



**Online Communication & Personal Relationships**  
**CA 345 (3 credits)**  
**Spring 2017**  
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:55 – 10:45 am  
132 Noland Hall

**Instructor:**

Dr. Catalina Toma

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Office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 11 am – 12 pm, and by appointment

**Teaching assistants:**

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Office hours: Fridays 9 – 11 am



**Sections:**

<b>301</b>	Wed. 9:55 – 10:45 am	1070 Grainger Hall	Jay
<b>302</b>	Wed. 11:00 – 11:50 am	2165 Grainger Hall	TJ
<b>303</b>	Wed. 11:00 – 11:50 am	1080 Grainger Hall	Jay
<b>304</b>	Wed. 12:05 – 12:55 pm	2165 Grainger Hall	TJ
<b>305</b>	Wed. 1:20 – 2:10 pm	345 Education Building	Jay
<b>306</b>	Wed. 2:25 – 3:15 pm	218 Educational Sciences	TJ
<b>307</b>	Wed. 2:25 – 3:15 pm	1131 Humanities Building	Jay
<b>308</b>	Wed. 3:30 – 4:20 pm	2195 Grainger Hall	TJ
<b>309</b>	Wed. 3:30 – 4:20 pm	2185 Grainger Hall	Jay
<b>310</b>	Wed. 4:35 – 5:25 pm	1080 Grainger Hall	TJ

## Course Overview

In recent decades, online communication has become an essential tool for the management of personal relationships. People use online communication platforms (e.g., online dating, social network sites, mobile phones, discussion forums) to find romantic partners, maintain friendships, collaborate, or seek social support. This survey course will introduce students to the emerging body of scholarship on how, and to what effects, people use these technologies to manage personal relationships. Every week, we will examine a technological platform (e.g., Facebook, online dating, online discussion forums) and discuss how relationship dynamics are shaped by this platform. For instance, how do people form impressions of others when communicating through purely textual media? In what ways do social network sites improve and hurt romantic relationships? How much do people lie in online dating profiles? Does the use of avatars in video games affect players' sense of identity?

We will approach these questions using a quantitative social science perspective. This means that we will read original research studies that (1) test and/or refine theories of social behavior in computer-mediated environments; and (2) use experiments, surveys, and content analyses as their methodologies. You are not required to have any prior knowledge on either theories or methods in the social sciences. An important objective of this course is to teach you how to think like a social scientist and to apply this knowledge to online relationships.

## Specific Learning Objectives

- Identify features of technology that affect people's ability to express themselves and to manage relationships
- Understand how people adapt to technology and use it for social purposes
- Become knowledgeable of the latest research findings in the area of online relationships
- Become conversant with the main theories and models in the field of computer-mediated communication
- Get a basic grasp of the scientific method and of theory development in the social sciences
- Learn how to read empirical articles in the social sciences

## Required Readings

There is no textbook for this class. All readings are available on Canvas (<http://canvas.wisc.edu>).

## Course Organization

### Lectures

Twice a week, I will deliver a lecture on important theories, concepts, and research findings in the field of computer-mediated communication. The purpose of lectures is to clarify and supplement the readings, not to replace them. Please complete all assigned readings prior to lecture and be prepared to discuss them!

Each of my lectures will be accompanied by PowerPoint slides. To help you follow along and study for exams, I will post my slides on Canvas prior to each lecture. Please feel free to download them on your computer or bring print-outs to class.

## Sections

Sections are taught by TA's and serve two primary functions: 1) to clarify course material through discussions, exercises, and practical applications; and 2) to help you complete assignments. Think of sections as an opportunity to get personalized help from an experienced graduate student (your TA) and from your peers on understanding the material and performing well in the course. While your TA will prepare a set of activities and exercises meant to help you along, you are expected to play an active role in your own learning process by asking questions, seeking clarifications, offering personal examples (if you feel comfortable), and providing feedback to your peers. Sections can be fun and can help significantly with your learning, but only if you participate actively! Please take ownership of your own learning process during section time.

## Office Hours

If you didn't have the opportunity to address your questions in section, or if you are experiencing issues that require one-on-one help, you are invited to come to office hours. It is best to seek assistance before exams and assignments, and generally as soon as you feel that you are struggling. You are welcome to attend any of the TA's office hours, not just those of your own TA, and of course you are welcome to mine. We are all happy to help.

