

# INF2321H Digital Culture

Winter 2026

Tuesday, 1pm-4pm

WW 126

## Instructor

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Office Hours: TBD by appointment.

Link on Quercus.

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*“Don’t forget to add ‘LOL’ to the end of your already casual text to make it sound even more casual.”*

Source: Sarah Akinterinwa. 2024. The New Yorker, September 27, 2024.

<https://www.newyorker.com/cartoon/a60572>.

## Acknowledgement of Traditional Land

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We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

## Course Description

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Digital Culture introduces students to shared cultural forms online, including community formation, self-presentation, communication and language, and rituals and celebration. The course draws on a range of socio-cultural approaches to the study of digital culture, such as postcolonialism, critical race theory, queer and feminist theory, actor-network theory, cultural materialism, media archaeology, political economy, structuralism, and post-structuralism. The course will also consider the plurality of what “digital culture” can mean, including digital cultures outside of North America, particularly in the Global South, and the relationships between online and offline worlds. Students will gain a nuanced understanding of the historical landscape that led to the emergence of digital culture within the Internet age, with a particular emphasis on the experiences and contributions of marginalized communities. Integrating theoretical perspectives and relevant methodologies, this course will equip students with a toolkit for studying and interpreting digital culture in a changing world.

## **Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)**

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Students who have successfully completed this course will be able to:

CLO 1: Demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the historical landscape that led to the emergence of digital culture within the Internet age, with a particular emphasis on the experiences and contributions of marginalized communities.

CLO 2: Proficiently articulate and categorize essential terminology crucial for an engaged examination and discussion of digital cultures, including those outside of North America.

CLO 3: Evaluate dominant historical and contemporary theories and approaches to understanding digital culture in society.

CLO 4: Design and conduct a study of digital culture.

## **Relationship between MI Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)**

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MI Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)	CLO 1 contributes to these PLOs	CLO 2 contributes to these PLOs	CLO 3 contributes to these PLOs	CLO 4 contributes to these PLOs
PLO 1	X			
PLO 2		X		
PLO 3				X
PLO 4			X	
PLO 5				X

## **Assessments**

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The formative assignments are designed for students to express and provide evidence of their thinking, analysis, and understanding in different modalities (speech, writing, and visual). Summative assignments are designed to produce evidence of conceptual mastery.

Assignment Overview			
Category	Assignment	Due Date	% of final grade
<b>A1 - Learning Journey</b>	A1.1 - Course Check-in 1	3 Feb	2.5
	A1.2 - Course Check-in 2	10 Mar	2.5
	A1.3 - Keyword facilitation	TBD	10
	A1.4 - Course Catalogue	31 Mar	20
<b>A2 – Digital Culture Study</b>	A2.1 - Research Proposal	26 Jan	10
	A2.2 - Milestone Reports	3, 10, 24 Feb	5
	A2.3 - Research Paper	9 Mar	15
	A2.4 - Peer-review	16 Mar	5
	A2.5 - Research Presentation	24 Mar	30

### Assignment Descriptions

More details and rubrics will be available on Quercus. Students are not guaranteed to receive feedback on assessed material before the drop deadline. Check the “Late submission policy” for more details.

#### ***A1 - Learning Journey - 35% Final Grade***

**Goal:** assess the progress of achievement on describing historical (cultural, social, material) conditions leading up to digital culture, emphasizing marginal communities, mastery of essential terms/concepts and student evaluation of them. CLOS (1, 2 and 3).

Throughout the term, students will maintain a handwritten, physical notebook or binder in which they will collect materials that helped them learn (reading notes, lecture notes, in-class write-ups, and artifacts). These will be compiled into a physical catalogue that tells the story of what they learned and presents these notes and artifacts as evidence of their participation in the course.

- **In-class Write-ups:** during lectures and tutorials, students will produce different types of assignments which result in short pieces of texts (short-answer questions and prompt responses). These will address all readings, ask for reflections or stances, or ask for development of projects and plans, which may include quotes from the texts, summaries, key arguments and other elements.

- **Lecture notes:** Notes you take during lectures and tutorials that account for what happened in class and contents discussed.
- **Artifacts:** physical objects, pictures of in-class moments and objects, out-of-class objects or pictures of spaces or moments, peer annotations, assignment sheets, crude primary sourced data from research, magazine or newspaper articles (other materials can be validated with instructors).

