New telecommunication media
Comm 4291 // Spring 2024
Tue & Thu // 2:30-3:45p // Ford B10
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Tip: Read the syllabus. It contains the basic rules for the course. If you find yourself dealing with major life emergencies, I may be willing to bend those rules, but failing to know the rules is **not** such an emergency.

Overview

People often claim that our world has been revolutionized by "new" communication technologies such as laptops, smart phones, and social media. How true that claim is, however, depends on which technologies we mean, what part of the world we're talking about, and what we think of as "revolutionary." The actual relationship between technology and culture is rarely so simple, and questions of cause-and-effect on such a large scale rarely (if ever) have easy answers. In this class, we will engage with major social, cultural, and political issues associated with digital media, with an eye for the nuances and complexities of these issues.

The list of "new" media that could plausibly fit this course is too long for us to cover even a fraction of it well. So we will spend the semester focusing (sort of) on **artificial intelligence**: a technology that exists at the intersection of multiple other technologies (e.g., computers, the internet, software, cameras, smartphones, and more). Even with this "narrow" focus, a broad range of technologies and issues remain in play for us.

None of the big questions we'll address this semester have easy answers. How well you will do depends on (1) your ability to think **critically** about technology, media, culture, and politics, and (2) your ability to **argue** your positions on those issues persuasively, rather than your ability to memorize and repeat the "right" answers.

Philosophy

Any course is like a gym membership: what you get out of the experience will largely depend on how much time and effort **you** put into it. Ideally, there are at least three kinds of things that you will learn in this class:
- new facts (i.e., information about the world that you have not encountered before)
- new viewpoints (i.e., ways of seeing and understanding the world that are different than your own)
- new skills (i.e., techniques and abilities that are either new to you or that help you improve existing skills)

These things will (and can) not simply be distributed to you in neat, ready-to-use packages. If they're going to happen, you will need to commit time, energy, and focused effort to making them happen.

More specifically, you will need to:
- **Read a lot.** Most of those new facts/viewpoints come from the readings. If you read too casually, you'll find it hard to contribute to our discussions and to make well-informed, persuasive arguments.
- **Speak a lot.** While you can learn a lot by listening to what you classmates have to say, in order to get this benefit, **everyone** (including you) has to **contribute** to our discussions on a regular basis.
- **Listen a lot.** More precisely, listen carefully and respectfully. You should pay attention to what **everyone** in the class says, and treat it with the same care and respect that you want for yourself.
- **Write a lot.** Any college graduate should be able to write clearly and persuasively. And the best way to learn this skill is by practicing it. No one becomes a better writer without actually writing a lot.
- **Expect to make mistakes.** Mistakes are a **normal** part of learning -- and life. You will make mistakes, and that's perfectly okay . . . as long as you learn from them in productive ways.

Contact information

The most reliable way to reach me is email (rodman@umn.edu). I will try to respond to your emails within 24 hours after I see them (which may be several hours after you contact me, especially if you do so after 10:00 pm). While you can also reach me via Canvas, such messages will **not** reach me as quickly as email, so please don't use Canvas for anything time-sensitive.

Tip: Do not overburden yourself. There are only 168 hours in a week. If your schedule requires 80+ hours/week for school, work, and other responsibilities (e.g., jobs, internships, family care), then you may want to find ways to ease your load.

Content warning

This course will engage with controversial social, cultural, and political issues, and so it's possible that there will be strong differences of opinion within the group about the course material. There are several things we can -- and should -- all do to minimize the stress of addressing those issues:
- **Debate the issues, rather than personalities.** You can -- and should -- express your disagreement with what someone else has said or written without attacking them personally.
- **Be patient.** Making mistakes is an important part of learning, and there will be moments when others (and you too) say and write things that seem wrong. You don't have to be silent at such moments, but any intervention you make should aim to "help them see the light" rather than to "call them out."
- **Show mutual respect.** We need to share the spaces of the course (both physical and virtual) and work together productively. We can disagree about the major issues at stake and still treat each other with the same care and respect that we would want for ourselves.

Time

The University assumes that 1 credit hour equals 3 hours of work/week, and so you should plan on **working at least 9 hours/week** on this course. This is both an **estimate** (reading/writing speeds vary) and an **average** (workloads vary from week to week), and it reflects the **minimum** work needed to earn a **passing** grade. It is also independent of the work connected to the (optional) Capstone Project (see p. 12)

Plan ahead. Deadlines for written assignments are automatically enforced by Canvas. In particular, please note that Canvas will **lock** the discussion forum at the end of each Block, and you need to **complete** and **submit** any posts **before** the deadline in order for Canvas to accept them.

