

Professor Bonnie “Bo” Ruberg - bruberg@uci.edu

Office hours: Mondays 2:00 - 4:00 pm PST (on Zoom; schedule via [Calendly](#))

TAS: Kelly Donahey, Shiqi Lin, Molly Thrailkill, Pragya Trivedi, Scott Volz, Siavash Yansori

## **SYLLABUS: Film & Media Studies 85C “Cultural Perspectives on Digital Media”**

**\*Update\*** See text throughout highlighted in yellow that reflects changes to the syllabus made to accommodate students in the final weeks of the quarter. This is an immensely challenging and painful time and we (your professor and TAs) are here to help you make it through to the end of the class.

### **Course Description**

This course offers an introduction to the study of digital media and video games from a humanistic perspective. Our goal will be to understand the cultural and theoretical implications of new media, computational technologies, and forms of digitally-mediated play. Objects of study will include: online cultures and fandoms, video games and gaming cultures, social media platforms, interactive storytelling, live streaming, web series, algorithms and data, histories and counter-histories of computing, and more. This course will be taught with a strong emphasis on issues of culture, identity, and power, pairing digital media with readings on queer theory, gender studies and feminism, critical race studies, postcolonialism, indigeneity, and disability studies.

### **Online Learning in a Time of Crisis**

While we all strive for a positive learning experience, this is a moment of global crisis. Both teachers and students are very aware that the transition to online learning has happened with very little notice. This course was not originally designed to be taught or taken remotely. It has been quickly adapted for an online format, and this will surely pose unforeseen challenges. The professor, TAs, and students should all work together to set reasonable expectations for what we can accomplish in the midst of these turbulent times. Many students are currently in precarious positions. What is most important is that you are safe and healthy. Whenever possible, let’s be patient, understanding, and flexible with one another.

### **Course Structure**

*Weekly learning “bundles”:* Each Monday (roughly afternoon PST), a new “bundle” of materials will be made available on Canvas. It will include: Instructions about this week’s tasks, an intro video from the professor, an informal lecture video from the professor, a “guest lecture” video from another scholar, a set of readings, and a screening video.

*Written reflections and discussion:* In place of discussion sections, students will write weekly reflections (due Saturdays by 11:59 pm; been 500 and 700 words). These will be shared with other students in their section; students will comment on peers’ reflections (due Mondays by 2:00 pm). Prompts for the week’s reflections will be given by the professor as part of each week’s learning bundle.

*Final “take-home” exam:* The final will be an open-book, untimed take-home exam consisting of short essay questions related to themes of the course. Students will have approximately 4 days to complete it.

← Update: The final exam has been made optional. Please see the June 2 Canvas announcement for details.

*Note:* There are no in-person meetings for this course. There are also no synchronous meetings; this means that students do not need to watch lectures or join conversations live at specific times. There is no form of attendance-taking for this course.

### **Assignments, Expectations, & Grades**

*Lectures, readings, and screenings* (10%): Students are expected to watch all the lectures and screenings and complete all the readings included in each weekly learning bundle. Engaging with these materials will be crucial for the quality of your learning and for doing strong work. The grade students receive for engaging with these materials will be based on the honor system; unless the instructors have reason to believe you have not reviewed these materials, you will receive the full 10%.

*Reflections and comments* (40% for reflections, 20% for comments): Students are expected to write a weekly reflection on the week's materials, due each Saturday by 11:59 pm PST, of roughly 500 - 700 words in response to prompts given by the professor. Students are also expected to respond to one of their peers' reflections each week, to be completed by 2:00 pm on Mondays.

*Final* (30%): Students are expected to complete a take-home, untimed, open-book exam consisting of multiple short-essay answer questions. Students will have approximately 4 days to complete the exam. ← Update: The final exam has been made optional. Students who do not choose to complete the final will have their quarter grade calculated based on the assignments from weeks 1 - 10. Please see the June 2 Canvas announcement for details.

*Note:* Grading rubrics will be provided for the final exam. All other assignments will be graded for effort and completion. Students who consistently complete their work can expect to receive a good grade.

*Extra credit:* In approximately week 3, students will be provided with a prompt for an optional extra credit assignment (details to follow), which they can complete any time between week 3 and week 9. This assignment will be graded for effort and completion and can boost a student's quarter grade up to 4%.

### **Instructions for Submitting Reflections**

Instructions for how to submit reflections and peer comments are different for each "discussion" section. Please look for specific instructions from the TA who runs your section. If you have any questions about submitting your reflections or peer comments, please contact your TA directly.

