

**University of Calgary**  
**Department of Communication, Media and Film**

Communications Studies COMS 591, S03  
**Senior Seminar in Communication: Social Media Ethics**

**Fall 2015**

**Wed., Sept. 9 – Wed. Dec. 2 (excluding Wed. Nov. 11)**  
**Seminar W 12:00-14:45**

**Instructor:** Tamara Shepherd  
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**Office Phone:** 403-220-6729  
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**Web Page:** D2L available through MyUofC portal  
**Office Hours:** Wednesdays 15:00-16:00, or by appointment

### **Course Description**

Social media – networked platforms that enable people to connect and share with each other – facilitate distributed forms of communication while also consolidating power in the hands of a few major actors. This dual possibility for social media of opening up broader participation within asymmetrical economies characterizes the ambivalence endemic to contemporary networked culture. This seminar course asks students to explore how networked culture's key debates might be framed ethically, in relation to the promise of networked technologies to improve people's everyday lives.

The ethical dilemmas that organize the course fall under three main sections: material, social, and regulatory. The first section considers social media platforms in their materiality, counter to the presumption that such platforms exist as neutral, ephemeral playing fields. The second section concerns broader consequences of social media as ways of organizing both interpersonal and organizational relationships. The third section deals with regulatory frameworks and challenges posed by social media issues such as privacy, intellectual property, and appropriate content. In the course's movement through these three sections, ethical perspectives will be brought to bear on the political, economic, social, and cultural practices that define social media.

### **Additional Information**

Please be aware that much of this course deals with the artifacts, experiences, and products of networked culture. As such, some of the material we study manifests coarse language, sexuality, and violence. If this is a problem for you, please see the instructor, and think carefully about whether this particular section of COMS 591 is the best fit for you.

This is an inquiry-based seminar, where students will be responsible for participating in discussion, leading discussion, conducting independent research and working as part of a group. Regular attendance is expected and **participation will be crucial**. Readings must be completed in advance of class, and students are expected to participate fully in seminar discussions of all assigned readings.

## Objectives of the Course

COMS 591 has the following major objectives:

1. To provide you with the opportunity to co-ordinate and integrate the knowledge, skills, and experiences you have acquired during your studies;
2. To provide you with the opportunity to create a major research project drawing on course material and personal interests, which you will present to the class and expand into a formal research paper;
3. To encourage you to think and research across disciplinary boundaries;
4. To help prepare you for the expectations of graduate level study and professional work.

## Textbooks and Readings

Required readings will be posted on D2L; please consult schedule of readings available September 8, 2015.

Students are expected to have all readings completed **prior** to scheduled class times in order to contribute effectively during class discussions and activities. A detailed schedule of readings will be distributed at the first lecture.

Additional required readings to be posted or linked on D2L throughout the semester – every week that there is a group presentation, there will be an additional assigned reading selected and posted by the presenting group. These additional required readings will be posted at least one week in advance of the class in which they will be discussed.

## Internet and electronic communication device information

Laptops are permitted for note taking only. **iPods, cellphones and gaming devices may not be used at all during class.** Please respect the instructor and your fellow students. Improper use of electronic devices will impact your participation grade.

## Assignments and Evaluation

### Overall Grade Breakdown:

Participation:	Weekly	10%
Group Presentation:	Sept. 23–Nov. 4 (sign up)	25%
Position Paper:	October 7	20%
Workshop Presentation:	November 18 & 25	15%
Final Case Study Essay:	December 2	30%

### Participation (10%, weekly):

Seminars are significantly different than lectures, and inherently require active participation. Participation is not measured solely by how often you speak up. Informed,

thoughtful contributions to discussion are more important than frequent contributions. An ability to demonstrate familiarity with the required readings is also crucial. Attentive listening matters – students who interrupt others, distract their classmates, or use electronic devices in a way that distracts the instructor or other students will see an impact on their participation grade. Students are also expected to participate by engaging with the presentations of fellow students by attending presentations, asking questions, and offering thoughtful and constructive commentary.

Group Presentation (25%, Sept. 23–Nov. 4, one hour):

For our classes between September 23 and November 4, a group will be responsible for leading our seminar discussion each week. A signup sheet for presentation groups will be available on the first day of class – those who do not sign up will be assigned to a group. Each group will be responsible for the topic area of the week, as indicated on the course schedule posted to D2L. As a group, you will select an ethical dilemma around a specific element of social media. Find one academic article or chapter from a scholarly journal or book that will be assigned to the class as a mandatory reading. **You must provide the required reading to the instructor at least one week in advance of your presentation.** The instructor will approve your reading (both for content and copyright clearance) and circulate it to the class. As a group, you will be responsible for presenting the ethical issue and its context, showing diverse perspectives on the issue, and involving the class in discussion through creative participation activities. All together, this should take about **one hour** of class time: about 30 minutes of group presentation and 30 minutes of wider class discussion and/or activities. Groups are strongly advised to arrange a meeting with the instructor to discuss your plans for the presentation. Working together effectively will be crucial for this group project, as it composes a significant component of your course grade, and unless there is extraordinarily compelling evidence to indicate otherwise, all group members will receive the same grade.

Position Paper (20%, October 7, 1500-1800 words or 5-6 pages):

In the format of an academic essay – structured by a central argument – take a stance on **ONE** of the following ethical debates in social media: a) anonymity vs. real names; b) citizen journalism vs. traditional journalism; or c) play vs. labour. For your choice, make sure to start with an introductory paragraph that lays out the debate, delimits a key context, and introduces your position. Spend the body paragraphs of the essay on the following three tasks: 1) explain the broader debate and the central underlying ethical perspectives implicated; 2) define a key context for your treatment of the debate – i.e., one specific social media platform or practice – framed both in terms of the materiality of the underlying technology and the social relations it affords; 3) argue for your own position on the debate, accounting for how you arrived at your position and drawing on two or more authors we have reviewed on the course. Finally, end with a concluding paragraph that summarizes your argument, notes its main limitations, and suggests why this particular debate is important to contemporary life.