The course is organized in 7 two-week Blocks, each of which will use the following schedule:
- Day 1 (1st Tue)   9:00 am   Block begins // Discussion forum opens for business
- Day 1 (1st Tue)   2:30 pm   In-person class meeting #1
- Day 3 (1st Thu)   2:30 pm   In-person class meeting #2
- Day 7 (1st Mon)   5:00 pm   Online PC "halftime" deadline
- Day 8 (2nd Tue)   2:30 pm   In-person class meeting #3
- Day 10 (2nd Thu)   2:30 pm   In-person class meeting #4
- Day 14 (2nd Mon)   5:00 pm   Block ends // Discussion forum automatically locked

Canvas

Log in to the U's main Canvas page and select "COMM 4291" from either the Dashboard or the Courses menu. Canvas offers additional information about how to use the platform in both text and video formats. We will use Canvas for several things this semester:
- access to the official course documents
- access to all the required readings / videos
- discussion forums where you will contribute posts and comments about the course material
- the delivery point for your major writing assignments
- business-related announcements about the course

There are Canvas apps, which can push notifications/reminders to you and help you access (some) course content. But even Canvas(!) advises people **not** to use them as the primary platform for navigating a course.

> **Tip: Contact me if you need help.** If the reading has you baffled, if you want to discuss an idea you have for an assignment, or if you have questions/concerns about the course, set up a Zoom meeting with me. I'm happy to help if I can.

Grades

Grades don't mean what most people think they do, and they're less important than most people think they are. It's possible to learn a lot in a course, but still fail (e.g., by not turning in a major paper). It's also possible to learn relatively little in a course, but still get a high grade (e.g., by keeping information in your short term memory just long enough to do well on exams). More importantly, your grades will rarely -- if ever -- matter again once you have earned your degree. What you learn, however, potentially has lasting value for decades to come.

You will assign yourself a final grade. Sort of. There are **baseline requirements (BRs)** that you **must** meet in order to earn a final grade of C- (i.e., the minimum for the course to count toward degree requirements):
- 36 participation credits (PCs), including at least 2 PC (1 in-class, 1 online) in every Block
- 1 Reflection Essay (RE) of 1000+ words
- 2 fifteen-minute Zoom meetings with me (1 during Blocks #1-2, 1 during Blocks #6-7)
- 2 Syllabus Supplement (SS) assignments of 1250+ words each
- 1 Self-Assessment Essay (SAE) of 1500+ words

For any grade above a C-, you should produce a quantity and quality of work above and beyond the BRs that matches the University standards (quoted on p. 10 below). [Tip: The simplest (though not the only) path to justifying any grade above a C+ involves earning credit for more than 2 SSs.]

My working assumption is that the grade you assign yourself will be the grade that I officially assign you at the end of the semester, but that result depends on you backing up your claim with solid evidence and a persuasive argument. I reserve the right to assign you a different final grade -- higher or lower -- if there is a significant gap between the grade you assign yourself and your actual performance.

If you fall short of **any** of the BRs, the highest grade you can earn for the course is a D+. In such a scenario, what grade you will earn will depend on how far short of those requirements you fall.

Participation credits (PCs)

There are **two kinds** of PCs: in-class and online. You need to earn **at least one of each** kind **every** Block, and you need to earn **at least 36 PCs overall** in order to meet the BRs. For any/every Block where you don't earn at least one of each kind of PC, the ceiling for your final grade is lowered by a fractional letter grade (e.g., if you don't earn any online PCs during Block #3, the highest final grade you can earn is an A-).

In-class PCs
This is **not** a lecture-based course. Our class meetings will be structured around discussions, so you'll need to:
- attend class regularly,
- do the required readings carefully,
- come to class prepared to discuss those readings in thoughtful ways,
- contribute to in our in-class discussions/exercises in a non-trivial fashion.

We have 28 scheduled class meetings this semester, each of which allows you to earn 1 PC. On any given day, I will do my best to make sure that everyone gets a chance to make meaningful contributions to our conversations. This may mean that I will call on you if you have been extra quiet or, alternately, that I will ask you **not** to speak for a while if you have been extra talkative and other students have not been heard from.

> **Tip: Stay on schedule.** The Block structure of the course makes it possible to start fresh every two weeks. Sort of. The material we cover in (for example) April will make much more sense if you are familiar with the material we covered in January. If you fall behind, make sure to catch up on whatever material you missed/skipped.

Your in-class participation needs to be significant, thoughtful, and on-topic. Simply occupying a seat in the room and/or offering a few vague generalities during our discussions is not enough. For grading purposes, if you are "present in name only" (PINO) for one of our class meetings, you will **not** earn PC for that day. As the term implies, a PINO day happens when you are physically present, but you do not contribute to our discussion in a substantive fashion. This includes (but is not limited to) days when:
- you are present for less than half of a given class meeting,
- you have clearly not done the assigned reading, and/or
- you are primarily a passive spectator during our in-class activities.

What counts as a PINO day will be based on my assessment of your in-class performance, and I will email you about any such decision within 24 hours of the class meeting in question.

Ideally, everyone will attend -- and contribute productively to -- every class meeting all semester long. In reality, this never happens, but it **is** still a worthy goal. The course is set up to minimize the impact that missed classes will have on your grade, but the impact those have on your **learning** is much harder to compensate for. Here are important guidelines for how to handle any classes you miss, regardless of why you do so.
- **If you feel sick, stay home.** Being in class is important for your learning. But your health -- and the health of those around you -- is more important than that.
- **Contact me.** I don't need (or want) documentation for your absences, and I can't re-enact everything that happened in class for you. But staying in touch with me will help you stay on top of things.
- **Support each other.** There's no substitute for being part of an in-person discussion, and there are limits to what someone can tell you about what a room full of people said during 75 minutes of class, but it's still a good idea to have a "buddy" who can share their notes for classes you miss.

