



The University of Western Ontario

MIT 3377G

Digital Intimacy

Winter 2021

Thursdays, 3:30-5:00, Zoom

Instructor:

Prof. Anabel Quan-Haase (Ph.D.)
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Office Hours: Thursday 1:30-2:30 pm via Zoom

Course Description:

In this course we will examine a wide range of technologies that support social relations and explore how relations between humans and technology create different kinds of cultures or "technocultures". We will look at early text-based technologies such as instant messaging as well as image-based social media platforms such as Snapchat. Students will acquire cutting-edge knowledge of new social trends and phenomena linked to how social relations are established, maintained, and dissolutioned in technosocial spaces. We will examine a diverse set of social relations ranging from intimate, romantic relations to new types of socialization with artificial intelligence. This course will investigate how technology is becoming interwoven in the very social structure of society. We will examine various platforms and the social consequences these have had for our understanding of friendship, trust, and community. Our aim is to not only have a good understanding of the theories of social relations, but also of the methodological approaches that exist to study how social networking unfolds. We will also examine the challenges that society faces in the advent of new forms of socialization, in particular increased feelings of loneliness, fragmentation, and alienation.

Prerequisite(s):

Restricted to yrs 3 & 4 FIMS modules. Not open to MIT minor module.

See: <https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/timetables/mastertt/ttindex.cfm>

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Learning Outcomes:**Students completing this course will:**

1. Explore how relations between humans and technology create different kinds of cultures or "technocultures".
2. Acquire knowledge of new social trends and phenomena linked to how social relations are established, maintained, and dissolutioned in technosocial spaces.
3. Evaluate the complex ways in which digital media influence social relations intra- and intergenerationally.
4. Develop critical thinking skills in the context of social theory linked to social relations.

Required Text(s):

See readings.

Method of Evaluation:

<i>Requirements</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Test Grade</i>
Participation	Throughout	10%
Seminar Facilitation	TBA	25%
Final paper outline	March 4	25%
Final Paper	March 25	40%
Total		100%

Students are expected to do the weekly readings. The weekly readings will be the basis for class discussions and the assignments.

Evaluation Breakdown:**Participation**

The course will use a seminar format (as this is a 3000 level course) where we will engage each other's ideas and opinions to negotiate our learning. Students are requested to come prepared to class, to participate actively in the discussions, and to allow others space to express their views. Your class participation grade will reflect the frequency and quality of contributions. Students who do not participate in class discussions can expect a very low grade for participation. Your participation will be based on attendance and active engagement in class discussions. Attendance is expected to all classes, but alone is not sufficient to obtain good marks in participation. Please also note that cell phone use and the use of electronic devices during class time for purposes unrelated to the course will also negatively affect your participation grade.

COURSE ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS: With the exception of legitimate medical/personal excuses (documentation required to be submitted) students are expected to attend at least 75% of the class meetings for this course. A passing grade in the course cannot be obtained without meeting this attendance requirement.

Seminar Facilitation

Students are expected to prepare a 15-minute seminar facilitation to take place in groups of 2-3 students on the various topics covered in the course. The seminar facilitations will be based on the topic covered in class during that week. The first day of class a list with the weekly topics will be distributed and students can choose what papers they would like to discuss. Please choose 1 paper from the list of readings. If in doubt about the appropriateness of your paper, please email your professor for approval before your seminar facilitation. The main objective in your facilitation will be to ensure that the class gains a firm and critical grasp of the concepts in the readings. You are free to facilitate the discussion in any way you choose (e.g. through the use of exercises, examples, cases, etc.). You can, for example, identify 2-3 general questions based on the reading and use these questions to guide discussion on the readings of the week. You should also try to identify links between the week's readings and material covered earlier in the course. The facilitation will be graded based on comprehensive coverage of subject matter, pertinent links with other assigned readings, critique and questions raised, and handling of discussion.

Final Paper Outline

To prepare you to write the final paper, submit a 2-page outline of your final paper. The outline is expected to include a topic, its relevance and how you will structure the argument of your final paper. All students will receive feedback on their paper outlines to help them prepare for their final paper.

