-97)	C- (70-72)
A- (90-92)	D+ (68-69)
B+ (88-89)	D (63-67)
B (83-87)	D- (60-62)
B- (80-82)	F (everything below 60)
C+ (78-79)	

## Course Policies (detailed info also available on bCourses)

**Extensions are only approved for DSP accommodations and documentable emergency circumstances** (e.g. hospitalization, death in the family, COVID-19 related issues, etc.). All assignments will all be “handed out” and completed through the bCourses website. There is a one-hour grace period where you can still submit your assignment even though it will be considered late and may get up to a 5% grade deduction. After that one-hour grace period, the paper will be considered a day late and will have a 10% grade deduction. Each additional day a paper is late, it will be penalized an additional 5%. After being four days, the paper will no longer be accepted. Please be sure to turn things in on time and before the stated due date and time.

\*NOTE: The reason I have a strict policy on extensions is because I am concerned about unknowingly participating in a system that privileges certain racial, cultural, socioeconomic, family background influences that may account for one student asking for an extension while others keep silent about their circumstances. Especially in larger classes, I feel it is important to have clear guideline to provide some equity.

- PLEASE submit your assignments early! Do not wait for the last minute, especially given grade penalties for late assignments. Please save us all some stress and extra work and submit things *at least an hour in advance of the due date and time.*
- On bCourses, you can submit assignments early and re-submit them later to override the submission. Your submission will not be graded until the due date passes, so you may submit assignments early to avoid last minute technological errors so that you at least get some credit in case of emergency.
- **Back-up your work!** Stolen laptops, broken laptops, etc. are a real risk of the technological era. If you encounter such a problem, *there is NOT a guarantee of an extension.* It is therefore your responsibility to back up your work so that you can still turn in the assignment in case a technologically related tragedy occurs.
- **If you encounter an error in submission,** please take a screenshot of the error that includes the date and time of the error (your computer’s date/time clock is good enough) and email your assignment with the screenshot attached to me. For your assignment to be accepted as on time, **I must receive this email before the submission due date.**
- It is your responsibility to make sure you submitted the correct assignment and that the assignment was fully submitted, so **please after submitting your assignment, check to be sure that the correct document was successfully uploaded onto bCourses.** If you submit the wrong assignment or if it was unsuccessfully uploaded, we have no choice but to give you a 0 on the assignment.

### ***Disabled Students' Program (DSP)***

If you are part of the Disabled Students' Program (DSP) and require special accommodations, please try to make arrangements in advance—this will guarantee you access to your accommodations. If you do make arrangements last minute, we will try our best to still accommodate, but try to ask in advance, even if it's just in case.

To ask for an extension or accommodation using your DSP letter, you must first be sure that your DSP letter allows for the accommodation you are requesting. Then, follow these two steps:

- 1) Send an email with your DSP letter attached to me (the instructor). If you are asking for an extension, please **suggest a reasonable due date** (allowed by your letter) to turn in the assignment.
- 2) Once I approve (via email) the extension/accommodation, I will change the due date for you in bCourses.

Please follow these instructions carefully. Over the years, DSP has expanded to include many more students, and teaching very large classes without GSIs can make it difficult to handle these cases—so please make our job easier by following these instructions!

### ***Grading Philosophy:***

I believe that the grade you get is the grade *you earn*. I also believe that your final grade in the course should reflect an accurate assessment of the entire body of work you submit for the class. If something unexpected or tragic occurs with one assignment (e.g. you do much worse on an assignment due to personal circumstances, you were unable to turn it in on time and received a 0, etc.), I will still evaluate the rest of your coursework to see what grade you deserve for the entire course—in other words, focus on the other assignments and show you deserve an A in the course in spite of one major slip-up. You will never receive a grade **lower** than what you earned by sheer point calculation, but you may receive a grade **higher** if your work proves it (e.g. improvement, exceptional final exam, etc.).

I review every grade submitted at the end of the course and will handle things like borderline grades, rounding, etc. based on the performance of your work as a whole. I even (sometimes) re-read your already graded work to see if you should be bumped up from a B+ to an A- if you are on the borderline. These are done for **every** student, regardless of whether you email me or not (to ensure a fair playing field for all my students), so there is no need to “advocate” for yourself—just focus on the work and prove you deserve (i.e. earn) the grade you are hoping for.

### ***Re-grade Policy:***

If you want a re-grade, please follow the following steps. You have two weeks after receiving your grade to initiate the beginning of this process. I do not do re-grades after this two-week cut-off (to avoid people asking for re-grades at the end of the semester because their grades are borderline).

