**Dynamics of Online Relationships**

**CA 577 (3 credits)**

**Spring 2016**

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1 – 2:30 pm

3155 Vilas Hall

**Instructor:**

Dr. Catalina Toma

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Office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1 – 2 pm, and by appointment

**Course Overview**

Communication technologies have permeated both the personal and professional spheres of our lives. Much of our self-expression, identity work, and relationship management is accomplished in computer-mediated environments (e.g. social network sites, online dating, mobile computing). This upper-level seminar examines how the features and affordances of these environments affect users’ ability to understand one another and also to initiate, nurture, and manage their personal relationships. We will consider a multitude of technological features, such as anonymity, synchronicity, a reduction or elimination of nonverbal cues, and audience access, and we will spend a great deal of time thinking about how these features shape communicative and psychological processes.

Great emphasis will be placed on understanding, critiquing, and developing theories that can explain social dynamics in computer-mediated environments. To this end, we will review “new” theories that have been specifically developed to explain the effect of new communication technologies, but also “old” theories of relationships, that do not take into account the medium in which the interaction occurs. For this latter group of theories, we will discuss ways in which the study of computer-mediated environments can add sophistication to the existing line of thinking.

Every week, we will be reading research articles and book chapters that use social scientific methodologies. Additionally, you will be required to develop a research proposal that address gaps in the literature on online relationships. Because of the research component of the course, you are encouraged to have taken a prior course on research methods in the social sciences.

**Course Goals**

The overall goal for the course is to develop a sophisticated understanding of the theories and research findings in the emerging area of online relationships. Specific objectives include:

* Become conversant with the state-of-the-art research in the area of online relationship
* Understand how humans adapt to technology and use it for social purposes
* Identify features of technology that affect people’s ability to express themselves and manage relationships online
* Gain a sophisticated grasp of the scientific method and of theory-building in the social sciences
* Learn how to evaluate theories critically and how to identify worthwhile avenues for future research
* Understand the research process in the social sciences by developing research proposals

**Required Readings**

**There is no textbook for this class. All readings are available on Learn@UW.**

**Assignments and Grading**

**Your grade will be based on the following components:**

1. **Two exams *(2 x 20% each = 40%)***

**The exams will consist of a combination of multiple-choice questions, true/false questions, short essays and longer essays. Exams will be based on both readings and lecture material. I will provide you with study guides and one review session before each exam. The second exam is non-cumulative.**

1. **Weekly reflection blog *(15%)***

**Every week, you will be required to write a brief (i.e., 1-200 words) reflection post on the class blog located on Learn@UW. The post should contain insights, interpretations, critiques, or questions about the readings. The purpose of this assignment is to encourage you to keep up with the readings and also to think through them carefully prior to coming to class. You are also required to post at least one comment in response to a classmate’s post each week.**

**You will be graded on whether or not you complete this assignment, not on the content of your post. Thus, this assignment will give you an opportunity to express your thoughts freely, whether that means asking for clarification on issues you are struggling with, expressing disagreement with the authors or with your classmates, or exploring possible ideas for future research.**

**The reflection posts are due by midnight on the Sunday before class and should reference the readings assigned to the upcoming week. Comments on classmates’ posts are due by midnight on Monday.**

**While you are only required to write one comment in response to a classmate’s post, you are encouraged to engage with your classmates as much as you can. The three students who write the most comments over the course of the semester will receive 1% point added to their final grade.**

1. **Group project *(total of 30%)***

**Your work in this class will culminate in a group project, to be completed in teams of four. You will be able to choose your own teammates based on common interests and affinities. You are expected to write a research proposal on a topic of interest to you within the area of online relationships. Your proposal should identify a research question that advances theory in this area, and detail an empirical study that addresses this question.**

**The group project contains several components:**

* **IRB Completion Certificate (*ungraded*): You will be asked to become certified in conducting human subjects research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Failure to complete this training by the specified deadline will result in a 3% deduction from your final grade.**
* **Proposal (*ungraded*): You will write a short paper (2-3 pages) detailing your plan for the group project. This will include your research idea, the theory(ies) you plan on using, and a basic draft of your research methodology. I will give you detailed feedback that you should be incorporating in your final paper.**
* **Presentation (*10%*): During the penultimate week of class, each team will deliver a 25-minute presentation on their research proposal, accompanied by PowerPoint slides.**
* **Project write-up *(20%)*: Each team will write a 15-20 page paper that includes a careful literature review, hypotheses, a proposed methodology, a discussion of how your research project advances theory, and all the measures you plan on using in your study.**