**A1.1 and A1.2 Course Check-ins:** During the semester, students will submit all pages of their notebooks referring to a period of the course to evidence their participation and understanding of materials.

**A1.3 Keyword Facilitation:** During the semester, students will be required to facilitate/present in class a key term in Digital Culture for around 10 minutes.

The keywords are going to be chosen from the following book:

Peters, Benjamin. 2016. Digital Keywords. Princeton University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400880553>.

**A1.4 Course Catalogue:** a compilation of all materials collected, clearly reorganized in sections, subsections and presentation paragraphs that tell a coherent story, including an introduction and a final reflection.

**Note on costs:**

A binder, enough sheets and a pen can be purchased for less than C\$10. The cost of printing typed notes, pictures and text highlights to add to your physical binder can cost from 10 to 75 cents per page at the university.

**A2 - Digital Culture Study - 65% Final Grade**

**Goal:** assess the pertinence and quality of a study of digital culture conducted by the student. (CLO 4).

**A2.1 Research Proposal:** The first step of your study: a plan to study a topic on Digital Culture, containing:

- **Introduction:** with a clear contextual description that attests to why this topic is relevant to digital culture, and a research question
- **Literature Review:** A summary and evaluation of existing work that relates to the topic, including what they miss that this study will resolve, how they helped you raise your research question and choose your methodology - (at the very least 4 different sources)
- **Research Goals:** all steps you need to conclude to address the research question
- **Methodology:** how you will gather, analyze and interpret data, based on existing published work, in order to reach your goals

- **Timeline:** when each step of the research will take place, with specific day ranges.

**A2.2 - Milestone Reports:** After submission of A2.1, every week you will report in class on the steps achieved in your research. These should align with the proposal's timeline.

**A2.3 - Research Paper:** An academic paper of 2,500 to 3,500 words that articulates pertinence and theoretical framework, methodology, findings and discussion, and reflects on its contributions.

**A2.4 - Peer-review:** The analysis of two classmates' papers, presenting marks and short comments for the following criteria: (1) Pertinence/Significance, (2) Academic Rigour, (3) Soundness of Evidence, (4) Soundness of Analysis. For any of these criteria, clarity and organization should be evaluated. In case you don't understand what the text means in each of these, they should be marked as 0. Peer-marking will not affect Instructor grading, which will be based on task achievement only.

**A2.5 - Research Presentation:** After peer review, students will have one more week to tweak and correct their papers and prepare a presentation where they make the case for acceptance of their findings, based on soundness and rigour of methodology, pertinence and significance for the Digital Culture.

**Note on costs:**

Research takes time and resources; consider transportation to reach certain spaces, attending events, or acquiring materials as possible costs.

## Brief Course Schedule

All dates in this schedule are tentative and subject to change. The detailed course schedule is at the end of the syllabus.

Overview		
Week	Topic	Date
<b>I – Creators</b>		
Week 1	Digital has entered the chat (no readings)	6 Jan
Week 2	Influence	13 Jan
Week 3	Content (?) Creation	20 Jan
Week 4	Platforms & Networks	27 Jan
<b>II – Future-Past</b>		
Week 5	Computers	3 Feb
Week 6	Information Society	10 Feb
<b>Reading Week</b>		<b>16 to 20 Feb</b>
<b>III – Symbols</b>		
Week 7	Old New Media	24 Feb
Week 8	Memes & Communities	3 Mar
<b>IV – Control</b>		
Week 9	Digitized	10 Mar
Week 10	Datafied	17 Mar
Week 11	Symposium (no readings)	24 Mar
Week 12	AFK? (no readings)	31 Mar

## Contact, Assumptions and Conduct

For contact about the course's structure and assessments, students can do so directly during office hours, by email or indirectly through a student representative. To book office hours, we will use an MS Bookings link on Quercus. You can direct other private inquiries to me or the TA by email, and we will try to respond within two business days.

All course updates and official information will be discussed *in class*. Quercus will be updated based on what happens in class. Emergency announcements from Quercus will also be sent to your email.