Workshop Presentation (15%, Nov. 18 & 25, 10 minutes):

For our classes on November 18 and 25, students will individually present their topics

for the final case study paper to the class in the format of a workshop. A signup sheet for presentation slots will be available on November 4 – those who do not sign up will be assigned to a slot. The 10-minute presentation slot will be divided into two equal components: 1) a five-minute presentation, which briefly introduces the case study topic, what ethical debates it raises, and how those debates might be situated in the context of the course; 2) a five-minute workshop discussion, which will give students the opportunity to solicit feedback from their peers in order to strengthen their case study papers. The grade for this presentation will be based on how clearly the case study is presented, how effectively feedback is solicited from peers in the form of targeted questions about specific elements of the case study, and how diligently students respond when they are giving peer feedback on others' presentations.

Final Case Study Essay (30%, December 2, 3000-3600 words or 10-12 pages):

Through an extended study of one case example – the same one presented in the workshop presentation – students will explore the ethical implications of a particular social media platform or practice. While there may be several ethical implications involved, select one to consider more closely in the context of: a) the **technological lifecycle** underpinning the platform or practice (e.g., explain the design and marketing of the technology, how/where it is manufactured, distributed, and used); b) the **social consequences** of the platform or practice (e.g., how does it produce or invite certain kinds of social relationships? how might it be used for modes of social control or resistance?); and c) the relevant **regulatory frameworks** of interventions that pertain to the platform or practice (e.g., privacy or copyright legislation, website policies and terms of service). The goal of this essay is to offer an in-depth consideration of how ethical dilemmas function at various levels within social media, as well as to learn case study methodology as a research practice.

**Registrar-scheduled Final Examination:** No

All assignments and exams must be completed or a course grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

**Submission of Assignments:** Please hand in your essays directly to your tutor or instructor if possible. If it is not possible to do so, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

Written assignments should be typed, double spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, with pages numbered. Citations and references should follow APA style. For a guide to using APA style, see: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments, and be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at final exams in SS320 after classes have ended. Personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>

**Note:** It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment. For courses in which assignments are submitted electronically, it is the student's responsibility to ensure that the correct copy of the assignment is submitted. (Including the version date or version number in your file name may help you avoid submitting the wrong version of your written assignments.)

### Policy for Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

### Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Student Accessibility Services (220-8237, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/>) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than 14 days after the start of the course.

### Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Sources used in research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

### Grading & Grade Scale of the Department of Communication, Media and Film

Final grades are reported as letter grades. Work in this course will also be graded using letter grades.

The following grade scale percentage equivalents are used in the Department. If letter grades are used for an assignment or other course component, the percentage equivalent in the final column will be used for calculating the final grade:

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Department grade scale equivalents	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations
4.00	Outstanding	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%
3.70		A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30		B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good—clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70		B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%

<b>2.30</b>		<b>C+</b>	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
<b>2.00</b>	Satisfactory—basic understanding of the subject matter.	<b>C</b>	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
<b>1.70</b>		<b>C-</b>	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
<b>1.30</b>	Minimal pass—marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	<b>D+</b>	53 - 54.99%	54.0%
<b>1.00</b>		<b>D</b>	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
<b>0.00</b>	Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.	<b>F</b>	00 - 49.99%	0%

### **Plagiarism**

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people’s words and ideas begin. Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

For information on citation and documentation styles (including APA, Chicago, IEEE, MLA, and others), visit the links provided at <https://ucalgary.ca/ssc/resources/writing-support/436> . If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor TFDL, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>).

### **Academic Misconduct**

For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

### **Research Ethics**

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/resources/ethics>

## Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
<b>ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (ASC)</b>	SS 102 403-220-3580 <a href="mailto:artsads@ucalgary.ca">artsads@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>CAMPUS SECURITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calgary Police Service</li> <li>• Emergency Text Messaging</li> <li>• Emergency Evacuation &amp; Assembly</li> <li>• Safewalk Program</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a> <b>403-220-5333</b> <b>403-266-1234</b> <b>Emergency: call 911</b> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints">http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints</a> If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort ( <b>220-5333</b> ). For more information, see <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/</a>
<b>DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IT help line</li> </ul>	<a href="http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students">http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students</a> 403-220-5555 or <a href="mailto:itsupport@ucalgary.ca">itsupport@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing Support Services</li> <li>• Student Services Mobile App</li> </ul>	<a href="http://ucalgary.ca/ssc">http://ucalgary.ca/ssc</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support">http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support</a> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents">http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents</a>
<b>STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty of Arts Reps</li> <li>• Student Ombudsman</li> </ul>	<a href="https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/">https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/</a> <a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds">http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds</a>
<b>SU WELLNESS CENTRE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling Services</li> <li>• Health Services</li> <li>• Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE</li> <li>• Online resources and tips</li> </ul>	<b>403-210-9355</b> (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling</a> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health</a> <b>403-266-HELP (4357)</b> <a href="http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus">http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus</a> If you're concerned about a friend or your own well-being, it is important to seek help early. Call or visit the SU Wellness Centre or the 24-hour crisis line.

## Schedule of Lectures and Readings

To be posted on D2L in the first week of classes