Online PCs
The course Canvas site has a discussion forum for each Block. These are spaces for open-ended (yet still focused) extensions of our in-class conversations about the course material. During any given Block, the discussion forum will be open for your contributions from 9:00 am on Day 1 (1st Tuesday) until 5:00 pm on Day 14 (2nd Monday). Canvas will automatically lock the forums at the end of each Block (i.e., 5:00 pm on Day 14).

In order to earn credit, any given online PC:
- must be **at least 250 words** long (quotations and "filler" prose will **not** count toward that total)
- must engage in significant ways with material from **the same Block** where it happens
- should take a clear position on a **major course-related issue** raised by whatever you are responding to
- should support that position with a **persuasive argument**

Your contributions can take a variety of forms. For example:
- offering thoughtful, critical commentary on issues from the required reading that we didn't cover in class
- sharing thoughts that you could/should have made during our in-class conversations but that (for whatever reason) didn't happen
- following up on key facets of our in-class conversations with additional commentary or insights that come to you after those conversations have ended
- responding in substantive ways to one of your classmate's online PCs

To be clear, this is **not** an exhaustive list of the possibilities for credit-worthy online PCs, though it covers the most common successful approaches to the assignment.

Tip: Present your work as if it matters. Spellcheck it. Proofread it. Copy-edit it. And do this, even for your DCs. If you don't care enough about what you've written to make it as polished as possible, you shouldn't expect it to earn credit.

Our online discussions work best when they are interactive **conversations** among the group, rather than a series of "one-way" messages to me. But that conversation can't happen if everyone waits until the end of the Block to contribute. To that end, each Block has a "halftime" deadline (5:00 pm on Day 7 (1st Monday)). As long as you earn 1 online PC credit before that deadline, you can earn as many online PC credits as you like for that Block. If you miss that deadline, the maximum number of online PC credits you can earn for that Block is 2.

The following approaches to online PCs will **not** earn credit:
- **Extended summaries:** Your audience has done the reading, been part of the in-class discussion, and/or read the PC that you are responding to. They don't need you to repeat those things, but they can benefit from you offering a PC that helps them see whatever you're responding to in a new light.
- **Mere (dis)agreement:** You should have something more substantial to say than simply expressing your (dis)approval of what someone else has said or written. This is especially true if your (dis)approval consists mostly of summary (cf. the point directly above) and/or "filler" prose.
- **Simple comparisons:** Merely pointing to similarities and differences between two readings is **not** the same thing as making an argument of your own about the main issues addressed in those readings.
- **Off-topic detours:** Know the difference between the core arguments in a reading/discussion, and the various side issues that appear in it. Your PCs need to focus on the former, rather than the latter.

Additional online PC advice:
- Good online PCs involve more formal prose than the average in-class discussion, but are less formal than a research paper. You should craft your online PCs with enough care and thought for them to be productive additions to a larger conversation. Think about what you want to say **before** you start writing. After you've written something, re-read and edit it for clarity and style before you post it.
- Argue your points. Don't merely assert them. Your readers aren't likely to be believe what you write simply because you preface it with "I believe that . . ." or "We all know that . . ." or some such. Your job is to **persuade** your readers that your point is valid, not simply to demonstrate that you have an opinion.
- In order to respond to your classmates' PCs appropriately, you will need to read them with the same care and thought that you give to the required readings. You are **not** obligated to read every PC that gets posted, but you should still do your best to follow as much of the conversation as you can.
- Your PCs should be respectful and constructive -- especially (though not exclusively) if you are disagreeing with something one of your classmates has written.

Reflection essay (RE)

In a well-crafted and thoughtful essay of **at least 1000 words**, explain what you (think you) already know about the relationship(s) between media, technology, and culture. This is **not** a research paper. It is a deliberately open-ended essay in which you summarize the knowledge, opinions, and questions you currently have about the course's central theme. It will provide a useful touchstone when you write your Self Assessment Essay at the end of the semester. Some questions that you might want to consider in your RE include:
- What (if any) forms of media technology do you think are particularly **beneficial** to society as a whole? Why do you think so? Are there downsides to those technologies that we should be worried about?
- What (if any) forms of media technology do you think are particularly **harmful** to society as a whole? Why do you think so? Are there upsides to those technologies that we should embrace?
- What (if any) questions or concerns do you have about media and technology as you begin the course? Are there specific media technology issues that you want to know more about?

To be clear, this isn't an exhaustive list of questions to think about, nor are you obligated to address them all.

Tip: Meet the assignments' requirements. One of the most common mistakes that students make is to ignore a vital part of an assignment's instructions: e.g., they submit only one part of a two-part paper, they turn in a descriptive essay rather than an argumentative one, etc. Ignoring those details will not serve you well.