- If you are in a discussion section with TA Kelly Donahey, please [this link](#) to submit your reflections.
- If you are in a discussion section with TA Molly Thraikill, please use [this link](#) to submit your reflections.
- For all other TAs, please check your messages (including your spam filters) for instructions on how to submit your reflections.

### **Contacting the Instructors**

If you have a question, first double check that the answer is not on the syllabus. Your main point of contact is “your” TA - the TA who leads the discussion section group you are enrolled in. This is the person you should email with questions or comments. If you would like to schedule an office hours appointment (2:00 to 4:00 pm on Mondays) with the professor, for example because you are interested in pursuing a career in academia or you have a question you feel uncomfortable asking your TA, you can use the Calendly link above. Please follow these [email etiquette guidelines](#) when contacting all instructors. Kindly remember that there are 350 students in the course, so the professor may not be available to answer all individual emails.

TA email addresses:

Siavash Yansori - [syansori@uci.edu](mailto:syansori@uci.edu)

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### **Missed Deadlines & Extensions**

Staying on top of the course material and turning in assignments on time is an important part of staying on track in an online course. As a general rule, large assignments (like the final) drop one grade level (10%) per day that they are late; they cannot be more than 3 days late. Smaller assignments, like weekly reflections, can be turned in up to 2 days late, but will receive partial credit. ← Update: Week 9 and week 10 assignments can now be submitted late (up to June 12) with no penalty. You may request an extension for an assignment from your TA at any time. Please see the June 2 Canvas announcement for details.

With that said, it is understandable that students may be facing challenging or unforeseen circumstances that disrupt their schedule. If you are sick or otherwise unable to make a deadline, please contact the TA who runs your section as soon as possible. Your TA will work with you to accommodate your needs.

### **Materials & Technology Requirements**

There are no books or other pieces of media to purchase for this course. All materials will be made available online. Because some students may not have reliable access to computers and the internet during the current health crisis, the course has been designed to use only basic online functions. No specific software or hardware is required.

### **Plagiarism**

UC Irvine’s code of conduct states that students who plagiarize may face a variety of consequences, ranging from a “0” on an assignment or an “F” for the course to disciplinary action at the university level. Plagiarism is presenting somebody else’s words, work, or ideas as if they are your own. The writing that you do in this course must be 100% your own. It is alright to reference other people or quote them, but you must cite them. Be especially careful with language from “common knowledge” sources, such as Wikipedia. Copying from sources like Wikipedia is still plagiarism. If you are concerned that you may accidentally plagiarize, seek out an online university guide (there are many!) for avoiding plagiarism.

## **SCHEDULE**

## **Week ONE (3/30 - 4/5) - Introduction to Studying Digital Media**

### Readings:

- Julia Griffey (2020), "What Is Interactive Digital Media?" in *Introduction to Interactive Digital Media*
- Langdon Winner (1980), "Do Artifacts Have Politics?"

Guest lecture: Sasha Costanza-Chock (2019), "[Design Justice](#)" (video)

Screening: [Hackers](#) (1995) - ~~full movie available at YouTube link~~ ← update: unfortunately the YouTube link is down; here are a few others to try ([here](#) and [here](#)); apologies for the inconvenience!

**Due this week:** Reflection 1 + peer response

## **Week TWO (4/6 - 4/12) - Histories and Counter-Histories of Computing**

### Readings:

- Julia Griffey (2020), "History of Interactive Digital Media," in *Introduction to Interactive Digital Media*
- "[A Queer History of Computing \(Part 1\)](#)" (2013), Jacob Gaboury ← note: you only need to read part 1 (the part on Turing, not the later parts on other figures)

Guest lecture: Mar Hicks (2017), "[Programmed Inequality](#)"

Screening: [The Imitation Game](#) (2014) - link requires UCI VPN proxy sign-in ([information here](#))

**Due this week:** Reflection 2 + peer response

## **Week THREE (4/13 - 4/19) - New Media Art and Interactive Storytelling**

### Readings:

- Tim Murray (2018), "New Media Arts: Creativity on the Way to the Archives," in *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and the Digital Humanities*
- Anastasia Salter (2018), "Building Interactive Stories," in *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and the Digital Humanities*

Guest lecture: Sam Barlow (2016), "['Her Story': Telling a Story Using the Player's Imagination](#)"; for context, also watch "[How 'Her Story' Works](#)" (2015)