Final Paper

This is a comprehensive research paper. The research paper should be a critical and analytical exploration of a topic discussed in class or related to Digital Intimacy. The paper should clearly state what your topic is and what key lines of argument you are putting forward. Your paper should include sources discussed in class as well as primary sources you have identified from the library. In this paper, you will be assessed for the ability to bring independent, critical thinking to bear on the topic. Specify clearly what you are arguing for and against, as this will be key for the structure of your essay. A detailed handout on the assignment will be given in class. Topics of relevance will be discussed in class.

How to Contact Me:

Please email me at aquan@uwo.ca if you need to get ahold of me.

How to get important information:

Please visit Western's OWL site for all important information regarding this course. If you can't find the information you are looking for, please email me.

Important Policies

Policies for Assignment Deadlines:

I will not give extensions except under special circumstances. 5% will be deducted per day for late assignments. Please see the Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf. If you cannot meet the deadline, notify the instructor as soon as possible, preferably before the scheduled date and present adequate documentation. For self-reported absences please make sure to submit your work within 48 hrs following the end of the self-reported absence (SRA).

Medical documentation will be required to reschedule your seminar facilitation, and assignment deadline. Please send an email to your professor as soon as possible to make arrangements and submit documentation to the appropriate Faculty Dean's office (FIMS/MIT). No electronic devices are allowed during the mid-term test or other aids. Be sure to keep a copy of all work submitted in fulfilment of this class. The final paper is submitted via OWL and a hard copy is also provided to the instructor at the beginning of class.

A Note on Plagiarism:

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence (the Scholastic Offence Policy can be viewed in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (www.turnitin.com).

Policy on Laptops and other Electronics/Phones during Zoom:

Be sure that all cell phones are turned off at the beginning of class.

Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness

Western's policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness can be found at www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Students must see the Academic Counsellor and submit all required documentation in order to be approved for certain accommodation: http://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/procedures/medical_accommodation.html.

Accessibility Options:

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website: www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html.

Scholastic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site: www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.

Mental Health

Students who are in **emotional/mental distress** should refer to Mental Health@Western (http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html) for a complete list of options how to obtain help.

Topics to be covered:

It is your responsibility to consult the course schedule in order to keep up with the course readings and ensure you do not miss the deadlines for the assignments. The course schedule outlines the topics to be discussed each week, the readings corresponding to the lectures, and deadlines for the assignments. Assigned readings should be completed **before** attending the class.

Class Schedule:

- 1** **Jan 14 Introduction to the Course:** Overview of course material and assignments. Course organization and assignment of seminars and readings.

Introductory Lecture: Digital media as a changing technology and its impact on society and intimate relations.

Code of Conduct in our Class: the dos and dont's

***Assignment of Class Facilitation Topics.**

- 2** **Jan 21 How do we create intimacy online and offline?**

Seminar: Does intimacy change when it is moved online? What affordances of digital media allow for intimacy?

Readings for Seminar:
 - a) Hobbs, M., Owen, S., & Gerber, L. (2017). Liquid love? Dating apps, sex, relationships and the digital transformation of intimacy. *Journal of Sociology*, 53(2), 271–284.
 - b) Lin, R., & Utz, S. (2017). Self-disclosure on SNS: Do disclosure intimacy and narrativity influence interpersonal closeness and social attraction? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 70, 426–436.

- 3** **Jan. 28 Online Dating: Intimacy and the world of dating apps**

Seminar: Dating apps. The role of dating apps in starting romantic relations?

Readings for Seminar:
 - a) Miles, S. (2017). Sex in the digital city: location-based dating apps and queer urban life. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 24(11), 1595–1610.
 - b) Bryant, K., & Sheldon, P. (2017). Cyber Dating in the Age of Mobile Apps: Understanding Motives, Attitudes, and Characteristics of Users. *American Communication Journal*, 19(2), 1–15.

c)

4 Feb. 4 Sexting: Why the moral panic?

Seminar: Sexting practices among youth and pushback of the moral panic.

