

POLS366: Digital Politics in the Postcolony

Mon/Wed/Fri: 10:30am to 11:15am

Saunders Hall, TBD

Course Website: <http://pols366.blogspot.com>

Instructor: Nicole S. Grove

Office Hours: Mon/Wed 12pm-1pm (Room TBD)

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What role has Twitter, Facebook and other forms of social media played in the Arab uprisings of 2011 through present day? Can video games teach us about African civil wars? What is the 'digital divide' and how might systems of power and privilege be inscribed into programs designed to increase online access like Google's 'Project Loon'? This course will introduce students to a range of key questions and debates surrounding the intersection of technology and politics with a focus on the consequences of Internet culture and digital communication for the postcolonial condition. In particular we will examine how discussions of digital media technologies and networked communication are often situated within techno-optimist narratives that link political change and resistance to globalization and technological progress. The selection of course texts and interactive media are designed to complicate these narrative frameworks that tie democracy and democratic participation to information access as we explore how the proliferation of digital communication technologies and the broadening of online access is tied to the increasing commercialization and privatization of civic life. Following this we will explore how networked lives perpetuate neocolonial relations and exacerbate modes of inequality and exploitation based on class, ethnicity, and gender. Students will participate in both individual and group projects that engage these questions via the use of digital media research tools and digital ethnographic methods in order to develop a critical approach for thinking about contemporary digital politics and colonial pasts, presents, and futures.

The course has both Writing Intensive (W) and Oral Communication (O) Focus Designations. The readings, lectures, digital journals and student discussions will facilitate the requirements for these designations. The course is designed to be interactive and thus relies significantly on student participation – *please come to class prepared and ready to discuss the readings!* The assignments are designed to: 1) help you gain experience in writing, research, oral presentation and discussion; 2) introduce you to interdisciplinary inquiry; 3) encourage you to practice critical thinking; and 4) introduce you to the use of digital ethnographic methods for political inquiry.

The course website is <http://pols366.blogspot.com> and it will be updated regularly. On this website you will find a downloadable syllabus, notes, sites of interest and other materials discussed in class, and links to recommended readings. If you have trouble accessing any of the material on the site please email me at nicolesunday@gmail.com.

Required Books

- Robert J.C. Young. *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, 2003.
- Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore. *The Medium Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*. Gingko, 2001.
- Ulises Ali Mejias. *Off the Network: Disrupting the Digital World*. Minnesota, 2013.

- Ronald Deibert. *Black Code: Inside the Battle for Cyberspace*. Signal Press, 2013.
- Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain. *Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring*. Oxford, 2013
- Leshu Torchin. *Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video and the Internet*. Minnesota, 2013.

**Recommended* readings are available for download on the course website. These optional readings are meant to give you a deeper understanding of the issues discussed for the week they are assigned, and to provide you with a wider range of sources to choose from for your research paper.

GRADING

Research paper outline	5 points [W]
Research paper	20 points [W]
Digital journal (3 entries/6 points each)	18 points [W]
One presentation on a reading	10 points [O]
Group digital ethics project/presentation	20 points [O]
Class participation	15 points [O]
Attendance	12 points
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TOTAL	100 points

Oral Communication Assignments [O]: The 15 minute individual presentation on a reading and 20 minute group presentations will contribute to improving your public speaking skills and allow you to better understand the key arguments of the texts by organizing your ideas about them and providing support for these ideas. As part of the assignment you are required to meet with me before and after your oral presentations to help you better prepare your presentations and communicate ideas clearly, while addressing any concerns you may have as well as receive post-presentation feedback on strengths you might build upon. Students may use notes for their presentations but should not read from them.

Writing Intensive Assignments [W]: The research paper, research paper outline and digital journal entries are designed to help you better understand the course content through writing, to develop clear and effective strategies for communicating central themes and ideas, and to learn to think critically and make substantive arguments. Individual meetings with the instructor at various stages of the written assignments will help you to further your written communication skills.