This essay is due by **5:00 pm on 29 Jan**. Please remember that the RE is one of the BRs you **must** meet for the course. To that end, the following rules also apply:

- Every day (or fraction thereof) that your RE is late will add 1 PC to the total that you will need in order to meet the BRs.
- Every 100 words (or fraction thereof) that your RE falls short of the 1000 word requirement will add 1 PC to the total that you will need in order to meet the BRs.
- REs that stray too far from the prompt will **not** count as successful fulfillment of the requirement, and you will need to submit a fresh RE that addresses the prompt properly.

Additional RE advice:

- Don't procrastinate! This is, by design, the simplest bit of formal writing you will do for this course. It does **not** require you to do additional research -- or even to engage directly with the required readings. In theory, it's an essay that you are fully capable of writing before the semester even begins.
- Penalties for late and/or short REs add extra work to your overall writing load later in the semester. Ideally, you don't have to worry about this issue at all (cf. "Don't procrastinate!" immediately above). If you do, though, try to keep whatever penalties you incur to a minimum (e.g., 1-2 extra PCs).

Syllabus supplements (SSs)

Each SS requires you (1) to find a reading that you think should be added to future versions of this course and (2) to write a two-part essay of **at least 1250 words** (250+ word summary, 1000+ word argument) that **argues persuasively** how/why the course would be **significantly improved** by your suggested addition. You need to earn credit for **at least 2 SSs** in order to meet the BRs for passing the course.

Your suggested reading must:

- have a **direct connection** to the course theme,
- be **at least 2500 words** long (for printed sources) or **10 minutes** long (for audio/video sources),
- **not** be written/created by an author who's already on our syllabus, and
- **not** appear on syllabi from previous versions of this course.

You **must** submit a digital copy of the reading you are suggesting. Some important rules for doing that properly:

- If your reading already exists as a PDF, you should upload that file to Canvas with your essay, rather than providing a link to a PDF.
- Any PDF you provide must be complete (e.g., no missing pages) and legible (e.g., not a blurry scan or a heavily marked-up document), and it should not require additional editing (e.g., don't provide an entire book for the sake of a single chapter).
- Do **not** use your phone to make PDFs of printed texts. Find and use a proper flatbed scanner.
- If your reading is online, but not a shareable file, you should provide its **public-facing** URL. Do **not** provide the URL that's connected to your UMN login from a library search.
- Any online reading you suggest **must not** be located behind a paywall or registration requirement, with the sole exception of materials that require a UMN login for access. This rule is **especially** important for video/audio "readings" of any sort (e.g., videos found on most streaming services).

> **Tip: Plan your essays in advance.** Before starting to write, think about what your intended argument needs in order to work well: e.g., the evidence you'll have to provide, the claims you'll have to support, the counter-arguments you'll have to refute. Planning ahead will help you write a strong first draft, and save time when you revise that draft.

The essay that accompanies your SS **must** consist of two parts, each of which should be **clearly labeled**:

- A 250+ word concise, accurate, and specific **summary** of your suggested reading that identifies the core argument(s) and/or major claim(s) found in your suggested reading. This summary should consist of **your own words**, rather than extended quotes from the reading or copied from the reading's abstract.
- A 1000+ word **argument** explaining how/why the course would be **significantly improved** by your suggested reading. This argument **must** also speak directly to the **substantive connection(s)** you see between your suggested reading and **at least 2 readings** on our current syllabus. Precisely what those connections are will vary. In some cases, your suggested reading may extend, update, and/or improve on arguments found in our current readings. In other cases, your suggested may function as a necessary correction and/or productive counterpoint to our current readings. (These are not the only two possibilities, but they are the most common.)
- The required word counts for these two parts are independent of each other: e.g., writing a 500-word summary does **not** mean you can stop your argument at 750 words.

You **must** submit **at least 2** successful SSs in order to meet the BRs for the course. You can submit as many additional SSs as you like -- and should almost certainly do so if you are aiming for a course grade higher than a C-. The final -- firm and non-negotiable -- deadline for all SSs is **5:00 pm on 8 May**.

SSs will **not** be assigned formal grades -- either they meet the requirements and earn credit, or they don't -- but I will return SSs submitted prior to **1 Apr** with constructive feedback. In the event that an SS submitted prior to that deadline does not earn credit, you will have the chance to revise and resubmit it in ways that bring it in line with the assignment's requirements. Such revisions will be due by **5:00 pm on 8 May**.

At least one SS is due by **5:00 pm on 18 Mar**. Please remember that this is one of the BRs you **must** meet for the course. To that end, the following rules also apply:

- Every day (or fraction thereof) that your first SS is late will add 1 PC to the total that you will need in order to meet the BRs.
- Every 100 words (or fraction thereof) that any SS falls short of the 1000 word requirement will add 1 PC to the total that you will need in order to meet the BRs.

