CJT780-001: Special Topics in Communication - Social Media Theory & Research
Spring 2013

Instructor: Zixue Tai, Ph.D. & Associate Professor
Meeting Time: Monday, 3:30 pm – 6:00 pm
Meeting Place: EGJ Rm. 223
Contact Info: Phone (O): 257-1676; Email- ztai2@uky.edu; Office – Grehan Rm. 214
Office Hours: TR 1:00 pm – 3:10 pm; M 1:15pm – 2:30 pm; & by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION & OVERVIEW
This course is an advanced graduate seminar focusing on the burgeoning but exploding field of the cross-disciplinary interrogation of the spectrum of myriad social media platforms and applications. It incorporates an interdisciplinary perspective on its theoretical and methodological approaches, and offers an up-do-date review of analytics and tools in gathering and analyzing data from a variety of popular social media platforms. Although the field of social media research is supra-disciplinary by nature and by necessity, we will pay special attention to topical issues, innovative approaches, theoretical implications and research findings in direct relevance to the field/discipline of communication.

In particular, there are three intervening lines of emphasis in the course materials and throughout class discussions: first, we will develop an understanding of major theoretical strains and conceptualizations in relation to social media uses and impact in society; second, we will scrutinize and evaluate a core set of state-of-the-field research literature encompassing contributions from diverse academic disciplines and research traditions; third, we will assess and be familiar with the expanding repertoire of analytics and research tools in tapping into and making sense of the ocean of social media data in regard to questions and inquiries of your own interest.

As graduate students in a major communication research program, it is our goal to train you into rising scholars so that you are able to not only appreciate other people’s research but also leave your own footprints in the discipline through your own original research endeavors and outputs. In this course, each doctoral student is required to complete a research study from conceptualization to writing up the paper in a specific area of his/her interest with regard to social media.

READINGS
There is no required book to buy for the course. There will be an extensive list of journal articles and book chapters that we will read throughout the semester. Weekly reading assignments will be made available to class members digitally.

CLASS FORMAT & PARTICIPATION
This class is an advanced-level graduate seminar, and your participation ultimately defines the success (or failure, if you will) of the course. Each seminar session will be structured around an extensive, but manageable, series of readings. Given that the readings form the foundations of class discussions, you are expected to come to class having completed the readings assigned for
that week. This means that you should arrive at class prepared with questions, comments, and criticisms.

Being a valued member of the community of scholars in any particular field entails practices best summarized in these two words: collegiality and communality. We will build this course into a community and collegial atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable to contribute to and engage themselves in all activities. Diverse, and even unorthodox opinions, are encouraged. Meanwhile, no student should refrain from criticisms and constructive comments on the work/words of others (among them, members of this class, your professor included). Yet all this should be done in a respectful, courteous, and professional manner.

As a courtesy to all members of this class, you should avoid any type of disruptive or distracting activities, such as text messaging, Web surfing and conversations unrelated to the course during class time.

**CLASS ATTENDANCE**

Attendance is mandatory, and punctuality is expected. Participation in class discussion and activities will be counted toward your grade. Excused absences are only reserved for personal emergencies, as defined by the University Senate, at the discretion of the professor. Excessive (i.e., three or more) absences, even if they are for emergency purposes, will jeopardize one’s chance of passing the course. It is the responsibility of the individual student to find out from fellow classmates what material has been covered in the session(s) they have missed, and to make up all missed readings and assignments.

**LATE ASSIGNMENT & INCOMPLETE**

Stick to all important deadlines. Late assignments may be accepted (possibly with a penalty), but this acceptance is not automatic. I have to be convinced why the request for extension should be warranted.

An “I” (Incomplete) grade will be given only if a substantial amount of the course work has been satisfactorily completed at the time of the request. Furthermore, you have to demonstrate that insurmountable circumstances are stopping you from completing the course in the remainder of the semester. This requires submitting a written appeal with all necessary documentation at the earliest date possible.

**PLAGIARISM/ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

There is a zero tolerance policy for any form of cheating and/or plagiarism. This includes (but is not limited to) using sources without proper attribution, fabricating research data, presenting another’s work as one’s own, using the same assignment for more than one class, and colluding with others in committing dishonesties. Any offense of the aforementioned nature will lead to a zero in this course and/or other possible consequences (e.g., resulting in a grade of “XF” – failed for academic dishonesty – being put on your permanent transcript). Any question or confusion about academic integrity must be resolved before any writing is submitted to the professor.
GRADING

Your final grade for this course is based on the following percentage breakdown:

- Session Moderator/Discussant: 20%
- Class Participation: 20%
- Research Paper (Including Presentation): 60%

PARTICIPATION

This is a seminar rather than a lecture. So with the help of the assigned readings, you will critique relevant theories, analyze research designs and approaches, and brainstorm ideas. As a result, active participation of all class members is expected, and each member should be ready to answer questions posed by moderators/the professor and provide feedback to others’ answers.