## Graded Work

### Grade Breakdown

2 exams:  $2 \times 20\%$  each = 40%  
 4 papers:  $4 \times 10\%$  each = 40%  
 10 article reports:  $10 \times 1\%$  each = 10%  
 5 "in the news/in pop culture" assignments:  $5 \times 1\%$  = 5%  
 Participation: 5%  
 Extra-credit: 3%

**Exams.** Two non-cumulative exams will be administered during lecture time (on Thursday), one half-way through and the other at the end of the semester. Each exam will consist of a combination of multiple-choice, true/false, and short-answer questions, and will be based on both lectures and readings. On the Tuesday before each exam I will organize an in-class review session. You will be invited to submit questions you would like addressed during the review.

Make-up exams will not be offered, except in cases of an unforeseen emergency. Appropriate documentation will be required to confirm the circumstances of the emergency. Please check the timing of the exams in the beginning of the semester. If you have a conflict that cannot be resolved, please take this class a different semester.

**Paper assignments.** You will be required to complete 4 short papers in this class, each 2 pages long. Each paper assignment will ask you to engage in an online activity (for instance, lurk on an online social support group, or create a dating profile), describe it, and then connect it with theories and concepts covered in class.

I will assign a total of 6 papers throughout the semester (see schedule below). You get to choose which 4 of these you would like to submit. The paper assignments will be announced

at the end of lecture on Thursday and will be due exactly one week after they have been announced, on the following Thursday at 11:59 pm. Your TA's will return the graded papers in 1-2 weeks.

**Article reports.** For each of the empirical articles (i.e., articles that report on primary data) covered in class, you will have an opportunity to submit a one-page article report. This article report will ask you to briefly summarize the article by answering a set of questions posted by me. You will be required to turn in article reports for 10 articles of your choice out of the 20 empirical articles we will read in this class. Each reading that is eligible for an article report is marked with an asterisk (\*) on the reading list. The article reports will be due by 11:59 pm on the Sunday **before** the article is assigned in class.

The article reports will be graded as **“pass/fail.”** You will get credit if you have answered the majority (i.e., over 50%) of the questions correctly. Please note that you cannot make up a “fail” grade on this assignment by submitting a replacement article report. We will grade the first 10 reports you turn in. Therefore, choose carefully which articles you would like to write reports on.

**“In the news/in pop culture” assignments.** This assignment will require you to find a news article, video, meme, or another pop culture artifact that illustrates the concepts covered in class. You are required to post this artifact along with a one-paragraph explanation of how it connects to course content. You are required to submit a total of 5 of these assignments on topics of your choosing. This assignment is due by 11:59 pm on the Sunday **before** the class to which your artifact refers.

This assignment is also graded as **“pass/fail.”** As is the case with article reports, you will not be able to make up a “fail” grade by submitting a substitute artifact. We will only grade the first 5 artifacts you submit.

**Participation.** You are required to participate actively and thoughtfully in section and lecture. This involves asking and answering questions, volunteering your opinions, and generally engaging with your classmates and instructors. To earn full participation credits, you should speak up in every single section and at least several times in lecture.

During all interactions with your peers and the teaching team, you are expected to act respectfully and politely. Please listen actively and seek to understand others' perspectives, particularly when they are different from yours. Please offer constructive criticism, and aim your criticism at specific arguments, not at the person making those arguments. Derogatory comments regarding race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability are not acceptable.

**Attendance.** Regular attendance is mandatory in both lecture and sections. However, we will only take attendance in section.

You are allowed to miss up to three sections with no penalty. You do not need to provide any documentation or explanation for these three allowed absences. For every additional missed section, your final course grade will be lowered by 1%, even if there are legitimate reasons for

your absence. Therefore, you should plan on saving your three allowed section absences for circumstances beyond your control that may force you to miss section.

While formal attendance will not be taken in lecture, it is imperative that you attend lecture regularly if you are to do well in this course. This course will cover complex theories and research procedures, and you are unlikely to grasp them by simply completing the readings, without additional explanations and examples from me. Additionally, I frequently lecture about issues that are not covered in the readings. You are well advised to attend every single lecture.

**Extra-credit.** There will be opportunities to earn up to 3 % points of extra credit in this course by participating in research studies. A half hour of research participation corresponds to 0.5 % point added to your final grade in the class. Instructors will not know which studies (if any) students participate in; they simply receive a list of total points earned.

All research opportunities are administered through the SONA website, <http://wisc-commarts.sona-systems.com>, which will be available for log-in after September 19th. The student guide to using SONA is on Learn@UW. Address all questions to Paul Ahn, the SONA Administrator, at [hahn36@wisc.edu](mailto:hahn36@wisc.edu).

Please note that the majority of research studies offered through SONA are not conducted by the teaching team of this course. Hence, we cannot guarantee that there will be enough studies available for each student. If you want to receive your extra-credit, be sure to monitor the SONA website regularly and sign up for studies as soon as they become available.