RESEARCH PAPER [W]: You will write a 12-page paper plus a research outline on a topic that we have agreed to together – ***please do not start writing before we've discussed your paper outline!*** The paper must be 12-pages long (not including the bibliography) and written in 12 point, Times New Roman font. The paper must include a title, introduction stating the topic and why it was chosen, a body with no more than two subheadings, a clearly identified conclusion, and a bibliography including ONLY sources listed on the syllabus, those referenced in course texts, or texts that have received pre-approval for use during our one-on-one meeting about the paper (please see me for any questions about this). Each student will submit a **Research Outline on March 31st**. Outlines should be substantive and include a preliminary bibliography. **RESEARCH PAPERS ARE DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF INSTRUCTION, MAY 7th. NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

DIGITAL GROUP PROJECT and GROUP PRESENTATION [O]: Students will spend the last two weeks of class working together in groups doing more in depth research on one example or issue related to digital politics discussed in the readings (i.e. the use of video games as a teaching tool about the Sudan; the Stuxnet computer virus developed by the United States for use against Iran, etc.). The instructor will work closely with each group using digital ethnographic methods to explore the colonial and/or neocolonial dynamics of the projects under consideration and how this history has shaped relations of global inequality, violence, activism, etc. Group presentations should be approximately 20 minutes long and should illustrate a substantive digital profile of the group's research. Students may use videos, Powerpoint, maps or anything else that may enhance the quality of their presentation.

PRESENTATION ON A READING [O]: Students will present on a week's reading of their choosing. The presentation should be 15 minutes long. The instructor will distribute a presentation schedule during the second week of class whereby students can select a reading assigned for a particular date. Presentations will begin in the third week. One-on-one meetings with the instructor prior to the presentation will be scheduled to go over content and the organization of the presentation to help facilitate effectiveness in communicating main ideas and a critical evaluation of the texts under review.

DIGITAL JOURNAL [W]: Students will write and post to the course blog three 1000 word digital journal essays documenting their experiences participating in a series of experimental assignments during the semester. Each assignment is meant to give students a more in depth understanding through experiential learning of the different ways that digital media is used (or not used) in the Global South. Digital journal entries must be posted to the course website by the due dates indicated on the syllabus. NO EXCEPTIONS.

CLASS PARTICIPATION [O]: Questions and comments about course material or topics discussed in class allow you to think critically and orally express ideas and arguments in an impromptu setting. Class participation also provides a way for students to engage each other's presentations and encourages group discussion and interaction.

ATTENDANCE: Attendance is critical to class participation. Late arrival to class beyond 10 minutes will be considered the same as being absent. One letter grade will be deducted from your final grade if you have more than FOUR unexcused absences.

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CLASS SCHEDULE

Mon 1/13: Introduction to the Course

Wed 1/15: Young, Introduction and Chs. 1 and 2 pp. 1-44.

Fri 1/17: Young, Chs. 3 and 4 pp. 45-92.

Mon 1/20: NO CLASS. Martin Luther King Day

Wed 1/22: Young, Ch. 5 93-120.

Fri 1/24: Young, Ch. 6 and 7 pp. 121-147.

Mon 1/27: McLuhan Part I

Wed 1/29: McLuhan Part II

Fri 1/31 – Discussion of Google’s Project Loon. Read “Project Loon explained: Can Google’s balloons unite the world online?” <http://www.techradar.com/us/news/world-of-tech/project-loon-explained-can-google-s-balloons-unite-the-world-online--1182663> AND “African Entrepreneurs Deflate Google’s Internet Balloon Idea” <http://www.technologyreview.com/news/516186/african-entrepreneurs-deflate-googles-internet-balloon-idea/>

Mon 2/3: McLuhan Part III

Wed 2/5: McLuhan Part IV

Fri 2/7: Discussion of One Laptop Per Child project. Read “Give Me Rice, but give me a laptop too.” <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/7138061.stm> AND transcript of Nicholas Negroponte interview on Al Jazeera with Riz Khan http://www.olpctalks.com/nicholas_negroponte/nicholas_negroponte_aljazeera.html

