GEOG 3414B – Digital Technology, Society & the Environment
Course Syllabus Winter 2020

1. Course Information
   • Classroom Location: PAB 36
     Lectures: Wednesday 11:30-1:30
               Thursday 11:30 – 12:30

   • Contact Information:
     Instructor: Dr Agnieszka Leszczynski
     Office: SSC 2425
     Office Hours: Thursdays 1:30 – 3:30
     Course email: geog3414@uwo.ca

     Teaching Assistant:
     TBA
     Office Hour: TBA, SSC 2316

2. Calendar Description
   • Course Description

     This course engages with digital technologies as social and spatial phenomena. Through an
     exploration of themes including the cloud, internet infrastructures, smart cities, digital
     platforms, and the gig/sharing economy, the course identifies the environmental and social
     implications of pervasive digitality while critically navigating through utopian versus
     dystopian discourses of technology.

     • 3 lecture hours per week, 0.5 course

     • Prerequisite(s): Third or fourth year standing at the University.

   • Senate Regulations

     Senate Regulations state, “unless you have either the requisites for this course or written
     special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from this course and
     it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no
     adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have
     the necessary prerequisites.”
3. Readings
There will be a selection of readings to parallel weekly lecture topics drawn from a range of journal articles, online content (newspaper articles, etc.), and books and book chapters. Where possible, these will be made available electronically via the OWL site for this course and put on reserve in the library.

4. Course Objectives
The objectives of the course are to:

- Examine the myriad societal and environmental implications of pervasive digital technologies, the digital economy, and everyday digital practices, and to trace their geographies.
- Introduce and navigate through the range of narratives and discourses which frame digital technologies as either socially beneficial or deleterious.
- To critically evaluate the merits of competing claims about technologies and their potential social and environmental consequences.

5. Learning Outcomes
Students who complete Geography 3414 will be able to:

- Understand digital technologies as phenomena that are socially and spatially produced.
- Identify the consequences of digital assemblages along social, ecological, and economic axes.
- Critically navigate through false binaries of utopian versus dystopian discourses of digital technologies.
- Identify the global and local geographies of digital technology production, circulation, financialization, and impacts.

6. Course Schedule
Subject to change.

Week 1 | Jan 8 & 9 | Course Overview | Welcome to the digital
- Overview of course structure, content, format, and expectations.
- Introduction to key concepts and terms in the course, and a framing of course themes and topics within the context of the pervasiveness of digital technologies across the spaces and practices of everyday life.
Week 2 | Jan 15 & 16 | The cloud
• A geographical grounding of the a-spatial metaphor of ‘the cloud’ in material infrastructures and environmental considerations.

Readings:

Podcast:
• Henn S (2014) Searching The Planet To Find Power For The Cloud. All Tech Considered, 21 April.
  https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2014/04/21/305666363/searching-the-planet-to-find-power-for-the-cloud

Week 3 | Jan 22 & 23 | Cryptocurrency
• Introduction to and critical engagement with cryptocurrencies, including a consideration of their dominant discursive framings, energy requirements, and geopolitical implications.

Readings:
Podcast:

Week 4 | Jan 29 & 30 | Bikeshares and e-scooters
• This week the focus shifts to digital platforms and a 2-week arc on mobilities, beginning with a focus on ‘micromobilities’ or ‘short-hop’ transportation modes, namely bikesharing and e-scooters.

Readings:


Podcast:

Week 5 | Feb 5 & 6 | Ridehailing
• Continuing with the mobilities theme, with platform enterprises begins with ridehailing (Uber, Lyft, and competitors), with a consideration of what this means for cities, public transportation infrastructures, and automobile emissions.

Readings:

• Rodier C (2018) The Effects of Ride Hailing Services on Travel and Associated Greenhouse Gas Emissions. A White Paper form the National Centre for Sustainable Transportation. Download available at: [https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2rv570tt](https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2rv570tt)

Podcast:
- Young N (2018) Ride-sharing was supposed to make traffic better. It’s making it worse. *Spark*, 07 September. [https://www.cbc.ca/radio/spark/spark-404-1.4811760/ride-sharing-was-supposed-to-make-traffic-better-it-s-making-it-worse-1.4811762](https://www.cbc.ca/radio/spark/spark-404-1.4811760/ride-sharing-was-supposed-to-make-traffic-better-it-s-making-it-worse-1.4811762)

**Week 6 | Feb 12 & 13 | MIDTERM**

**READING WEEK | Feb 19 & 20 | NO CLASS**

**Week 7 | Feb 26 & 27 | Gig work**
- A shift in focus from how digital platforms mediate how we move around cities to how platforms mediate how the things we consume move through and across cities, with an attention to both environmental and social considerations, including labour.