**You are not required to collect any data for this class. However, your research proposal should be sufficiently developed for data to be (potentially) collected in the future. Students pursuing honor’s theses are especially encouraged to use this project as a springboard for their ideas. For especially strong projects, I am willing to mentor and supervise interested students in actually running the proposed study in subsequent semesters. These students can earn independent study credits and/or authorship credit in any publications that may come out of this work.**

**Please note that the group project presentation and write-up will be graded holistically, meaning that they will receive one grade, rather than a different grade for each team member. However, I will ask each of you to evaluate your peers’ work and will be making adjustments to team members’ grades based on peer feedback.**

1. **Participation and leading discussion *(15%)***

Since this is a seminar, your participation is pivotal and will be evaluated along three criteria: a) attendance; b) active contribution to class discussions; and c) substantive contribution to class discussion. **A perfect attendance record does not guarantee a good participation grade. Rather, you must actively offer your thoughts during every class.** Your contribution could consist of asking questions, introducing issues for debate, offering your interpretation and critique of the readings, engaging with your classmates’ opinions, connecting the readings with your own experience and research interests, etc.

Please note that while you will be evaluated on the thoughtfulness and comprehensiveness of your contributions, you will **not** be evaluated on the extent to which you agree with me, the readings, or your classmates. All opinions are welcome and encouraged.

You will also be required to **lead class discussion** at least once during the semester, on a topic of your choice. This will entail quickly summarizing the readings, moderating class discussion, and preparing stimulating questions for your classmates.

Some students feel passionately about certain issues and positions. I welcome this passion and appreciate its energizing effect on the classroom. However, I ask that you treat your classmates with respect at all times and that you exhibit tolerance for others’ opinions, however divergent they may be from yours.

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%

**Course Policies**

**Attendance***.* Regular attendance is required for this course and will be recorded in the beginning of every lecture. If you are late for class, it is your responsibility to get in touch with me at the end of that class and ask that I adjust your attendance record. You are allowed up to three unexcused absences. For any additional absences, your participation grade will be lowered unless you provide written notification from your academic advisor or a doctor.

Exams will be administered collectively and make-up exams will only be given in case of an unforeseen emergency.

**Reading***.* The assigned reading should be completed **prior** to Tuesday’s lecture. You should be prepared to answer questions and discuss the reading material. The lectures are meant to clarify and supplement the readings, rather than replace them. To help you with your learning, I will post my PowerPoint slides on Learn@UW before exams are due.

**Grading***.* I will make every effort to provide you with detailed, thoughtful and constructive feedback on your assignments and exams. If you are dissatisfied with your grade, I am happy to meet with you and resolve any issues that may arise. If you wish to have any of your work re-graded, **you must make a written appeal to me within two weeks from the date you received your grade.** Your written appeal must make a compelling case as to why you deserve a different grade. Please be aware that when I re-grade your work, you may earn a **higher or lower** grade than originally assigned.

**Late assignments**. Time management is an important skill to be developed in this course. As such, late assignments will not be accepted unless you have obtained **prior approval** from me, or in the case of an unforeseen emergency. Documentation will be required in both instances.

Makeup exams will not be offered in this class.

**Incompletes***.* Generally speaking, 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 final exam. To qualify for such an incomplete, you must (1) have completed all coursework except the final; (2) be in good academic standing (C average or above); and (3) provide appropriate documentation for your unforeseen circumstances.

**Questions***.* Questions and comments are welcome at any time during lecture. Just raise your hand!

**Seeking assistance***.* Most of the material covered in this class is based upon social-scientific research and often statistical analyses. You will be required to think and write in ways that may be unfamiliar and challenging. You should never hesitate to seek assistance from me. I am always happy to help. It is best to seek assistance before exams and assignments, and generally as soon as you feel that you are struggling.

**McBurney students***.* I am happy to make special accommodations for McBurney students. Please identify yourselves to me in the beginning of the semester and present me with a copy of your McBurney visa. Then, before every exam, please send me an email with a reminder of your McBurney needs.

**Email policy***.* Your preferred method of communicating with me should be face-to-face, either before/after class or during office hours. Please limit your emails to urgent issues (e.g. unforeseen emergencies that prevent you from taking an exam) or issues that require very short answers (e.g., setting up an appointment). All questions related to class material should be asked in class 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 note-taking purposes. Please keep in mind that laptops can constitute an important source of distraction for you. 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 the University of Wisconsin’s code of academic integrity (<http://students.wisc.edu/doso/students.html>). 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 all 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**

**WEEK 1 Sep. 6 & 8 Communication Technologies as Psychological Spaces**

Van Gelder, L. (1985, October).  The strange case of the electronic lover. Ms. Magazine.