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## Basic assumptions

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1. You will be in class. Presence, dialogue, and interaction are integral to knowledge production.
2. More than one thing can be true. It depends on the circumstances and details.
3. This is a graduate course. You can search and collect data, find peer-reviewed, appropriate further readings, and have a very good grasp of how academic texts work.
4. While using digital technology is part of our daily lives, this does not mean you know how to use every interface or media language.
5. You have the independence and initiative to seek guidance for your work within (Instructors and classmates) and outside of the course (Library resources, Student Advising, Writing Support, etc.). ***This includes office hours.***
6. You may not be familiar with fundamental concepts from various disciplines. This is an interdisciplinary field and an interdisciplinary course. This is expected.
7. You can and should make mistakes. The classroom is the place to do it. The consequence for mistakes is more dialogue and collective learning.
8. You want to break with “common sense” and use your perspective to problematize situations and theories, thereby changing your own and others’ perspectives. This does not mean to be a “contrarian” or “devil’s advocate.”
9. You are willing to experiment with non-digital tools and technologies. Use notebooks, pens, pencils, collages, and other materials.
10. You have and are further developing critical thinking skills: you want to imagine and find out how things ought to be, not just how they currently are.
11. We are working together, not against each other.

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## Class Conduct

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When interacting with others, you should always be attentive to their well-being, use polite and non-aggressive language, justify your positions, and give sources of information. When expressing opinions, always consider how your thoughts align with various realities and perspectives.

We value **solidarity as a learning practice**: think and take your positions from a solidary position. You can do this by acknowledging how your context both affects and is affected by others, and how everyone, including instructors and classmates, shares common goals and interests. Your actions should be focused on these common goals. Be open to help and be helped.

## Charitable, Critical and Hate-Readings

The choice of topics and readings is based on what I judge to be the most effective to achieve our CLOs, regardless of their controversy or widely recognized or lesser-known problematic elements. Required readings are not merely supplementary content, but a significant part of the topic. **You must read them!**

Here's a good guide on academic reading by Paul Edwards:  
<http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtoread.pdf>

Your reading should always be **charitable**: assume (author and instructor) honesty, and seek their best (if flawed) argument, not its worst, to argue against.

In cases where there are controversies about authors, content, or their use of particular terms, we should always consider their context, limitations, and contributions while also questioning their effectiveness in achieving our goals. However, we should not ignore or dismiss the text without engaging with it constructively. This is a **critical** reading process. Even when assuming honesty, keep imagining alternatives to what they say.

You are allowed one "**hate-reading**" during the semester (in writing or discussion), in case you just can't stand the author or their arguments. But you should direct your rage wisely. Once you use it, it's gone.

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## Formatting, Citation and Reference Styles

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Whenever you submit a text-based document, it must be formatted according to basic academic writing elements. You should use a serif font (such as Times New Roman), size 12pt, double-space and 2.54 cm (1 inch) margins in a letter-sized page.

The university offers MS Word for writing. There are open-source options, such as LibreOffice and LaTeX, or note-taking markdown apps like Obsidian and Bear, which can export PDFs with these basic formatting elements.

For citations and reference styles, I strongly recommend using the Chicago-style author-date format. You can find more information and writing references in the Chicago Manual of Style Online. This style does not suppress the full author's name, helping with identification. However, you can choose from widely used styles such as APA, MLA.

I recommend using Zotero to manage, track, and generate your sources, citations, and reference lists.

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## Late Submission Policy

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Two types of activities generate assessment in this course: In-class and out-of-class.

### In-class activities

These are the ones made in the presence of the instructors and classmates during official class time. This type includes activities you do in part out of class, but that need

to be finalized in class. They cannot be compensated, except when Accessibility Services grant specific accommodations **in advance**. **If you missed it, it's gone**.

### **Out-of-class activities**

These are writings, reports, recordings, productions and any other type of activities that generate a final deliverable done out of official class time, not necessarily in the presence of the instructors, and to be submitted on Quercus or delivered in person. These have deadlines, which will then be graded and returned with feedback from the deadline up to 3 weeks afterwards.

After the deadline, **you can submit your assignment at any point in the semester until one week after the end of classes without penalty**. However, **late submissions will only be graded and returned to you** when final grades are finalized and submitted to e-marks **at the end of the term (deadline for grade submissions)**. This means that **if you do not submit assignments by the deadline, you might not have feedback before the last official day to drop the course**.

