

SOCI 438 Issues in Contemporary Sociology
Course Title: Coming of Age in the Digital Age

Instructor: Tucker D. Farris
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Course Description:

This course will explore in-depth aspects by which intimate interpersonal relationships are shaped by current contemporary social factors that have emerged from the digital age and proliferation of social media as a primary means of social interaction. The class uses the concept of relationships/interactional ties to explore social and cultural shifts in states of being with the advent of the digital age and reliance on social media/digital forms of social interaction in terms of how identities and realities are constructed through these mediums. Specifically, we will explore the explosion of the digital world of interconnectivity sociohistorically from the early 1990s to the present day. We will walk through the early days of instant messaging and America Online to MySpace, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and beyond. The core focus will be on chronicling the means by which our ways of existing and interacting have shifted from the early days of internet life to the COVID-19 pandemic forcing *all* of life online in some fashion. Students may expect to employ critical discourse in a seminar-style course to plumb the depths of this expansive topic, with the hope of ascribing some meaning and understanding to the lightning fast changes in our social world as precipitated by social media. We will specifically use the concept of relationships and interconnectivity as a framework to explore many different aspects of the current social world from topics that may include: the digitization of sex and intimacy, identity formation in the digital world, concepts of the self in digital social spaces, social class/race/gender identity/sexuality in digital spheres, online activism and social justice, and political discourse.

Given that this course will be a seminar, there is variability in the topics we explore where students are encouraged to explore topics that are interesting to them in the context of the material.

Course Objectives:

Upon completing this course, students should be able to:

- Engage in high-level discourse on the topics pertinent to the digital age (high-level referring to this being a 400-level course).
- Critically reflect on their own positionality and experiences in the digital age and draw from these reflections to produce nuanced discussion on contemporary issues.
- Gain an understanding of digital communications/interactions in the construction of modern social reality
- Gain insights into the changes of modern relationship ties across digital spaces and across time as different digital 'eras' have passed.

- Operate both theoretically and sociologically in investigating modern social issues related to existing in a digital-dominated social reality.
- Synthesize ideas from required course readings into an operable framework to pursue meaning and depth of analysis in topical areas.

Course Pre-requisites:

None, but students are encouraged to draw on previous coursework to bring their individual knowledge to the table for discussion.

Topics May Include:

- Digitization of emotion
- Sex in the online sphere
- Changes in socioeconomic positionality as a result of digital evolution
- Formulation of self in the digital sphere
- Discussions on the development of identity and individuality in a digitally connected world
- Commodification of emotional expression in online spaces
- The industry of digital world construction (I.E. how digital social spaces are designed)
- COVID-19 and existing online
- The evolution of political discourse in online spaces (specifically looking at US political discourse during the 2016/2020 elections and COVID)
- Symbols and online communication (memes, etc.)
- Generational experiences with the emergence of the digital age (I.E. how Millennials/GenZ folks have experienced the rapid changes to social life in the past twenty years).
- The rise of “Influences”
- Other topics TBD/As They Emerge

Required Resources May Include:

- “Thumbelina: The Culture and Technology of Millennials” by Michel Serres (Available as an eBook and paperback for \$25.00 or used for less).
- Other Additional Resources to be provided on Brightspace that may include videos, news/popular articles, peer-reviewed sources, book chapters/excerpts, or other writings.

Mode of Delivery:

The course will meet in-person on Mondays and Thursdays from 11:30 AM to 12:50 PM in Clearihue D126.