A significant portion (20%) of your course grade depends on your participation in class discussions and activities. Simply showing up at class won’t automatically qualify for a passing grade. Students will need to demonstrate that: (1) they have done the required readings; and (2) they can make meaningful contributions to and enlightening insights on discussions in class.

MODERATING

Each student is asked to sign up for a week that ideally pertains to her own research interests in the role as a discussion moderator. As such, the student will need to fulfill these specific duties: (1) fully understand and digest the assigned readings; (2) suggest additional literature in relation to this topic, if necessary; (3) present a short, integrated summary outlining main theoretical strains and research lines in this subspecialty of inquiry as gleaned from the readings; (4) pinpoint salient topics and (significant and well-trodden, significant but underexplored, promising, groundbreaking, etc.) areas of future research; and (5) lead the class through discussions by preparing a list of thought-provoking questions.

The moderating assignment may entail additional research on top of the assigned readings. You will become the expert on this topic in this class by getting yourself intimately familiar with extant research literature and emerging fronts, and you will put yourself in a position to identify fertile lines of research down the road. To do that, it may be desirable to suggest a few (let’s say, four or five) additional readings in wake of your own evaluations of current research literature. You will need to prepare a handout to the class (running about two pages) based on the tasks specified in the previous paragraph.

RESEARCH PAPER

I am assuming that all students coming into this class have already developed a sufficient level of sophistication with research methods and an intimate familiarity with communication theories. For each doctoral student, you will need to complete a research project from start to finish. This means you will need to turn in a finished paper reporting your original research developed through this class at the end of the semester. So it cannot be based on an existing project you are doing or have done for other purposes. I expect the paper to be at the level of acceptability by a reputable conference (e.g., ICA, NCA, AEJMC), or better yet, to be publishable by a recognized journal.
We will discuss the progress you will need to make for this paper in class on a regular basis. If the research involves human subjects, then you will need to take into consideration the IRB process in your planning.

For Master students, you have the option of either working out a research proposal or conducting a comprehensive literature review pertaining to a particular aspect of social media research within domains of your personal interest.

For all projects, topics need to be approved by the professor before you can proceed to the next step.

*Here is a rough timeline to follow in planning ahead*

**January end:** Research topic finalized

**February – early March:** Literature review and tools preparation

**Mid- to late-March:** Data gathering

**Early to mid-April:** Data gathering (con’t); analyzing data and drafting the paper

If IRB approval is needed, then you will need to get the paper work going in mid-February for that part of the process. In most cases, I anticipate an Exemption request considering the typical type of research we do in this field.
Schedule & Readings (Tentative)

**Week 1 (Jan. 14)**
Introduction & Logistics

**Week 2 (Jan. 21)**
MLK Holiday.

**Week 3 (Jan. 28)**
Topic: State of the Field Overview

Readings


**Week 4 (Feb. 4)**
Topic: Self-Presentation and Identity Building

Readings


**Week 5 (Feb. 11)**

**Topic: (Un-)Friending, (Un-)Following and Abstinence**

**Readings**


Quinn, K. (2013). We haven't talked in 30 years!: Relationship reconnection and Internet use at midlife. *Information, Communication & Society*. In press.


**Week 6 (Feb. 18)**

**Topic Social Capital, Civic Engagement and Political Participation**

**Readings**


Vitak, J. & Ellison, N. B. (2013). 'There's a network out there you might as well tap': Exploring the benefits of and barriers to exchanging informational and support-based resources on Facebook. *New Media & Society*. In press.

**Week 7 (Feb. 25)**

**Topics: Mourning & Bereavement; Imagined Audiences & Publics**

**Readings Related to Mourning & Bereavement**


**Readings Related to Imagined Audiences & Publics**


**Week 8 (Mar. 4)**

**Topic:** Interplay of Social Media and Conventional Media

**Readings**


**Week 9 (Mar. 11)**

Spring Break.

**Week 10 (Mar. 18)**

**Topic:** Analytics and Research Tools.
Readings TBA.

**Week 11 (Mar. 25)**

**Topic:** Analytics and Research Tools
Readings TBA.

**Week 12 (Apr. 1)**

**Topics:** Ethnographic Approaches & Perspectives; Social Media Activism

**Readings (Ethnographic Approaches & Perspectives)**
Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online*. Ch. 4 (pp. 58-73) & 10 (pp. 174-184).


**Readings (Social Media Activism)**


**Week 13 (Apr. 8)**

**Topic: Public Health**

**Readings**


Hawn, C. (2009). Take two aspirin and tweet me in the morning: how Twitter, Facebook, and other social media are reshaping health care. *Health Affairs*, 28(2), 361-368


**Week 14 (Apr. 15)**

**Topic: College Students & Teens**

**Readings**


**Week 15 (April 22)**

Research Presentations. May continue into the Finals Week if needed.

**May 1 (at noon): Final Paper Due.**