

SI 429 Course Syllabus

SI 429: Online Communities

Fall 2018

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email: eegg at umich

office hours: Mondays 1:30-2:30, 3368 NQ or by appointment

Overview

This course is intended to help students understand and analyze communities that are formed in or maintained via online environments. Although there is a fair bit of disagreement about the definition of community (and therefore, online community), we will loosely use 'community' as a term to describe a group of people who engage in sustained interaction over time. The group may be held together by a common identity, a collective purpose, or merely by the individual utility gained from the interactions. We will use the terms e-community and online community interchangeably, as shorthand, both for communities that conduct all of their interactions online and for communities that use online interaction to supplement face-to-face interactions.

The course introduces students to important concepts, terms, and theories that will help them understand how online communities are used by millions of people every day for a variety of purposes. The course develops a language for discussing online communities critically, and applying those concepts to new designs. The major component of this class is a group project where students apply the readings, theories, and empirical findings from the class to critique an existing online community or design a new one.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this course, a student should be able to:

- Describe an online community using the concepts and vocabulary of multiple theoretical [L][SEP]perspectives
- Be familiar with a range of online communities and how they differ from one another in [L][SEP]terms of user practices, goals, design decisions, and other metrics
- Understand design choices for online communities as they relate to social science [L][SEP]theory and research [L][SEP]
- Critique existing designs and propose new ones with both empirical and theoretical backing

Prerequisites

There are no formal prerequisites. This course assumes some familiarity with online tools such as search engines. This course will spend very little time explicitly teaching about technology, but will frequently assume it as background.

Texts

Required books:

Kraut, R. E., Resnick, P. (2011). Building successful online communities: evidence-based [L][SEP]social design. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Oldenburg, R. (1999). The great good place: Cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community. Da Capo Press.

Goffman, Erving. (1959). The presentation of self in everyday life. Garden City, N.Y. Doubleday.

All readings not from the assigned books will be available on the Canvas site for this class (linked from corresponding reflection assignment), unless they are available online in which case a URL will be provided. If you cannot access a reading for some reason, please let the instructors know ASAP so they can address the problem for the entire class.

Note the entire (draft) text of this book is also available online – see <http://kraut.hciresearch.org/content/books>. However the online version has no page numbers, different numbering of design claims, and the text of this online version differs from the final book version in multiple, minor ways. The library holds this book as well. There is also an electronic version of the book available through the UM Library online. If you can, I recommend purchasing the book, as it will be more convenient and will be useful for you after the course ends.

Please note: everyone in the class is expected to come to class having read the required readings for that class. This is linked to the intent behind the daily reading reflections. If you do not do the required readings, your understanding of the course material will suffer, as will your grade and the classroom discussions. Please plan on spending ten hours of work outside class meeting times on course assignments and readings. We will also have periodic reading quizzes, so it will benefit you in multiple ways to do the reading before class.

You will need regular access to a computer with Internet access in order to get the online readings. Students are responsible for checking Canvas and their email accounts regularly to stay up-to-date on announcements. If you don't check your University email account, you should forward it to an account that you do check. Students are responsible for any information distributed via email and/or Canvas. Any changes to this syllabus will be announced via Canvas and in class. Please note there may be adjustments to the reading schedule and calendar as well; these will be announced in Canvas and in class.

Class Activities

Each week there will be assigned readings. Occasionally, there will also be optional readings which are (obviously), not required, but might be useful to students particularly interested in a certain topic. All of these will be available electronically through Canvas. Our engagement with these readings will begin online, before the class session for which they're assigned, and will continue in class. We will engage in four ways:

1. Description: statements or questions about what the author claims.
2. Critique: arguments about whether the author is correct or what the author has left out.
3. Connection: how the claims or concepts relate to those in other readings, or to our own ^L_{SEP} lives.
4. Application: how the reading applies to the communities we are studying. ^L_{SEP}

^{SEP}We may have guest speakers during the course of the semester. Be prepared with good questions, engage with them actively, and appreciate their time. Guest speakers are always energized by an engaged audience.

Content Warnings

The content and discussion in this course will at times engage with potentially triggering content. Some of this will be emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with. I will flag especially graphic or intense content, and will do my best to make this classroom a space where we can engage empathetically and thoughtfully with difficult content.