**WEEK 2 Sep 13 & 15 History and Theoretical Foundations**

Baym, N. K. (2010). *Personal Connections in the Digital Age.* Cambridge: Polity Press. Ch. 2 “Making New Media Make Sense” (pp. 22-49).

Walther, J. B., & Parks, M. R. (2002). Cues filtered out, cues filtered in. *Handbook of interpersonal communication.*

\*\*\*Only read pp. 529 – 542

**WEEK 3 Sep. 20 & 2 Research Methods and Ethics**

Kramer, A. D., Guillory, J. E., & Hancock, J. T. (2014). Experimental evidence of massive-scale emotional contagion through social networks. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *111*, 8788-8790.

**IRB TRAINING & COMPLETION CERTIFICATE DUE (Thu)** <https://my.gradsch.wisc.edu/citi/index.php>

**WEEK 4 Sep. 27 & 29 – Self-presentation & Self-disclosure**

Toma, C. L.**,** Hancock, J. T., & D’Angelo, J. D. (forthcoming). Love’s labor in the age of the Internet: Self-presentation in online dating profiles. In L. M. Webb & K. B. Wright (Eds.) *Computer-Mediated Communication in Personal Relationships, 2nd edition.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Bazarova, N. N. (2015). Online disclosure. In C. R. Berger & M. E. Roloff (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Interpersonal Communication*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

**WEEK 5 Oct. 4 & 6 – Impression formation**

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.

Toma, C. L. (2014). Counting on friends: Cues to perceived trustworthiness in Facebook profiles. In Proceedings of *International Conference on Weblogs and Social Media (ICWSM*) (Ann Arbor, MI, 2014)*.* Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AAAI) Press, pp. 495 - 504.

**WEEK 6 Oct. 11 & 13 Deception**

Hancock, J. (2007). Digital deception. *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*, 289-301.

Warkentin, D., Woodworth, M., Hancock, J. T., & Cormier, N. (2010, February). Warrants and deception in computer mediated communication. In *Proceedings of the 2010 ACM conference on Computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 9-12). ACM.

**GROUP PROJECT TEAM ASSIGNMENT (Thu)**

**WEEK 7 Oct. 18 & 20 Review Session & Exam #1**

**WEEK 8 Oct. 25 & 27 Deception (continued) & Proposal workshop**

Toma, C. L., & Hancock, J. T. (2012). What lies beneath: The linguistic traces of deception in online dating profiles. *Journal of Communication*, *62*, 78-97.

**WEEK 9 Nov. 1 & 3 Romantic Relationships**

Toma, C. L. (2015). Online dating. *The International Encyclopedia of Interpersonal Communication*.

Fox, J., & Tokunaga, R. S. (2015). Romantic partner monitoring after breakups: attachment, dependence, distress, and post-dissolution online surveillance via social networking sites. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *18*(9), 491-498.

**GROUP PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE (Thu)**

**WEEK 10 Nov. 8 & 10 Friendships & Social Capital**

Ellison, N., & Vitak, J. (2015). Social media affordances and their relationship to social

capital processes. In S. Sundar (Ed.), The handbook of psychology of communication technology

(pp. 205-227). Boston: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hancock, J. T., **Toma, C. L**., & Fenner, K. (2008). I know something you don’t: The use of asymmetric personal information for interpersonal advantage. In proceedings of *Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW2008)* (San Diego, CA, 2008), pp. 413-416, Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Press*.*

**WEEK 11 Nov. 15 & 17 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.), *The Routledge Handbook of Media Use and Well-Being* (pp. 170 – 182). London, UK: Taylor & Francis Ltd.

Bayer, J. B., Ellison, N. B., Schoenebeck, S. Y., & Falk, E. B. (2016). Sharing the small moments: ephemeral social interaction on Snapchat. *Information, Communication & Society*, *19*(7), 956-977.

**WEEK 12 Nov. 22 Group Project Workshop**

**WEEK 13 Nov. 29 & Dec. 1 Media Temptations, Addictions, & Non-use**

Hofmann, W., Reinecke, L., & Meier, A. (2016). Of sweet temptations and bitter aftertaste: Self-control as a moderator of the effects of media use on well-being. In L. Reinecke & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of media use and well-being: International perspectives on theory and research on positive media effects* (pp. 211-222). New York: Routledge.

Baumer, E. P., Adams, P., Khovanskaya, V. D., Liao, T. C., Smith, M. E., Schwanda Sosik, V., & Williams, K. (2013, April). Limiting, leaving, and (re) lapsing: an exploration of facebook non-use practices and experiences. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 3257-3266). ACM.

**GROUP PROJECT DUE (Thu)**

**WEEK 14 Dec. 6 & 8 Student Presentations**

**WEEK 15 Dec. 13 & 15 Review Session & Exam #2**