I **strongly** advise you to follow the assignment due dates. They are set to reflect our grade submission deadlines and to provide a reasonable time for assessment and feedback. To ensure you receive feedback in a timely manner and your projects progress properly, please submit your assignments on time. All assignments labelled as late by Quercus will fall under this policy. If you miss the deadline by a few hours or one full day, you **may** still receive feedback as if you submitted on time, **but this is not guaranteed**. This depends on whether we have time to go back to barely-late assignments.

**Within the instructor's purview, no additional extensions or penalties will be accepted for any reason. Please, do not ask.**

I encourage you to read about Accessibility Services by following the link in the Faculty Policies section below, explore other accommodations for your assignments if needed, and then discuss them with me.

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### **Generative AI Policy**

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I **strongly** advise against using Generative AI in general. **The use of such tools for in-class assignments is prohibited**. Students may choose to use generative artificial intelligence tools as they work through the out-of-class assignments in this course; this use must be documented in an appendix for each assignment. The documentation should include which tool(s) were used, how they were used, and how the AI results were incorporated into the submitted work.

Course instructors reserve the right to ask students to explain their process for creating their assignment, to remove marks for formality criteria in cases of flawed documentation, and to consider GenAI to affect other marking criteria (i.e. degrading writing quality, inaccuracies or hallucinations).

**If you have not used GenAI in your assignment, you must add the statement as the last line of the document, after references:**

“Generative AI Statement: I (we) did not use any Generative AI tool (such as MS Copilot, ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini) in the planning, creation or finalization of this assignment.”

## **Detailed Course Schedule**

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All dates are tentative and may change.

Each week has specific learning goals that correspond to our CLOs. Additionally, all topics include the following learning goals:

- Identify and rephrase each author's central claim or thesis.
- Summarize their arguments.
- Provide accurate definitions of the key terms the authors use.

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### **Week 1 – Digital Entered the Chat – 6 Jan**

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#### **Learning Goals:**

Explain the rationale of the course, its routines, what the expectations are and how to meet them (from the instructors' and students' perspectives).

#### ***No Required Texts***

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### **Week 2 – Influence – 13 Jan**

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#### **Learning Goals:**

Understand and connect the terminologies of convergence, participatory and influencer culture

#### ***Required Texts***

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. “Introduction: ‘Worship at the Altar of Convergence’ - A New Paradigm for Understanding Media Change.” In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 1–24. New York University Press.  
<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb05936.0001.001>.

Bishop, Sophie. 2025. “1 Influencers The Canaries in the Algorithmic Coal Mine.” In *Influencer Creep: How Optimization, Authenticity, and Self-Branding Transform Creative Culture*, 20–46. University of California Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520402720>.

Cunningham, Stuart, and David Randolph Craig. 2019. “2. Creator Labor.” In *Social Media Entertainment: The New Intersection of Hollywood and Silicon Valley*, 65–114. Postmillennial Pop. New York: New York University Press.

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### **Week 3 – Content (?) Creation – 20 Jan**

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#### **Learning Goals:**

Interpret and evaluate notions of content creation and the values of authenticity in digital cultures. Evaluate notions of intimacy and celebrity in mass media and compare with the current Creator culture.

#### **Required Texts**

Bishop, Sophie. 2025. “4 Linen, Looms, and Limestone Cottages Being an ‘Authentic’ Artist on Social Media.” In *Influencer Creep: How Optimization, Authenticity, and Self-Branding Transform Creative Culture*, 106–30. University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520402720>.

Cunningham, Stuart, and David Randolph Craig. 2019. “4. Authenticity, Community, and Brand Culture.” In *Social Media Entertainment: The New Intersection of Hollywood and Silicon Valley*, 148–83. Postmillennial Pop. New York: New York University Press.

Horton, Donald, and R. Richard Wohl. “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance.” *Psychiatry* 19, no. 3 (1956): 215–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1956.11023049>.

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### **Week 4 – Platforms & Networks – 27 Jan**

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#### **Learning Goals**

Explain the relationship between the political economies of digital media and digital culture’s values. Understand the process of platformization and the concept of network society.

