COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is an advanced graduate course meant to explore emerging questions of sociality in cyberspace, and their implications for human life online and offline. To focus the course within the limits of the quarter system, readings and discussion will focus on (1) virtual worlds, online games, and social networking sites; (2) ethnographic approaches, including questions of method; and (3) theorizing indexical relationships between the virtual and actual. With my permission, your course research paper may address other substantive topics (e.g., mobile devices, websites and blogs) and other theoretical interests, so long as the paper engages in a substantial manner with course readings and discussion.

The course is meant to be focused on reading and discussion, rather than writing. There is what appears to be a heavy reading load, but I will provide guidance on how to improve your ability to engage productively with large amounts of reading and the amount of writing you must do is reduced—it will be okay, I promise! <NOTE: I will not allow any student to take an incomplete for this course under any circumstances.> The seminar discussions will follow three basic guidelines:

*Generosity.* With a ten-week course there simply is not time for substandard texts. All readings selected for the syllabus are insightful and theoretically innovative. Critiquing aspects of the readings is fine, but if you find yourself rejecting an argument in toto, this indicates your reading is insufficiently generous.
Provisionality. You are allowed (indeed, encouraged) to think out loud, say something and then take it back, and generally speak in a provisional manner, knowing that those around you will be patient, supportive, and slow to take offense.

Community. Some individuals are quite comfortable speaking at length: this is desirable, but I reserve the right to ask persons to wrap up their comments, or to solicit comments from persons who have not yet participated in any particular course meeting.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

(1) Seven two-page précises

The primary requirement of the course is that you do seven (7) précises. Since we have nine regular meetings (following the Week 1 introductory meeting), this means you can choose two weeks in which you do not have to do a précis. Each précis should take the form of critical questions, commentary and analysis about at least two of the readings for that week. They can link the readings to earlier readings from the course or readings from outside the course, but particularly the latter of these is discouraged due to limits of space. I discourage negative critiques; you should focus on generous engagement, linking the readings to our discussions.

Précises must be turned in within the first five (5) minutes of class in TRIPLICATE, with the two pages STAPLED together (not paper-clipped or folded). They can never be turned in late. You must be in attendance in class for any day in which you turn in a précis (someone else can not turn it in for you). If you leave class early on the day you turn in a précis, that précis will not be counted. Each précis counts for 10% of your overall grade, so the seven précises together constitute 70% over the overall grade. Please note that falling even one précis short will thus severely impact your grade. If you do eight or nine précises (that is, the possible one or two in addition to the seven required précises, each additional précis will count as 4% extra credit toward your final grade, for a maximum of 8% extra credit, depending on the grade for those extra précises).

(2) The final paper

Due to the emphasis on reading and précises, the final paper is relatively short. It should be 4,000–5,000 words long (all inclusive of endnotes and references), and can be on any topic that relates to the course, so long as you obtain my approval. You may also apply the course readings and discussion to your own research projects. The final paper will constitute 30% of the overall grade. The course grade will thus be calculated as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Seven (7) précises times ten points per précis} & = 70 \text{ points} \\
\text{Final paper} & = 30 \text{ points} \\
\text{Total} & = 100 \text{ points}
\end{align*}
\]
You will then be assigned a letter grade as follows: A+ 96.7-100; A 93.4-96.6; A- 90-93.3; B+ 86.7-89.9; B 83.4-86.6; B- 80-83.3; C+ 76.7-79.9; C 73.4-76.6; C- 70-73.3; D 65-69.9; F 64.9 and below.

**COURSE TEXTS**

The following ten books (listed in the order we will read them) are available at the bookstore, over the Internet, or on reserve (save for the two that as noted will be provided directly). I will explain how to access the other readings during the first course meeting.


COURSE SCHEDULE

week 1. introduction

week 2.

Tom Standage, The Victorian Internet.

William Gibson, Neuromancer.


week 3.

Geoff Ryman, Air.


week 4.


week 5.

枵 Tom Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life*.


week 6.

枵 Celia Pearce, with Artemesia, *Communities of Play*.


week 7.

枵 Bonnie Nardi, *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*.


week 8.


- Mimi Ito et al, Living and Learning with New Media: Summary of Findings from the Digital Youth Project, 2008.

week 9.

- Ilana Gershon, *The Breakup 2.0*.


week 10.

- Daniel Miller, *Tales from Facebook*.


TAKE-HOME FINAL due emailed to tboellst@uci.edu BY 5pm on Friday, June 10.