Additional SS advice:

- You will have a **much** easier time if you start working on your SSs by thinking about what you're trying to improve (i.e., the syllabus) and then searching for readings that meet that goal than you will if you start with a specific reading and then trying to explain how/why it would make the course better.
- Choose your suggested reading(s) carefully.
  - Readings that (a) make **persuasive arguments** of their own and (b) **address significant social, cultural, and/or political issues** are much better choices than ones that simply describe or explain a phenomenon related to the course theme.
  - Readings that **enhance** or **extend** the existing reading list in productive ways will work much better for this assignment than ones that merely fit the course theme.
  - Scientific and/or statistical articles are usually **not** a good choice for this assignment. Unless you are able to evaluate the quality of a scientific study and/or the accuracy of its results -- e.g., do you know statistics well enough to interpret the data tables? do you know enough about the underlying methodologies to assess the quality of the study's design? -- your ability to make a case for why future students in this course would benefit from such a reading is likely to be limited.

Tip: Avoid formulaic writing. The "five-paragraph essay" may have gotten you through high school, but it won't serve you well here. There's nothing magical about five paragraphs (or any similar "rule" about writing) that helps you craft strong, persuasive arguments.

- Be **very careful** when it comes to TED Talks (or similar video lectures). Some of them will work well for this assignment. But many of them embody the structural problems represented in this parody. Please make sure that there's a strong, substantive argument in any such video you suggest, rather than just a pretty slide show and a smooth-talking presenter.
- Focus on the **main** argument(s) in the readings/sources in question. An argument you try to build around a single paragraph from a 20-page article (for instance) will only work well if that paragraph is absolutely central to the article as a whole. If the author's main argument still holds up without that paragraph, then it's not important enough for you to put it at the center of your essay.
- Your argument should speak to the **specific** value of the reading you are suggesting, rather than some general value that could plausibly be found in dozens (hundreds? thousands?) of other readings. Put a different way, an argument that "The syllabus would be improved significantly with a reading on Topic X" is only going to be persuasive if you can demonstrate that (1) the syllabus really would be better if it included Topic X, **and** (2) your suggested reading addresses Topic X in strong and productive ways.
- Think about your argument in **relational** terms. How would it fit into the syllabus as a whole? What, precisely, makes it an especially valuable addition? If your suggested reading is going to significantly improve the course, then it will need to **both** (1) work well alongside the existing readings **and** (2) add something important to the major claims and arguments already found in those readings.
- Here are some strategies to **avoid** in making your argument:
    - Do **not** simply compare your reading to those on the syllabus. Saying that X is (or isn't) like Y is not, by itself, a persuasive argument for how and why X would significantly improve Y.
    - Do **not** focus on the modality of your suggestion. There's nothing about media formats (e.g., print, video, audio) that guarantees anything about the intellectual, argumentative, and/or pedagogical value of the content found in those formats.
    - Do **not** focus on the "newness" of your suggestion. Essay A isn't smarter, more relevant, or better argued than Essay B simply because Essay A was published 5 (or 10, or 50) years more recently than Essay B.
    - Do **not** structure your essay by walking your readers through your thinking/research process. Telling the story of how you came to choose a particular reading for this assignment is **not** the same thing as a persuasive argument for how and why that reading would improve the course.

Self-assessment essay (SAE)

In a well-crafted and thoughtful essay of **at least 1500 words**, tell me the final course grade that you deserve, and make a **persuasive argument** to support that claim. Important issues to consider in your SAE include:
- **The quantity of the work you did.** How far above and beyond the BRs did you go? If you trickled past them (e.g., 38 PCs and 2 SSs), you'll have a much harder time justifying an A than if you clearly exceeded them by a lot (e.g., 52 PCs and 5 SSs).
- **The quality of the work you did.** Did you write exceptionally strong and polished online PCs? Or did you do just enough to meet the technical requirements? Did my feedback on your SSs describe them as excellent, or did I suggest that they needed significant revisions?
- **The kind of "extra" work you did.** There's no simple formula for how much "weight" to apply to the different kinds of work required, but it's safe to say that SSs are worth **significantly** more than PCs.
- **What you actually learned.** Reread your RE before you start writing your SAE. Remind yourself of what you knew (or didn't know) in January, and then compare that to what you know in May. One way to make a strong case for a particular grade is to evaluate the distance you've traveled over the course of the semester and/or to write an essay that visibly demonstrates what you've learned.

> **Tip: Plan ahead.** The work you need to do for this course takes time. The semester will go by **much** faster than you think, so plan accordingly. Trying to cram most of your work in during finals week will **not** serve you well.

- **The University's official standards for grades.** These are quoted directly below. Did you merely meet the course requirements (e.g., earn a C), or was your work outstanding (e.g., earn an A)?

[N.B.: This is not an exhaustive list of issues to cover in your SAE, nor are you obligated to address them all.]

Your SAE is due by **5:00 pm on 8 May**. Please remember that the SAE is one of the BRs you **must** meet for the course. As such, every 100 words (or fraction thereof) that your SAE falls short of the 1500 word requirement will result in a penalty of a fractional grade deducted from your course grade (e.g., if you otherwise would have earned a B, but your SAE is only 1420 words long, you will receive a B- for the course).