Readings for Seminar:

- a) Hasinoff, A. A. (2016). How to have great sext: consent advice in online sexting tips. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 13(1), 58–74.
- b) Roberts, S., & Ravn, S. (2020). Towards a sociological understanding of sexting as a social practice: a case study of university undergraduate men. *Sociology*, 54(2), 258-274.

5 Feb. 11 Breakups and coping strategies: How does digital media complicate breakups? What strategies do those involved in a breakup employ?

Seminar: Breakups in a digital world and their emotional toll.

Readings for Seminar:

- a) Zhang, R., Freeman, G., & McNeese, N. J. (2020, October). Breakups on Social Media: Social Behaviors and Dilemmas. In Conference Companion Publication of the 2020 on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing (pp. 431-435).
- b) Quan-Haase, A., Nevin, A., & Lukacs, V. (2018). Breakups on Facebook: A typology of coping strategies. In L. Robinson, J. Schultz, J., & B. Wellman (Eds.) *Emerald Studies in Media and Communications*.

6 Feb. 18 Reading week

7 Feb. 25 Locative Media and the Complexity of Intimacy

Seminar:

Readings for Seminar:

- a) Pieber, D., & Quan-Haase, A. (2019). Up close and impersonal: Locative media and the changing nature of the networked individual in the city. In Z. Neal & C. Rozenblat (Eds.), *Handbook on cities and networks*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- b) Veel, K. & Thylstrup, N.B. (2018) Geolocating the stranger: the mapping of uncertainty as a configuration of matching and warranting techniques in dating apps, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 10(3), 43-52, DOI: 10.1080/20004214.2017.1422924

8 **March. 4 Family Connections Online: Exchanging social support around the world with grandma, grandpa and the extended family**

Seminar: Family ties and social connectivity via digital media.

Readings for Seminar:

- a) Quan-Haase, A., Mo, G. Y., & Wellman, B. (2017). Connected seniors: how older adults in East York exchange social support online and offline. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(7), 967-983.
- b) Wilding, R., & Baldassar, L. (2018). Ageing, migration and new media: The significance of transnational care. *Journal of Sociology*, 1440783318766168.

Assignment 1 due: final paper outline.

9 **March 11 Feedback to Final Papers Outline and Discuss Final Papers**

10 **March 18 Gaming and intimacy: Does gaming create a sense of intimacy and community? How do gamers get to know one another?**

Seminar: Gaming is a part of today's culture and as people spent hours gaming, they also develop a sense of connectivity, belonging, and community.

Readings for Seminar:

- a) Hellman, M., Karjalainen, S.-M., & Majamäki, M. (2017). 'Present yet absent': Negotiating commitment and intimacy in life with an excessive online role gamer. *New Media & Society*, 19(11), 1710–1726.
- b) Konstantinova, B. (2018). Online Communication of eSports Viewers: Topic Modeling Approach. In *Advances in Computer Entertainment Technology* (pp. 608–613). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76270-8_42

11 **March 25 The Internet as a Form of Sociability: What is the nature of online friendship? Can we build trusting, intimate relationships online?**

Seminar: Relationships on the Web.

Readings for Seminar:

- a) Lu, W. & Hampton, K. (2016). Beyond the Power of Networks: Differentiating Network Structure from Social Media Affordances for Perceived Social Support. *New Media and Society*.
- b) Handyside, S., & Ringrose, J. (2017). Snapchat memory and youth digital sexual cultures: mediated temporality, duration and affect. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26(3), 347–360.

Final Papers Due in Class.

12 **April 1 Chatbots, Assistants, and Robots: Is this real intimacy?**

Seminar: How are chatbots changing notions of intimacy in society? Can chatbots and sexbots substitute human relations?

Readings for Seminar:

- a) Ho, A., Hancock, J., & Miner, A. S. (2018). Psychological, Relational, and Emotional Effects of Self-Disclosure After Conversations With a Chatbot. *Journal of Communication*.
- b) Wagner, C. (2018). Sexbots: the ethical ramifications of social robotics' dark side. *AI Matters*, 3(4), 52–58.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

13 **April. 8: Review Class. Are we more lonely? Or is this a moral panic?**

Seminar: To what extent are media that are geared toward making us social in fact making us more lonely?