1. Meet with (remotely or in-person) the person who graded your paper to discuss why you got the grade you got.
2. Write a cover letter to me that explains how you understand their perspective and why you still have an issue with the grade (e.g. what you thought was mis-graded). I realize that you likely discussed this in your meeting, but we would like to have something written down for clarity and reference.
3. Your reader or I will re-grade your work (the entire thing) and whatever grade you get becomes the final grade (either higher or lower). Whether your reader re-grades it or I do depend on whether your reader believes there is something that could be adjusted or not.
4. If your reader re-grades the assignment and you are still unsatisfied, you may refer the issue to me. I should warn you that in general (on average from what I have seen historically), I might be a tougher grader than the reader. Whatever grade I end up giving is the final say on the matter.

Keep in mind, your reader grades **many** assignments. They probably have a sense for how your assignment compares to other people in the class. But grading many assignments could also allow for mistakes, so while that is possible, please have **sober judgment** over your own work and really consider the grader's perspective. Regardless of how much time or effort you put into the assignment, if it simply did not meet the requirements or if you did not adequately communicate what was in your head, you may still have gotten a lower grade (keep in mind, your reader has no idea how much time you spent on the assignment and isn't evaluating effort, but the expectation of the assignment based on a rubric or answer key).

## Reading List and Semester Schedule

Assignments that are “handed out” means they will be explained in class and available on bCourses. Please complete readings before class on the day that they are listed under.

### Tips About the Readings:

Most of the readings are provided as a particular view of a topic. They should not be read as “truth,” but rather with some skepticism and analytical criticism—consider whether or not and to what extent you are convinced by the authors’ interpretation and view.

I have kept the reading load to be rather manageable, but some days will have more reading than others. Overall, read for understanding, overarching meanings, and the big picture. Do not worry too much about detailed specifics, such as dates, statistics, discussions on methodology, etc.—you can always go back and look at key parts of the reading to apply to your assignments. **If you can write 3-5 sentences to summarize the main concepts of the readings, you are doing great.**

I realize that in the summer session, you may have less time to do the readings. Skim aggressively—learn when to slow down and focus and when to speed up and even skip! I **DO NOT expect you to read every word of every reading**, nor should you, as this is actually a bad reading habit to develop (for academic, course reading). On bCourses, many readings come along with a short video to give you tips on how to read the assigned reading—use these tips to work smarter and make the readings more manageable. Almost all readings will be discussed in lecture, so between your aggressive and smart skimming and the lectures, I believe this reading load is manageable. Do your best to *at least* skim through every reading on the syllabus before class, and perhaps after lecture, you can revisit the reading and fine tune your reading notes.

I would MUCH prefer that you spent even just 10 minutes on every reading on the syllabus rather than giving up and reading only 10% of the readings here. Ideally, you should be able to do a good skim on each reading assignment in about 30 minutes—and do a deeper read on some of them that you find interesting (closer to 60 minutes).

### List of Important Due Dates:

VC Proposal due	Thursday, July 13
Disconnect Paper due	Thursday, July 20
VC Paper due	Thursday, August 3
Take Home Final Exam due	Friday, August 11

## **WEEK 1: Overview and Foundational Theory**

### **1. Thursday, July 6**

#### **Introduction: VC/SM**

- Wellman, B., & Gulia, M. (1997). Net Surfers Don’t Ride Alone: Virtual Communities As Communities. *Communities and Cyberspace*, Edited by Peter Kollock and Marc Smith. New York: Routledge.
- Baym, Nancy. (2010). *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Cambridge, UK: Polity (pp. 1-49).

**Virtual Community Proposal Handed Out via bCourses**

**Disconnect Paper Handed Out via bCourses**

## WEEK 2: Theories Continued and Utopian vs. Dystopian Discourses

2. **Tuesday, July 11**                      **ANT, Medium Theory, and the Attention Economy**
  - Law, John. 1992. "Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy, and Heterogeneity," *Systems Practice*. 5 (4): 379-393.
  - Meyrowitz, Joshua. "Medium Theory," in *Communication Theory Today*. 50-77.
  - Goldhaber, M. H. (1997). "The attention economy and the net." *First Monday*.
  
3. **Thursday, July 13**                      **Theories of Society and Technology + Utopian Views**
  - Orlikowski, Wanda. 1992. "The Duality of Technology: Rethinking the Concept of Technology in Organizations," *Organization Science*, 3 (3): 398-412.
  - Rheingold, H. (1993). A slice of life in my virtual community. In L. M. Harasim (Ed.), *Global Networks: Computers and International Communication* (pp. 37-80). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
  - Tufecki, Z. (2010). Who Acquired Friends Through Social Media and Why? "Rich Get Richer" versus "Seek and Ye Shall Find."  
\*\*\***Virtual Community Proposal Due Thursday, July 13**\*\*\*