This course follows the University's published standards for A-F grading:
- A: "achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements"
- B: "achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements"
- C: "achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect"
- D: "achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements"
- F: "signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed"
- I: incompletes will only be given under "extraordinary circumstances" (i.e., major life emergencies)
- S/N: only students who have registered for the course on an S/N basis are eligible for these grades

Word counts

The word counts represent the **minimum** writing necessary to produce acceptable work. Your goal should be to write **strong** online PCs/essays, rather than simply meeting the required word count and then stopping.

Word count rules/tips:
- The minimum word count requirement for any given assignment is **firm**. If what you've written falls short of the required word count by even a single word, you will **not** receive credit for that assignment.
- Different apps/programs use different rules for counting words. Submitting work that is just barely long enough comes with the risk that something you think is long enough on your end will fall short of the minimum requirement on my end -- and the latter is the count that matters.
- Don't pad out your writing with "empty" words. If more than 10% of any given text you submit consists of filler prose (e.g., extended summaries of the readings, generic greetings, etc.), **only the non-filler words will count** toward meeting the requirement in question: e.g., a 1200-word SS essay that includes 200 words of summary and another 200 words of filler will count as an 800-word essay.
- **For online PCs:** Only your own words count: e.g., 175 words from you plus 150 words quoted from elsewhere will count as 175 words, rather than 325.
- **For the SSs:** The word counts for the summary and argument portions of your essay are independent of each other. An extra long summary doesn't allow you to write a shorter argument (or vice versa).
- **For the RE, SSs, and the SAE:** Only the main body of your text counts. Headers, footers, titles, and reference lists do not count. Quotes from other sources **do** count, but **only** if those quotes are trimmed to an appropriate length (e.g., do **not** quote a 75-word passage from one of our readings if only 10 of those words are actually necessary for your argument to work well).

Tip: Argue your points. Don't merely assert them. Simply saying that you think that an author is wrong is less convincing than explaining why you think so. Your main task is not simply to present your position: it's to **persuade** your reader that your position is correct.

File formats

REs, SSs, SAEs, and copies of your suggested SS readings must be **submitted via Canvas** as **uploaded files**. Acceptable formats for your essays are
 • LibreOffice (.odt)
 • Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx)
 • Rich Text Format (.rtf)
Essays submitted in other formats (PDFs, Microsoft Works, etc.) or as links to online files (Google Drive, Dropbox, etc.) will **not** be accepted. (Formats for your suggested SS readings have more leeway, but still need to be files that I can access. If you aren't sure about a particular file/format, ask me about it in advance.)

Revisions

Any SSs that you submit prior to **1 Apr** will come back to you with feedback from me no later than 1 May, and you can -- if you so desire -- revise and resubmit those SSs in order (a) to meet the BRs and/or (b) help justify a higher final grade for the course. Any such revisions are due by **5:00 pm on 8 May**.

In general, the kind of revision that you should aim for involves more substantial work than just minor proofreading or copy-editing corrections. It should also **not** be a repetition of your original essay with a new paragraph or two that attempt to respond to the feedback I've given you. You should assume that any suitable revision will involve some combination of:
 • reorganizing and/or restructuring your original essay,
 • rethinking key pieces of your original argument,
 • undertaking fresh research,
 • discarding portions of your original essay that didn't work well, and/or
 • writing fresh prose that fixes problems with your original essay.
Put differently, if your initial version of an essay is so strong that all it really needs to improve it is for you to fix a few typos (or something equally minor), I will tell you so explicitly in my feedback.

Zoom meetings

You are **required** to have at least 2 one-on-one Zoom meetings with me (see Canvas for the link): a Check-in meeting during Blocks #1-2, and a Progress meeting during Blocks #6-7. There is no formal grade or evaluation for these meetings, but they are **not** optional. To set these up, email me at rodman@umn.edu with suggestions for specific days/times that fit your schedule. Please keep the following guidelines in mind:
 • My schedule is generally most open on **Mondays** and **Wednesdays** from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm. Please aim for those days/times first if you can.
 • You should block out **15 minutes** for each of these meetings. If you want/need more time than that, please tell me so when setting your meetings up.
 • These meetings are **in addition to** those required for the Capstone project. If you want to fulfill both requirements at once, please tell me so when scheduling, and set aside 45 minutes for your meeting.
 • **Do not wait** to set these up. They need to be **completed** (not just scheduled) by the listed deadlines, and the best way to get days/times that fit your schedule is to set up your meetings in advance.
 • **Do not miss the deadlines.** Every day (or fraction thereof) that you are late in completing one of these meetings will add 1 PC to your BRs, and I can not guarantee that my schedule will be empty enough to keep any such penalty to a single day.

Tip: Do the required reading/viewing. Your ability to do well in this course depends on you doing the required reading/viewing with care and thought. If you simply skim them -- or blow them off -- both your learning and performance will suffer.