- *Project proposals due in hardcopy at the start of class on Thursday Feb 27*. Late penalty: 20% for the first 24 hours, 10% for each 24 hour period thereafter. No proposals will be accepted after 4 pm on Friday February 28th. Late proposals must be submitted to the assignment drop-box outside of the Department of Geography main office (SSC 2322). Assignments are retrieved from the drop-box at 4 pm so make sure you get yours in by 3:59 pm if submitting late.

**Readings:**

**Podcast:**
Week 8 | Mar 4 & 5 | Delivery and the on-demand economy

- A shift in focus from how digital platforms mediate how we move around cities to how platforms mediate how the things we consume move through and across cities, with an attention to both environmental and social considerations, including labour.

Readings:


Podcast:


Week 9 | Mar 11 & 12 | Short-term rentals

- An engagement with what short-term accommodation platforms such as Airbnb mean for urban housing, housing affordability, and urban governance.

Readings:


Podcast:

Week 10 | Mar 18 & 19 | The smart home and the internet of things (IoT)

- Scaling from the city to the home, an exploration of the implications of the incursion of connected – ‘smart’ – technologies into private domestic spaces. A consideration of what IoT in the home means for privacy, intimacy, domestic energy expenditure, and gender relations.

Readings:


Podcast:

Week 11 | Mar 25 & 26 | Algorithms and AI

- Exploration of how algorithms and AI play a structural role in underwriting the exclusion of subjects and spaces across heterodox geographies and intersectional positionalities.

Readings:


Podcast:

Week 12 | Apr 1 & 2 | Course wrap up and final exam review
• Exploration of how digital technologies play a structural role in underwriting the exclusion of subjects and spaces across heterodox geographies and intersectional positionalities.

• Term project submissions due electronically by 4:00 pm on Thursday, April 2nd. Late penalty: 20% for the first 24 hours, and 10% for each 24 hour period thereafter up to 72 hours beyond the submission deadline. No assignments will be accepted more than 72 hours past the submission deadline.

7. Evaluation

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Components</th>
<th>Percentage of Course Grade</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-class participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Participation consists of written questions submitted by each student at the end of each Wednesday’s lecture for 10 themed lectures, starting in week 2 (The cloud). These questions may be about the lecture content or the readings for that week. The professor will answer a selection of these at the start of the next class (Thursday). Students must submit a question at the end of 10 Wednesday lectures (x 10) to achieve the full participation grade.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Week 6 (week before Reading Week)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Date TBA Final Exam Period</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term assignment (audio-visual research presentation)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>For your term assignment, you will research, create, audio-narrate and record, and submit a 10 minute audio-video slide presentation on a course-relevant topic of your choice. This will be submitted digitally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project proposal</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Feb 27th @ start of class Details TBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Components</td>
<td>Percentage of Course Grade</td>
<td>Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annotated bibliography</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>An annotated bibliography of the references used when researching your topic and putting together your presentation.</td>
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8. Requesting Academic Consideration

Students who experience an extenuating circumstance (illness, injury, or other extenuating circumstance) sufficiently significant to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements may submit a request for academic consideration through the following routes:

(i) Submitting a Self-Reported Absence form provided that the conditions for submission are met;

(ii) For medical absences, submitting a Student Medical Certificate (SMC) signed by a licensed medical or mental health practitioner in order to be eligible for Academic Consideration; or

(iii) For non-medical absences, submitting appropriate documentation (e.g., obituary, police report, accident report, court order, etc.) to Academic Counselling in their Faculty of registration in order to be eligible for academic consideration. Students are encouraged to contact their Academic Counselling unit to clarify what documentation is appropriate.