I've done my best to identify any texts with potentially triggering content. I've included tags for: violence, racism, misogyny, and self-harm. If you have concerns about encountering anything specific in the course material that I have not already tagged and would like me to provide warnings, please come see me or send me an email. Please feel free to discuss any concerns—including potential concerns about attending in-class discussions—with the instructor.

Religious/Cultural Observance

Persons who have religious or cultural observances that coincide with this class should let the instructor know in writing (by e-mail for example) by 9/15. I strongly encourage you to honor your cultural and religious holidays! However, if I do not hear from you by 9/15, I will assume that you plan to attend all class meetings.

Point of View

The readings, class discussion, and my comments in class will suggest a particular point of view. This perspective is my own (or the author's) and does not have to be yours! I encourage you to disagree with the ideas in the readings and lectures as well as the perspectives of your colleagues in the course. A significant part of a college education is learning about the complexity of various issues. Therefore, it is important that we listen and respect one another, but we do not have to agree. A richer discussion will occur when a variety of perspectives are presented in class for discussion.

Assignments

- Responses to readings & online sites (individual; 20%)
- OCARs and presentation of results to class (group; 10%)
- Written midterm proposal for final community analysis and critique paper (group; 10%)
- In-class presentation of community paper proposal at midterm (group; 5%)
- Online community analysis and critique final paper (group, 30%)
- In-class presentation of community analysis and critique paper (group, 5%)
- Peer feedback of in-group performance (individual; 5%)
- Class participation (individual; 15%)

These will be recorded as letter grades using the standard University conversion tables.

Students are responsible for viewing their grades in Canvas and informing the instructors of any discrepancies. Also, students must keep copies of any work submitted until final grades are submitted. If you are concerned about your grade, please make an appointment to discuss the situation with the graduate student instructor or professor as early in the semester as possible.

Grading Appeals and Late Policy ^[L]_[SEP]

Few students will feel the need to appeal a grade, but we want to provide a clear and fair process for students to do so. If students have questions about feedback on an assignment, they should review their performance during office hours. Students should prepare a document stating their rationales for the grade appeal, which should be submitted via email within one week of receiving the grade in question. The professor reviews all grade appeals. Grades can increase, decrease, or stay the same. The re-grade is final, even if it is lower than the original grade.

Late papers will not be accepted for credit after 48 hours. Before then it will be accepted but there will be a penalty of 20% for each 24-hour period after the time it is due (usually 5pm on the due date specified in the syllabus, unless announced otherwise).^[L]_[SEP] In extreme cases (death in the family, severe illness), extensions may be granted. Students must communicate with instructors before the deadline and provide documentation upon request.

Academic Integrity

All assignments in this course are clearly designated as "group" or "individual" assignments. Unless otherwise specified in an assignment all submitted work must be your own, original work. Any excerpts, statements, or phrases from the work of others must be clearly identified as a quotation, and a proper citation provided. Any violation of the School's policy on Academic and Professional Integrity (stated in the Master's and Doctoral Student Handbooks) will result in serious penalties, which might range from failing an assignment, to failing a course, to being expelled from the program. Violations of academic and professional integrity will be reported to UMSI Student Affairs. Consequences impacting assignment or course grades are determined by the faculty instructor; additional sanctions may be imposed by the assistant dean for academic and student affairs.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way the course is usually taught may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office to help us determine appropriate academic accommodations. SSD (734-763-3000; <http://ssd.umich.edu> ([Links to an external site.](#))[Links to an external site.](#)) typically recommends accommodations through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

Student Mental Health and Well-being

The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and well-being of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact **Counseling and**

Psychological Services (CAPS) at (734) 764-8312 and <https://caps.umich.edu/> ([Links to an external site.](#))[Links to an external site.](#) during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in schools on both North and Central Campus. You may also consult **University Health Service (UHS)** at (734) 764-8320 and <https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs> ([Links to an external site.](#))[Links to an external site.](#), or for alcohol or drug concerns, see www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources ([Links to an external site.](#))[Links to an external site.](#). For a listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit: <http://umich.edu/~mhealth>. ([Links to an external site.](#))[Links to an external site.](#)

Reading and Assignments Schedule

Note: Any aspect of this syllabus, including the content and reading schedule, may be adjusted throughout the semester. Any changes will be announced in class and/or via Canvas. Students are responsible for checking Canvas on a regular basis. All readings are in Canvas or online.