Check-in meeting (16 Jan - 12 Feb)
This meeting is an opportunity to touch base early in the semester, and to help you get off to a strong start. This would be a good moment for you to raise any questions or concerns that you have about the course (including the readings, the assignments, the in-class discussions). If you have an accommodations letter from the DRC, this meeting would be a good time to discuss that (though if this applies to you, please make sure to send me a copy of that letter at least 24 hours prior to our meeting).

Progress meeting (2-29 Apr)
This meeting is an opportunity for you to make sure that you finish the course well. This would be a good moment for you to raise any questions or concerns that you have about the kind and/or amount of work you need to do to complete the course successfully and/or to justify the final course grade you are aiming for.

Capstone project (optional)

If you are a Communication Studies major and want to use this course to fulfill your Capstone requirement, you must write a well-researched, argumentative essay of 2500+ words on a topic that fits the course's main theme. This project earns you an extra credit hour and is graded independently of the main course. As such, it involves work **above and beyond** the main course requirements.

There are several **mandatory** deadlines built into the project that, ideally, (1) keep you from procrastinating, (2) give me time to give you constructive feedback, and (3) give you time to act on that feedback in productive ways:

29 Jan	Register for Comm 3999W-002
6 Feb	Topic meeting (via Zoom) with me
13 Feb	Topic proposal / 10-item bibliography
27 Feb	Thesis paragraph draft
2 Apr	Rough draft
1 May	Progress meeting (via Zoom) with me
8 May	Final paper

Except for 29 Jan, all the deadlines above are **5:00 pm** deadlines. They are also all "drop dead" deadlines: i.e., failing to meet **any** of them (which includes failing to meet their minimum requirements) means that you are no longer eligible to fulfill your Capstone Project requirement in connection with this course this semester.

Scholastic dishonesty

The following is a partial list of examples of scholastic dishonesty:
- plagiarism in any of its forms
- copying another student's work (in whole or in part)
- having someone else do any of the course's required work on your behalf
- knowingly assisting someone else in their efforts to engage in any of the above practices

Penalties for scholastic dishonesty range from no credit for an assignment to a final course grade of F. These penalties are independent of any that might be imposed by the U. For more details, please see the U's student conduct code and the information page on potential consequences for code violations.

> **Tip: Revise your work *before* you submit it.** Even the most brilliant first draft will still benefit from a round or two of revision. Give yourself enough time before any given deadline to put your first draft aside for a while (overnight, if not longer) and then revise it.

If you choose to use artificial intelligence "assistants" (e.g., ChatGPT, Bard, etc.) in connection with your work for this course, you should do so with **exceptional** care. On the one hand, such tools can potentially be helpful for brainstorming ideas and sharpening your own arguments. On the other hand, you should **not** attempt to use such tools to do the major thinking, researching, or writing that you need to do yourself in order to complete your assignments. In particular, bear in mind that AI tools have a number of known weaknesses:

- They have been shown to "hallucinate" in ways that produce false, misleading, and even dangerous responses to users' questions.
- They are much better at producing vague, generic prose than they are at crafting thoughtful, critical arguments.
- They are trained to mimic the appearance of human thought without actually engaging in such thought themselves.

There is no automatic penalty for using AI tools in this course -- much like there is no penalty for using your word processor's "spell check" feature -- but it is **very** unlikely that you will be able to count on AI to do the required work for you in a satisfactory fashion.

Disability accommodations

If you have an accommodation letter from the U's Disability Resource Center (DRC), I will be happy to make accommodations for you that are consistent with the course's major learning outcomes and the major goals of the assignments. To that end, here are some important considerations:

- Please share your DRC letter with me as soon as you can, since I cannot make accommodations happen retroactively, nor can I make them happen without having received a copy of your letter.
- DRC letters are intended to open up **an ongoing dialogue between us** about how best to ensure that you have a fair opportunity to succeed in this course. I will email you after reading your letter with my sense of how/if the requested accommodations match up with the course, and you should respond with any questions or concerns you may have, so that we can reach a happy mutual understanding.
- Individual accommodation letters can vary, but it has been several years since such a letter included a request that I had not seen before. Many of the most common requests either do not apply to this course (e.g., extra time for quizzes and exams) or they are already built into the syllabus for everyone.
- The most commonly requested accommodation that matches the course requirements is for flexible deadlines. This does **not** work for online PCs without undermining the nature of that assignment, but it **can** be applied (within reason) to the RE, the first SS deadline, and some of the Capstone deadlines.
  - Accommodation-related extensions are **not** automatic. You need to **contact me in advance** to request them, and we need to agree on a new deadline for the assignment in question. That revised deadline then becomes the trigger moment for whatever late penalties would normally apply.
  - Such extensions have unavoidable "domino" effects. The semester doesn't (and can't) get extended, and I provide feedback on a "first in, first back" basis. So, for example, an extension for your first SS necessarily means my feedback on your work will happen later, and you'll have less time to incorporate that feedback into revisions and/or subsequent SSs.

Miscellaneous

- We will cover topics that may evoke strong differences of opinion. I don't expect the group to agree on everything, but I do expect our discussions to be characterized by mutual respect and collegiality. Strong opinions are acceptable, but verbal bullying and personal attacks will **not** be tolerated.