### **Late Assignments**

For all written work in this course (i.e., papers, article reports, “in the news/in pop culture” assignments), you are given a choice of submitting only a subset of all possible assignments. Given this flexibility, late assignments will not be accepted. If you cannot submit an assignment in time, choose another assignment to submit. This will require you to plan your time carefully. We recommend that you allow yourself leeway for unexpected circumstances (e.g., illness, accidents) by completing assignments early, when you have the time and have no conflicts. Simply planning on submitting the last possible assignments in this course (e.g., the last four assigned papers) is not recommended.

### **Grade Contestations**

Your TA will be grading all of your work. You are entitled to detailed, thoughtful and constructive feedback. If you believe the feedback you have received is inadequate, or there has been a mistake in grading, you must first contact your TA and try to resolve the problem. If you are still dissatisfied with the outcome, you may make a direct appeal to me. You must do so within 2 weeks from the date you received your grade. Your appeal must be written and must make a compelling case as to why you deserve a different grade. Please be aware that when I re-grade your work, you might earn a higher or lower grade than the one assigned by your TA.

### **Grading Scale**

All assignments and exams will be graded on a scale from 1 to 100. The following score to letter grade conversion will be used:

A	93 – 100 %
AB	88 – 92.5%
B	83 – 87.5%
BC	78 - 82.5%
C	70 - 77.5%
D	60 – 69.5%
F	< 59.5%

### (Additional) Course Policies

#### McBurney Students

If you are a McBurney student, you must identify yourself to your TA in the beginning of the semester and present your McBurney visa. We will gladly accommodate your needs. It will be your responsibility to contact your TA prior to every exam to make the necessary arrangements.

#### Incompletes

Incompletes will not be offered in this class. The only exception will be made if circumstances beyond your control (e.g., illness, accident) prevent you from taking the last exam. To qualify for such an incomplete, you must (1) have completed all coursework except the last exam; (2) be in good academic standing in this class (C average or above); and (3) provide appropriate documentation for your unforeseen circumstances.

#### Email

The TAs and I are committed to giving you personalized attention and helping you with whatever issues arise in this class. However, since this is a very large class, we request that you only email us with issues that require short answers (e.g., setting up an appointment). We will get back to you within 2 business days. All other inquiries should be addressed during office hours, or immediately before/after class. All questions relating to class material should be asked in section, lecture, or during office hours.

#### Cell phones & Laptops

Out of consideration for your classmates, please turn off your cell phones at the beginning of class. Cell phone use during class will result in your dismissal from that class. You may use laptops only for class-related work. Please keep in mind that laptops can constitute an important source of distraction. Since a great deal of learning occurs by paying attention and participating in class, extraneous laptop use during class can impede your learning, hurt your grade, or force you to spend more of your free time catching up.

#### Academic Integrity

You are required to abide by University of Wisconsin's code of academic integrity (<http://students.wisc.edu/doso/students>). While you are encouraged to collaborate with your peers and to draw upon relevant literature, any work that you submit for academic credit must be your own, written entirely in your own words (unless clearly marked as quotations and properly attributed to sources). You must at all cost avoid copying peers' work or cheating on exams. All cases of plagiarism will result in an automatic F in the assignment/exam and will be officially reported to the Dean of Students. There will be no warnings, no second chances, and no opportunities to rewrite.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Note: Articles marked with \* are eligible for article reports

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### Week 1 (Jan 17 & 19): Welcome & Introduction

Topics: Course description; how to read an empirical article; technological features & affordances; technological determinism vs. social shaping of technology

No readings this week

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### Week 2 (Jan 24 & 26): Text-based media (email, IM)



Topics: Emotional communication; impression formation

Hancock, J. T., Landrigan, C., & Silver, C. (2007). Expressing emotion in text-based communication. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on Human factors in computing systems* (pp. 929-932). ACM Press.

Hancock, J. T., & Dunham, P. J. (2001). Impression formation in computer-mediated communication revisited an analysis of the breadth and intensity of impressions. *Communication research*, 28, 325-347.

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### Week 3 (Jan 31 & Feb 2): Multi-modal media (phone, video chatting)



Topics: Long-distance romantic relationships; trust

\*Neustaedter, C., & Greenberg, S. (2012). Intimacy in long-distance relationships over video chat. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 753-762). ACM Press.

\*Bos, N., Olson, J., Gergle, D., Olson, G., & Wright, Z. (2002). Effects of four computer-mediated communications channels on trust development. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 135-140). ACM Press.