#### **Required Texts**

Castells, Manuel. 2010. “The Culture of Real Virtuality: The Integration of Electronic Communication, the End of the Mass Audience, and the Rise of Interactive Networks.” In *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed., 355–406. Information Age 1. Chichester, West Sussex; Wiley-Blackwell.

Nieborg, David B, and Thomas Poell. 2018. “The Platformization of Cultural Production: Theorizing the Contingent Cultural Commodity.” *New Media & Society* 20 (11): 4275–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818769694>.

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## Week 5 – Computers – 3 Feb

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### Learning Goals

Historically situate computer and digital technology imaginaries and evaluate how they influenced the emergence of digital culture.

### Required Texts

Turner, Fred. 2008. “The Shifting Politics of the Computational Metaphor.” In *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, 11–39. University of Chicago Press.

Light, Jennifer S. 1999. “When Computers Were Women.” *Technology and Culture* (Baltimore) 40 (3): 455–83. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tech.1999.0128>.

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## Week 6 – Information Society – 10 Feb

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### Learning Goals

Analyze how the co-construction of digital technologies and societies affects different cultures.

### Required Texts

Webster, Frank. 1995. “Information and the Idea of an Information Society.” In *Theories of the Information Society*, 7–29. London and New York: Routledge.

Chan, Anita Say. 2014. “Introduction: Digital Reform— Information-Age Peru.” In *Networking Peripheries: Technological Futures and the Myth of Digital Universalism*, 1–19. The MIT Press.

<https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9360.001.0001>.

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## READING WEEK – NO CLASSES – 16 to 20 Feb

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How about you disconnect for a week?

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## Week 7 - Old New Media – 24 Feb

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### Learning Goals

Understand early analysis of digital media language and evaluate its explanatory power in today’s media environment.

### Required Texts

Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. 1999. “I Theory.” In *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 17–62. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press. 9351.

Manovich, Lev. 2002. “What Is New Media?” In *The Language of New Media*, 1st MIT Press pbk. ed. Leonardo. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

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**Week 8 - Memes & Communities – 3 Mar**

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**Learning Goals**

Explain the cultural elements of social life online.

**Required Texts**

Baym, Nancy K. 2000. "I Think of Them as Friends': Interpersonal Relationships in the Online Community." In *Tune in, Log on: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*, 1st ed., 119–42. New Media Cultures. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.

Shifman, Limor. 2013. "Memes in a Digital World: Reconciling with a Conceptual Troublemaker." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 18 (3): 362–77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12013>.

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**Week 9 - Digitized – 10 Mar**

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**Learning Goals**

Critique the power of social pressures and ideologies of digital development adoption and describe how they relate to global dynamics of colonialism and imperialism.

**Required Texts**

Ricaurte, Paola. 2024. "The Digitalization Imperative." *Dialogues on Digital Society*, August 14, 29768640241262263. <https://doi.org/10.1177/29768640241262263>.

Nyabola, Nanjala. 2018. "Women at Work: Kenyan Feminist Organising on Social Media." In *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics: How the Internet Era Is Transforming Politics in Kenya*, 127–56. Zed. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350219656>.

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**Week 10 - Datafied – 17 Mar**

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**Learning Goals**

Detail and explain in depth the conditions of digitization of marginal lives and societies, as data becomes the focal point of digital culture.

**Required Texts**

Couldry, Nick, and Ulises A. Mejias. 2020. "1. The Capitalization of Life without Limit." In *The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism*, 3–36. Stanford University Press.

<https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9781503609754-002/html>.

D'Ignazio, Catherine, and Lauren F. Klein. 2020. "4. What Gets Counted Counts." In *Data Feminism*, 97–123. The MIT Press.

<https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11805.001.0001>.

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**Week 11 - Symposium**

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**Learning Goals**

Apply concepts and articulate the interpretation of digital culture phenomenon.

**No Required Texts**

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**Week 12 - AFK**

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The course concludes with an overview of key terminology and concepts and a reflection on the study of digital culture.

**No Required Texts**

## **Faculty policies, resources and more**

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Students must be familiar with all information related to grading policies, health and wellness, accessibility services and accommodations, academic integrity, student absence and declaring an absence in ACORN, and academic dates and deadlines. This information is common to all undergraduate courses syllabi and can be found on [Required Common Syllabus Elements Grad Courses 2025-2026](#).

## **Note**

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