> **Tip: Prioritize well.** There are lots of things in this world more important than this course. But most of those won't excuse you from the course requirements -- and the ones that will tend to be major life emergencies. This course shouldn't matter more than everything else in your life -- but your coursework **will** suffer if you put it too low on your priority list.

- Significant disruptions of the normal flow of course-related business -- e.g., using cell phones in class, excessive side chatter, premature leave-taking behavior -- may result in grade penalties.
- The content of this course -- both in-person and online -- is not intended for public circulation or distribution. You can make audio and/or video recordings of class meetings for your personal use, provided you do so without disrupting the ordinary flow of the class. You can download copies of online materials to help you complete the course successfully, but not otherwise. The purchase and/or sale of either written notes or recordings of class meetings is strictly prohibited.
- I will do my best to accommodate your needs relating to religious holidays and/or documented disabilities. By University policy, you **must** provide me with written notice (for religious holidays) and/or official documentation (for disabilities) with **enough lead time** for such accommodations to be arranged.
- The Center for Writing offers a range of services designed to help you with research and writing projects.
- Student English Language Support offers a range of services to help international undergraduate students.
- The University Library offers a wide range of free online tutorials about basic research techniques, and I **strongly** encourage you to complete one (or more) of these **early** in the semester.
- Please pay attention to the U's official notices regarding:
  ○ policy statements for syllabi
  ○ policy regarding makeup work
  ○ COVID-19 policies and guidelines
  In particular, please note that the last link is subject to updates if the pandemic situation changes.

Schedule

Block #1	**Theory (16-29 Jan)**
16 Jan	no reading
18 Jan	Shimpach, "What's New?"
	Slack & Wise, *Culture and Technology* (pp. 1-57)
23 Jan	Lessig, "Is-Ism"
	Slack & Wise, *Culture and Technology* (pp. 59-104)
25 Jan	Slack & Wise, *Culture and Technology* (pp. 107-162)
Block #2	**History / Future (30 Jan - 12 Feb)**
30 Jan	Carey, "Historical Pragmatism and the Internet"
	Crawford, "Introduction"
1 Feb	Marvin, "Community and Class Order"
6 Feb	Crawford, "Earth"
	Sinnreich & Gilbert, "The Carrier Wave Principle"
8 Feb	Gibson, "The Gernsback Continuum"
	Varley, "Press Enter ∎"
Block #3	**Attention / Distraction (13-26 Feb)**
13 Feb	Davidson, *Now You See It* [selections]
	"Smithereens" (*Black Mirror* s05e02)
15 Feb	Paasonen, "Fickle Focus"
	Crawford, "Affect"

Tip: The semester lasts fifteen weeks -- and they all count. This course is set up so that it's possible to recover from a slow start and still succeed. But overcoming a slow start successfully **will** require you to work extra hard at the end of the semester.

20 Feb   Jurgenson, "The Disconnectionists"
                 "National Anthem" (*Black Mirror* s01e01)
22 Feb   McChesney, "What Is the Elephant in the Digital Room?"

Block #4   **Intimacy / Connectivity (27 Feb - 18 Mar)**
27 Feb   Crawford, "Classification"
                 "The Entire History of You" (*Black Mirror* s01e03)
29 Feb   Crawford, "These Foolish Things"
                 Morris, "Grizzling About Facebook"

12 Mar   Stone, "In Novel Conditions"
                 "San Junipero" (*Black Mirror* s03e04)
14 Mar   Duhigg, "How Companies Learn Your Secrets"

Block #5   **Labor / Algorithms (19 Mar - 1 Apr)**
19 Mar   Crawford, "Labor"
                 "Fifteen Million Merits" (*Black Mirror* s01e02)
21 Mar   Fisher, "Do Algorithms Have a Right to the City?"

26 Mar   Noble, "A Society, Searching"
                 "Nosedive" (*Black Mirror* s03e01)
28 Mar   O'Neil, "These Women Tried to Warn Us About AI"

Block #6   **Hacking / Activism (2-15 Apr)**
2 Apr   Crawford, "State"
                 "hellofriend.mov" (*Mr. Robot* s01e01)
4 Apr   Norton, "Inside Anonymous"

9 Apr   *We Are Legion*
11 Apr   Coleman, "The State of Anonymous"

Block #7   **Surveillance / Justice (16-29 Apr)**
16 Apr   Crawford, "Data"
                 "Crocodile" (*Black Mirror* s04e03)
18 Apr   Vaidhyanathan, "The Surveillance Machine"

23 Apr   Ingraham & Reeves, "New Media, New Panics"
                 "Hated in the Nation" (*Black Mirror* s03e06)
25 Apr   Crawford, "Power"
                 Crawford, "Space"

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8 May   **Final deadline for all SSs and SAE**
5:00 pm

Tip: Your chance to earn your grade ends when the semester does. The only exceptions to this rule involve major life emergencies). In such cases, you will need to provide independent verification of the emergency in question, and you will receive a final grade of "I" pending the completion of the work that you've missed.