### PAPER ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE

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### Week 4 (Feb 7 & Feb 9): Facebook part 1



Topic: Social capital

\*Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends:” Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12, 1143-1168.

\*Burke, M., & Kraut, R. E. (2014). Growing closer on Facebook: Changes in tie strength through social network site use. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 4187-4196). ACM Press.

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### Week 5 (Feb 14 & 16): Facebook part 2



Topic: Romantic relationships

\*Muise, A., Christofides, E., & Desmarais, S. (2009). More information than you ever wanted: Does Facebook bring out the green-eyed monster of jealousy? *CyberPsychology & behavior*, 12, 441-444.

\*Toma, C. L., & Choi, M. (2015). The couple who Facebooks together, stays together: Facebook self-presentation and relationship longevity among college-aged dating couples. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 18, 367-372.

### PAPER ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE

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### Week 6 (Feb 21 & 23): Facebook part 3



Topic: Emotional well-being

Toma, C. L. (2016). Taking the good with the bad: Effects of Facebook self-presentation on emotional well-being. In L. Reinecke & M.-B. Oliver (Eds.) *Handbook of Media Use and Well-Being* (pp. 170-182). New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

\*Tandoc, E. C., Ferrucci, P., & Duffy, M. (2015). Facebook use, envy, and depression among college students: Is facebooking depressing? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 43, 139-146.

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### Week 7 (Feb 28 & Mar 2): Photo-based media (Instagram, Snapchat)



Topics: Narcissism; intimacy

\*Weiser, E. B. (2015). # Me: Narcissism and its facets as predictors of selfie-posting frequency. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 86, 477-481.

\*Kofoed, J., & Larsen, M. C. (2016). A snap of intimacy: Photo-sharing practices among young people on social media. *First Monday*, 21(11).

### PAPER ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE

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### Week 8 (Mar 7 & 9): Review & MIDTERM EXAM

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**Week 9 (Mar 14 & 16): Online dating part 1**


Topics: Self-presentation; deception

\*Ellison, N., Heino, R., & Gibbs, J. (2006). Managing impressions online: Self-presentation processes in the online dating environment. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(2), 415-441.

\*Toma, C. L., Hancock, J. T., & Ellison, N. B. (2008). Separating fact from fiction: An examination of deceptive self-presentation in online dating profiles. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34, 1023-1036.

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**Week 10 (Mar 28 & 30): Online dating part 2**


Topic: Partner choice

\*Heino, R. D., Ellison, N. B., & Gibbs, J. L. (2010). Relationshopping: Investigating the market metaphor in online dating. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27, 427-447.

\*D'Angelo, J. D., & Toma, C. L. (2016). There are plenty of fish in the sea: The effects of choice overload and reversibility on online daters' satisfaction with selected partners. *Media Psychology*, 1-27.

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**PAPER ASSIGNMENT #4 DUE**


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**Week 11 (Apr 4 & 6): Online dating part 3**


Topic: Prevalence and success of online dating

\*Cacioppo, J. T., Cacioppo, S., Gonzaga, G. C., Ogburn, E. L., & VanderWeele, T. J. (2013). Marital satisfaction and break-ups differ across on-line and off-line meeting venues. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110, 10135-10140.

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**Week 12 (Apr 11 & 13): Online discussion forums**


Topics: Social support; self-disclosure

Tanis, M. (2007). Online social support groups. In A. N. Joinson, K. McKenna, T. Postmes, & U-D. Reips (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Psychology* (pp. 139-153). Oxford University Press.

\*Barak, A., & Gluck-Ofri, O. (2007). Degree and reciprocity of self-disclosure in online forums. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 10, 407-417.

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**PAPER ASSIGNMENT #5 DUE**


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**Week 13 (Apr 18 & 20): Video games**

Topics: Identity; identity shift



\*Bessière, K., Seay, A. F., & Kiesler, S. (2007). The ideal elf: Identity exploration in World of Warcraft. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 10(4), 530-535.

\*Yee, N. and Bailenson, J. (2007). The Proteus effect: The effect of transformed self-representation on behavior. *Human Communication Research*, 33, 271–290.

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**Week 14 (Apr 25 & 27): Media ecology**

Topics: Media selection in relationship contexts; Social sharing



Ledbetter, A. M. (2015). Media multiplexity theory: Technology use and interpersonal tie strength. In D. O. Braithwaite & P. Schrodt (Eds.) *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; pp. 363–376). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

\*Choi, M., & Toma, C. L. (2014). Social sharing through interpersonal media: Patterns and effects on emotional well-being. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 36, 53-541.

**PAPER ASSIGNMENT #6 DUE**

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**Week 15 (May 2 & 4): Review & FINAL EXAM**

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