Readings for Seminar:

- a) Thomas, L., Orme, E., & Kerrigan, F. (2020). Student loneliness: The role of social media through life transitions. *Computers & Education*, 146, 103754.
- b) Nowland, R., Necka, E. A., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2018). Loneliness and social internet use: Pathways to reconnection in a digital world? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13(1), 70-87.

Final Papers Graded Returned to Students.

What did we cover in class?

Are the effects of the digital media positive or negative for intimacy?

NOTES FROM THE FIMS DEAN'S OFFICE

Winter 2021

Rights and Responsibilities

The conditions governing a student's ability to pursue their undergraduate education at Western are ratified by Senate and can be found on the Academic Policies section of the University Secretariat:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/rights_responsibilities.html

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments, including take-home exams, in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence. All papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software Turnitin under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#)

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

Students will have two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment

for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- during exam periods,
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are NOT met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate or equivalent documentation, if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact the FIMS Undergraduate Student Services Office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's home Faculty.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see [Policy on Academic Consideration For Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#) and for the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

In the event of a Covid-19 resurgence, it is possible that different procedures may need to be put in place on short notice.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Academic Calendar](#).

Grading at FIMS

- Normally, first year courses required for entry into an MIT or MPI module (MIT 1020E and MIT 1025F/G) are expected to have a course average between 68-72%.
- Normally, second year required courses (MIT 2000, 2100, 2200, 2500) are expected to have a course average between 70 and 75%.
- Normally, third year required courses (MIT 3000, 3100) are expected to have a course average between 72 and 77%.

Elective courses and 4th year seminars have no recommended course averages.

Support Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>

SUPPORT SERVICES - LINKS

Office of the Registrar:

www.registrar.uwo.ca

Mental Health Support:

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>

Accessible Education:

http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html

Accessibility Information:

www.accessibility.uwo.ca/

Writing Support Centre:

<http://writing.uwo.ca/>

Learning Skills Services:

<https://www.uwo.ca/sdc/learning/>

Academic Learning and Support for Online Learning:

<https://www.uwo.ca/se/digital/types/academic-and-learning-support.html>

Indigenous Services:

<https://indigenous.uwo.ca/>

Western International:

<https://international.uwo.ca/>

Career Centre:

<http://careerexperience.uwo.ca/>

Appendix A: Suggested Grade Ranges in MIT, MPI and MTP

Guidelines to the MIT Grade Range

These guidelines are benchmarks, and are not to be followed as rigid regulations. They will be adjusted as appropriate to take into account the level of the course and any specific instructions given by a professor. As well, competency in English language usage (including spelling and grammar) may be taken into account in the assignment of grades by individual instructors. Note that the 70-79 grade range is broken into two divisions, as this is the grade range into which a large number of students fall.

90-100 (Outstanding, A+)

The report shows sparkling originality and exhibits a high degree of critical analysis of the topic. Sophisticated synthesis and analysis of the theoretical and conceptual dimensions of the topic are demonstrated. Mastery of complex material and ideas is immediately evident. The topic is treated with sensitivity and subtlety of thought. The quality of the writing and background research is exemplary.

80-89 (Excellent, A)

The report shows originality and exhibits a high degree of critical analysis of the topic; it gets to the heart of the matter with comments and/or questions. It is clearly focused and logically organized. The quality of writing makes the report immediately understandable. Mastery of complex material and ideas is demonstrated. The report is of appropriate length, while preserving the priorities and emphasis of the material, so that the result is meaningful, not simplistic.

75-79 (Very Good, B+)

The report shows above average analysis, critical thinking and independent thought. Claims are supported by ample evidence and the components of the topic are well-researched and presented. The topic is addressed in reasonable depth and/or breadth and covers material appropriate to the course. The analysis is organized around focal points and the argument is easily followed. The report demonstrates an above average ability to write in an intelligible style and to condense material meaningfully and with a concern for priorities of that material.