Mon 2/10: Mejias, Introduction and Part I

*Digital Journal Assignment #1: Starting 2/15 do not use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or any other form of social media (this means no posting and no reading other people’s posts) for two days. For the following two days you may use these sites for only ONE HOUR per day. The purpose of the assignment is to consider the conditions under which your own immediate and consistent access to these sites as a form of communication is possible, and to experience what limits and disruptions to access to these sites effect the way you do or do not communicate with the people in your lives and with the rest of the world (4 billion people do not have access to Facebook and billions of others only have limited access to the internet on a daily basis). Write a 1000 word essay about your experiences and post to the course website by February 24th.

Wed 2/12: Mejias, Part 1 cont.

Fri 2/14: Mejias, Part II.

Mon 2/17 – NO CLASS. Presidents Day.

Wed 2/19 – Mejias, Part II cont.

Fri 2/21 – Mejias, Part III.

Mon 2/24 – Mejias, Part III cont.

*DIGITAL JOURNAL ENTRY #1 DUE.

Wed 2/26 – Howard and Hussein, Introduction and Chapter 1.

Fri 2/28 – Howard and Hussein, Chapter 2.

Mon 3/3 – Howard and Hussein, Chapter 3

Wed 3/5 – Howard and Hussein, Chapter 4

Fri 3/7 – Howard and Hussein, Chapter 5 and Conclusions.

*Digital Journal Assignment #2: For this week please only read the African News Wire to update yourself on news and current events (be sure to skim the headlines everyday). Do not look at CNN, BBC, MSNBC, Yahoo News, or any other news source if you can help it. Did this experience highlight trends or habits in the way you seek

out news? Did it introduce you to issues you were not aware of before? Write about your experiences and post to the course website by March 21st.

Mon 3/10 – Deibert, Preface, Introduction and Chapter 1, pp. 1-28

Wed 3/12 – Deibert – Chapters 2 and 3 pp. 29-68

Fri 3/14 – Deibert – Chapters 4 and 5, pp. 69-102

Mon 3/17 – Deibert, Chapters 6, 7, and 8, pp. 103-147

Wed 3/19 – Deibert, Chapters 9, 10, and 11, pp. 148-187

Fri 3/21 – Deibert, Chapters 12-15 and Epilogue, pp. 188-250

*DIGITAL JOURNAL ENTRY #2 DUE.

Mon 3/24 – SPRING RECESS

Wed 3/26 – SPRING RECESS

Fri 3/28 – SPRING RECESS

Mon 3/31 – Torchin, Introduction and Chapter 1

*RESEARCH PAPER OUTLINE DUE

Wed 4/2 – Torchin, Chapter 2

Fri 4/4 – Torchin, Chapter 3

Mon 4/7 – Torchin, Introduction and Chapter 1

Wed 4/9 – Torchin, Chapter 2

*Digital Journal Assignment #3: Play three video games on Molleindustria.org: ‘Phone Story’ (an educational video game about the journey of your smartphone from raw material excavation to shiny interface) and ‘Unmanned: A Day in the Life of a Drone Pilot’ and ‘Oilgarchy’. Write about your experiences with each game. Was the game easy or difficult to play? What types of audiences are the games designed for? After playing the games what are your thoughts about video games as an educational tool as compared to reading text or watching a documentary film? Post your essay to the course website by April 16th.

Fri 4/11 – Torchin, Chapter 3

Mon 4/14 - Torchin, Chapter 4

Wed 4/16 - Torchin, Chapter 5 and Conclusion

*DIGITAL JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE.

Fri 4/18 – NO CLASS. Good Friday.

Mon 4/21 –Group project

Wed 4/23 –Group project

Fri 4/25 –Group project

Mon 4/28 –Group project

Wed 4/30 –Group project

Fri 5/2 – Group Project

Mon 5/5 – GROUP PRESENTATIONS.

Wed 5/7 – GROUP PRESENTATIONS.

*RESEARCH PAPER DUE