Students seeking academic consideration:

- are advised to consider carefully the implications of postponing tests or midterm exams or delaying handing in work;
- are encouraged to make appropriate decisions based on their specific circumstances, recognizing that minor ailments (upset stomach) or upsets (argument with a friend) are not normally an appropriate basis for a self-reported absence;
- must communicate with their instructors no later than 24 hours after the end of the period covered by either the self-reported absence or SMC, or immediately upon their return following a documented absence.

Academic consideration is not normally intended for the following circumstances:

- Students who require academic accommodation based on an ongoing physical or mental illness (recurring or chronic) or an existing disability. Students with an ongoing physical illness or mental disorder (recurring or chronic) or an existing disability are responsible, in consultation with their doctors or other health professionals, to determine if they are capable of pursuing their studies and, if so, with what accommodations. Students are expected to seek and arrange reasonable accommodations with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as soon as possible in accordance with the Policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disability. Students with pre-existing accessibility plans arranged
through SAS may not need to provide additional documentation when seeking academic consideration where such request for consideration relates to their disability and where their accessibility plans allow for coursework deferral or deadline extensions.

- **Students who experience high levels of stress related to academic performance** (including completing assignments, taking part in presentations, or writing tests or examinations). Students with academic or exam stress should access supports through Student Health and Wellness and Learning Skills Services in order to deal with this stress in a proactive and constructive manner.

*Grades will not be adjusted on the basis of need. It is important to monitor your performance in the course. Remember: You are responsible for your grades in this course.*

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9. **Make-up Examinations**

No make-up examination will be offered for the midterm exam. In the event of a missed midterm – whether due to medical or non-medical reasons with documentation, or the use of a self-reported absence – the final exam will be re-weighted to be worth 50% of the course grade.

Make-ups for the final exam will be granted with approved documentation only. All documentation for missed exams must be provided the Academic Counselling Office and Instructor within 48 hours of the scheduled exam. Otherwise, the instructor will assign a grade of zero. The format and content of make-ups may differ substantially from the scheduled test or examination.

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10. **Use of Electronic Devices**

There is a strict *no phones* policy in class. All mobile phones must be turned to silent mode and stored out of sight (in bags, purses, pockets, etc.).

No electronic devices will be allowed during tests and examinations.

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11. **Lecture Slides & Recordings**

No audio or video recording of lectures is permitted without the explicit written permission of the instructor. If you require an accessibility accommodation in this matter, please contact the instructor.

*Lectures and course materials, including power point presentations, outlines, and similar materials, are protected by copyright (copyright of the instructor). You may not record lectures*, reproduce (or allow others to reproduce), post or distribute lecture notes, wiki material, and other course materials publicly and/or for commercial purposes without the instructor’s written consent.*
with the exception of individual cases that fall within the remit of the University policy on academic accommodations and accessibility; in this instance, permission to record must be secured from the instructor in advance.

12. Academic Offences
Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence. Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

13. Western’s Commitment to Accessibility
The Department of Geography strives at all times to provide accessibility to all faculty, staff, students and visitors in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with differential abilities.
Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519-661-2147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar’s website.
More information about “Accessibility at Western” is available.

14. Medical Issues
The University recognizes that a student’s ability to meet his/her academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by medical illness. The Student Services website provides greater detail about the University’s policy on medical accommodation. This site provides links the necessary forms. In the event of illness, you should contact Academic Counselling as soon as possible. The Academic Counsellors will determine, in consultation with the student, whether or not accommodation should be requested. They will subsequently contact the instructors in the relevant courses about the accommodation. Once the instructor has made a decision about whether to grant an accommodation, the student should contact his/her instructors to determine a new due date for tests, assignments, and exams.
Students must see the Academic Counsellor and submit all required documentation in order to be approved for certain accommodation.

15. Mental Health
If you or someone you know is experiencing distress, there are several resources here at Western to assist you. Please visit Western’s Health and Wellness website for more information on mental health resources.
16. Support Services
   Student Support Services
   Student Development Services

17. Important Dates Winter 2020
   January 6: Classes resume
   January 10: Last day to add a second term half course
   February 17: Family Day – Department Office Closed
   February 18-23: Spring Reading Week (No classes; Department Office open)
   March 7: Last day to drop a second term half course without penalty
   April 3: Classes end
   April 4 and 5: Study days
   April 6-26: Final Examination Period