## WEEK 3: Dystopian Views and Moral Panic

4. **Tuesday, July 18**                      **Dystopian Views**
  - Kross, E., Verduyn, P., et. al. (2013). Facebook Use Predicts Declines in Subjective Well-Being in Young Adults. *PLoS ONE*. 8(8).
  - Carr, N. (2008). Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet is doing to our brains. *The Atlantic*. July/August, (<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868>)
  - Przybylski, A., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C., Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 29. 1841-1848.
  - Turkle, Sherry. "Introduction," in *Alone Together*. New York: Basic Books, 2011.  
**Virtual Community Paper Handed Out via bCourses**
  
5. **Thursday, July 20**                      **Dystopian Views: Algorithms and Moral Panic**
  - Watch Netflix Documentary "*The Social Dilemma*" AND/OR YouTube Video Discussion with "The Social Dilemma" Filmmakers and Katie Couric [via bCourses or YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/yGi2YKZZNFg?t=532>]
  - Zuboff, Shoshana. "Big other: surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization," *Journal of Information Technology*. 2015. 30: 75-89.
  - Draper, N. R. A. (2012). Is your teen at risk? Discourses of adolescent sexting in United States television news. *Journal of Children and Media*. 6(2): 221-236.
  - Boyd, Danah. *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. Yale University Press, 2014: 1-28.  
\*\*\***Disconnect Paper Due Thursday, July 20**\*\*\*

## WEEK 4: Global Culture and Social Capital

### 6. Tuesday, July 25                      Culture and Globalization

- Chen, Carl. "The creation and meaning of Internet memes in 4chan: Popular Internet culture in the age of online digital reproduction." (2012): 6-19.
- Castells, Manuel. "The Impact of the Internet on Society: A Global Perspective," *Change: 19 Key Essays on How Internet is Changing Our Lives*. Openmind, <https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/article/the-impact-of-the-internet-on-society-a-global-perspective/?fullscreen=true>

### 7. Thursday, July 27                      Social Networks and Capital

- Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380.
- Steinfield, C., Ellison, N. B, and Lampe, C. (2008). Social Capital, self-esteem, and use of online social network sites: a longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 29: 434-445.
- Putnam, R. (1995). Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. *Journal of Democracy*. 6(1): 65-78

## WEEK 5: Public Spaces and Politics

### 8. Tuesday, August 1                      Public Spaces (Physical and Virtual)

- Hampton, K. N., Livio, O., and Goulet, L. S. (2010). The Social Life of Wireless Urban Spaces: Internet Use, Social Networks, and the Public Realm. *Journal of Communication*, 60(4): 701-722.
- Humphreys, L. (2005). Cellphones in public: social interactions in a wireless era. *New Media & Society*, 7(6), 810-833.
- Steinkuehler & Williams (2006). Where Everybody Knows Your (Screen) Name: Online Games as "Third Places".

### 9. Thursday, August 3                      Elections, Politics, and Engagement

- Rafaeli, Sheizaf, Gilad Ravid, and Vladimir Soroka. "De-lurking in virtual communities: A social communication network approach to measuring the effects of social and cultural capital." 37th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 2004. Proceedings of the. IEEE, 2004.
- Kim, Yonghwan, Hsuan-Ting Chen, and Homero Gil de Zuniga. (2013). Stumbling Upon News on the Internet: Effects of Incidental News Exposure and Relative Entertainment Use on Political Engagement. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 29: 2607-2614.

\*\*\*Virtual Community Paper due Thursday, August 3\*\*\*

**Take-Home Final Handed Out via bCourses due Friday, August 11**

## WEEK 6: Polarization, Social Movements, and Conclusion

### 10. Tuesday, August 8 Political Polarization and Disinformation

- Sunstein, Cass R. "Chapter 3: Polarization," *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton University Press: pp. 59-97, 2017.
- Singh, R., & Brinster, K. N. (2021). "Fighting Fake News: The Cognitive Factors Impeding Political Information Literacy." In *Libraries and the Global Retreat of Democracy: Confronting Polarization, Misinformation, and Suppression*. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Fisher, Max and Amanda Taub. "How YouTube Radicalized Brazil," *The New York Times*, August 11, 2019.

### 11. Thursday, August 10 Social Movements and Final Review

- Gladwell, Malcolm (2010, October 4). Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not be Tweeted. *The New Yorker*.
- Tufekci, Zeynep and Christopher Wilson. (2012). Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations from Tahrir Square. *Journal of Communication*. 62: 363-379.
- De Choudhury, Munmun, Shagun Jhaver, Benjamin Sugar, and Ingmar Weber. "Social media participation in an activist movement for racial equality." In Tenth International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media. 2016.

**\*\*\*Final Exam Due Friday, August 11 submitted via bCourses\*\*\***