



**MIDWESTERN
STATE UNIVERSITY**

A Member of the Texas Tech University System

Course Syllabus: Internet and Society

Fain College of Fine Arts

MCOM 2523

Fall 2026

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Josh Westerman

Office: Fain 206

Office hours: On my office door :D

Office phone: TBA

Cell Phone:

Twitter:

E-mail: Joshua.westerman@msutexas.edu

Course Description

This course treats the internet not as a force acting on society from outside, but as a technology co-produced by the social, political, and economic forces it also reshapes. It is a feedback loop rather than a one-way determinism. Each unit pairs a theoretical framework with a case study drawn from internet history or current events, and asks students to apply that framework through direct analysis of networks, platforms, and online communities. By the end of the semester, students will be able to trace how infrastructure, governance, culture, and capital co-construct the internet we use...how that internet, in turn, reshapes the society building it.

Textbook & Instructional Materials

Shifman, Limor. *Memes in Digital Culture*. MIT Press, 2014.

doi:10.7551/mitpress/9429.001.0001

Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work not the individual's to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the Office of Student Conduct.

[Office of Student Conduct](#)

In this course, we may use generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT) to examine the ways in which these kinds of tools may inform our exploration of the topics of the class. You will be informed as to when and how these tools will be used, along with guidance for attribution if/as needed. Any use of generative AI tools outside of these parameters constitutes plagiarism and will be treated as such.

Moffett Library

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support student's studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Get started on this [Moffett Library webpage](#) to explore these resources and learn how to best utilize the library.

Grading

Course Grade - List all graded assignments with their point value and or percentage of total grade. Letter Grade Scale indicate the overall points or % to letter grade scale for example 1270 to 1137 = A.

Table 1: Points allocated to each assignment

Assignments	Points
Quizzes (5 at 50 pts each)	250
Homework	100
Project 1	150
Midterm Exam	150
Final Paper + Project 2	250
Final Presentation	100
Total Points	1000

Table 2: Total points for final grade.

Grade	Points
A	900
B	800 to 899
C	700 to 799
D	600 to 699
F	Less than 600

Homework

Homework is primarily written (paper+pen) with the exception of one take-home essay which will need to be printed and formatted using the Chicago approach to citation and style.

Quizzes

There will be a total of 5 quizzes in this class with 3 being announced and 2 being surprise or “pop” quizzes. The quizzes will be timed and best prepared for by completing assignments and readings. These appear on the Course Schedule in more detail.

Exams

Exams are written and timed. Students will be given ample time to perform their best on assessments. Please let me know as soon as possible if you require accommodations (you must work with the Office of Disability Services).

Projects Required

Projects and corresponding student presentations make around half of the graded material in this course. Getting a satisfactory grade cannot be accomplished without completing these assignments. We will briefly discuss projects on Day 1 of classes so that students of the class can begin to brainstorm early.

Projects in this course take a “forensic” or case-study based approach to research. You will be asked to select a specific issue or example from topics covered in order to complete various types of analysis of media, texts and scholarly research surrounding the issue.

“Staying with the Trouble” Controversial Issue Case Study (Project 1)*

Disinformation/Misinformation Case Study (Project 2)*

* Full details and rubric for projects are in the course schedule.

Mid-Term Exam

The coursework for this class will include a traditional written mid-term exam. This will take place during one class period and will be timed. If you require accommodations for exams, please reach out to the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible.

Final Exam

We will use the final exam period for final student presentations. Please plan accordingly!

Extra Credit

I will only accept extra credit assignments if the student in question is within 1-point of the letter grade threshold. Extra credit assignments must be requested by the student in a timely manner.

Late Work

Barring documented extenuating circumstances or pre-negotiation with me, I will not accept late work. I am very understanding of life events and troubles outside of the university interfering with performance in class. Please be proactive about discussing these matters with me. I will work with you.

Make Up Work/Tests

Quizzes and tests will not be re-administered without prior negotiation or documented extenuating circumstances.

Attendance

"This course is discussion-based. Regular attendance is crucial, but flexibility is built in. Please reach out if challenges arise. Although in general students are graded on intellectual effort and performance rather than attendance, absences may lower the student's grade where class attendance and class participation are deemed essential by the faculty member. Instructor's records will stand as evidence of absences. A student with excessive absences may be dropped from a course by the instructor. Any individual faculty member or college has the authority to establish an attendance policy, providing the policy is in accordance with the General University Policies.

Instructor Class Policies

This is a laptop- and phone-free classroom. Devices stay closed and put away unless you are the one presenting or speaking. I am invested in protecting the kind of attention this course actually requires. Close reading, argument, and discussion don't happen well when a screen is open in front of you, even with the best intentions. Take notes by hand; bring the readings printed or annotated; be here.

If you need a laptop or phone for a documented accommodation, please let me know and we'll sort out logistics. No need to explain why.

We can and will discuss extremely controversial issues in this class as part of our work to consider the relationship between internet and society. Please be kind to one another.

Disagreement isn't disrespect. Discomfort is often a sign the discussion is working, not a sign something has gone wrong. Harassment, personal attacks, and targeting classmates for who they are, however, are not discussion. Ad

hominem and personal attacks end the conversation and will be treated as a conduct issue, not a debate.

Change of Schedule

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first 12 class days of a regular semester or the first four class days of a summer semester is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

Services for Students with Disabilities

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Student Wellness Center, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

Grade Appeal Process

Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [MSU Catalog](#)

***Notice:** Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor.

Week 1 (Aug 24, 26) — Introduction: Feedback Loops, Not Determinism

Week 2 (Aug 31, Sep 2) — Infrastructure & Protocols

Week 3 (Sep 7 Labor Day; Sep 9) — Networks & Network Theory

Week 4 (Sep 14, 16) — Online Communities & Subcultures

Week 5 (Sep 21, 23) — Platformization

Week 6 (Sep 28, 30) — Digital Labor & the Gig Economy

Week 7 (Oct 5, 7) — Surveillance Capitalism & Data

Week 8 (Oct 12, 14, Mid-Semester) — Internet Governance & Policy

Week 9 (Oct 19, 21) — The Digital Divide & Access

Week 10 (Oct 26, 28) — Internet Culture & Memes

Week 11 (Nov 2, 4) — Digital Activism & Networked Publics

Week 12 (Nov 9, 11) — Misinformation, Conspiracy & Belief

Week 13 (Nov 16, 18) — Algorithmic Governance & AI

**Week 14 (Nov 23; Thanksgiving Nov 25–29) — Internet Futures I:
Revisiting the Feedback Loop**

- **Analytical Focus: Proposal workshop for final synthesis projects.**
- Week 15 (Nov 30, Dec 2) — Internet Futures II: Synthesis**

Last Class Day: December 4 (Friday — no MW meeting that day; Dec 2 is the final class session) Final Examinations: December 5–10