70-74 (Good, B)

The report shows an attempt at analysis and critical thinking. Claims are supported by reasonable evidence. The topic is addressed in some depth and/or breadth, with references to the appropriate literature and course material. The analysis is organized around focal points. The report is generally well written and well argued.

60-69 (Competent, C)

The report demonstrates adequate comprehension of the topic. The report is on topic and is a reasonable summary of material covered in the course, but goes no further. Facts are stated accurately; the quality of writing is sufficiently intelligible with enough elaboration and enough connections made between ideas to permit a reader to understand the point of the report.

50-59 (Marginal, D)

The report shows less than adequate comprehension of the topic and of the material covered by the course. The report is a less than adequate summary of sources and/or is considerably off-topic. Facts are stated inaccurately or ambiguously; the writing style is difficult to follow; there is insufficient elaboration to permit reader's comprehension of relations among ideas; little judgment is shown in selecting detail for inclusion in the report.

Below 50 (Unacceptable, F)

The report demonstrates a failure to comprehend the topic. The material is disorganized and unintelligible. The report clearly does not meet the minimal requirements of the assignment.

Appendix B: Guidelines of Academic Appeals for FIMS Students

Grounds for Appeal:

The Faculty of Information and Media Studies does not view the appeals process as an opportunity for students to solicit a second opinion on a grade assigned to a particular piece of work. Appeals must pertain to the final grade in a course, and will only be entertained if sufficient grounds for appeal can be met, including: medical or compassionate circumstances, a defect in the evaluation process, bias, inaccuracy or unfairness.

Stages in the Appeals Process:

The first stage of the process is a discussion of the disputed grade with the appropriate Teaching Assistant (if applicable), and subsequently, the course Instructor. For grades assigned to individual assignments, essays, lab reports, projects and tests completed throughout the term, the student first must appeal to the Teaching Assistant or Instructor of the course, within three weeks of the date on which the Instructor or Teaching Assistant returned the assignments to the class. The Appeals Committee will not hear any further appeals about the final grade in any course unless this first step has been taken.

If completion of the first stage has not resolved the matter, the student may appeal the final grade in the course to the FIMS Appeals Committee. Appeals of final grades must be **within the time frame indicated in the Undergraduate Calendar.** It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the appeal is submitted within the deadline. The student shall submit a formal letter to the FIMS Appeals Committee outlining the grounds for the appeal, the remedy sought and relevant materials including the information about when and with whom (Teaching Assistant and/or Instructor) the student met, as described in Stage 1. If the appeal involves a request for work to be regraded, the original marked work and a clean copy (if possible) must be included. If the appeal is commenced once the deadline has passed, it will not be considered either by the Appeals Committee or by the Associate Dean.

The FIMS Appeals Committee has the discretion to determine whether the grounds for appeal have been met.

If the Committee deems that the reasons for the appeal are not legitimate, the Associate Dean will be informed. The appeal will be terminated and the student will be informed.

If the Committee decides that the grounds for appeal have been met, the following steps will be taken:

1. the course Instructor will be shown the appeal letter and offered an opportunity to make a written response;
2. if work is to be regraded, a reader will be appointed who is competent in the area in question and was not involved in the assignment of the original mark. The reader will consider the work in question and will arrive at an independent evaluation. If there is a large discrepancy between the original mark and the regraded mark, a second reader may be appointed by the Committee. **If the appointed reader(s) arrive at a grade within five marks of the original, the original grade will stand.**

The FIMS Appeals Committee will review the evidence and will make a recommendation on the case to the Associate Dean Undergraduate.

The Associate Dean Undergraduate will consider the recommendation from the Appeals Committee, and will make a decision. The student and the instructor will be notified promptly and in writing by the Associate Dean of the decision and of the change in grade, if any. Within the Faculty of Information and Media Studies, the Associate Dean's decision on the matter is final.

Further appeals are possible under certain circumstances to the Senate Review Board Academic (for Undergraduate students) or to the Faculty of Graduate Studies (for Graduate students) but the student should carefully consult the guidelines regarding such Appeals.