Screening: [Downtown Browns](#) (2017) - play through all 3 interactive episodes (scroll down past the trailer for the episodes; no download required)

**Due this week:** Reflection 3 + peer response

## **Week FOUR (4/20 - 4/26) - Video games**

### Readings:

- Mary Flanagan (2018), "Critical Play and Responsible Design," in *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and the Digital Humanities*

- Selections from *How to Play Video Games* (Shira Chess, “Feminism”; Adrienne Shaw, “LGBTQ Representation”; TreaAndrea Russworm, “Race”; Souvik Mukherjee, “Postcolonialism”) ← *pick 2 of these 4*; don’t worry, they’re all short!

Guest lecture: Bonnie Ruberg (2019), [“Video Games Have Always Been Queer”](#)

Screening: Explore the video game streams on [Twitch.tv](#); watch gameplay of at least 2 games for a total of at least 1 hour. If you’re not sure where to start, try Twitch’s [Browse page](#), which lists streams by game.

**Due this week:** Reflection 4 + peer response

### **Week FIVE (4/27 - 5/3) - Live Streaming**

Readings:

- Simon Park (2015), [“Play It Your Way: How Twitch Lets Disabled Gamers Earn a Living Online”](#)
- Jessica Conditt (2018), [“Striving to Be Seen: Black Girl Gamers on Twitch”](#)
- Ed Nightingale (2019), [“Meet the Drag Troupe Changing the Face of Online Gaming”](#)

Guest lecture: TL Taylor (2019), [“Play as Transformative Work”](#)

Screening: [We Live in Public](#) (2009) - video on Google Drive; to access, sign in to Google via UCI email

**Due this week:** Reflection 5 + peer response

### **Week SIX (5/4 - 5/10) - Surveillance**

Readings:

- Kelly Gates (2017), “Surveillance,” in *Keywords for Media Studies*
- Anna Lauren Hoffman (2019), [“The Privacy Risks of Unchecked Facial-Recognition Technology”](#)
- Madeline St. Amour (2020), [“Privacy and the Online Pivot”](#)

Guest lecture: [“Shoshana Zuboff on Surveillance Capitalism”](#) (2019)

Screening: [Screening Surveillance](#) - watch all 3 online episodes (10-15 minutes each)

- [“Blaxites”](#)
- [“A Model Employee”](#)
- [“Frames”](#) (content warning: imagery suggestive of self harm)

**Due this week:** Reflection 6 + peer response

### **Week SEVEN (5/11 - 5/17) - Social media and “connection”**

Readings:

- Sherry Turkle (2011), “Growing Up Tethered,” from *Alone Together*
- danah boyd (2014), “Introduction” to *It’s Complicated*

Guest lecture: no guest lecture this week; there is a second screening in place of a guest lecture

Screening 1: [Catfish](#) (2010) - video on Google Drive; to access, sign in to Google via UCI email

Screening 2: "[San Junipero](#)" (2016), season 3, episode 4 of *Black Mirror* - video on Google Drive; to access, sign in to Google via UCI email

**Due this week:** Reflection 7 + peer response

### **Week EIGHT (5/18 - 5/24) - Data & Algorithms**

Readings:

- Melissa Gregg and Dawn Nafus (2017), "Data," in *Keywords for Media Studies*
- Tarleton Gillespie (2014), "The Relevance of Algorithms"

Guest lecture 1: Safiya Noble (2018), "[Algorithms of Oppression](#)"

Guest lecture 2: Data2X (2020), "[Talking Data Feminism with Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein](#)"

Screening: no screening this week; there is a second guest lecture in place of a screening

**Due this week:** Reflection 8 + peer response

### **Week NINE (5/25 - 5/31) - Online fandom**

Readings:

- Henry Jenkins (2017), "Fan," from *Keywords for Media Studies*
- Elizabeth Ellcessor (2017), "Accessing Fan Cultures: Disability, Digital Media, and Dreamwidth," from *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*

Guest lecture: Nancy Baym (2018), "[Music Fandom and the Shaping of Online Cultures](#)" (podcast)

Screening: [Trekkiies](#) (1997) - video on Google Drive; to access, sign in to Google via UCI email

**Due this week:** Reflection 9 + peer response ← Update: Week 9 materials received late, up until June 12, will not lose points for lateness. Please see the June 2 Canvas announcement for details.

### **Week TEN (6/1 - 6/7) - Imagining Digital Futures**

Readings: no readings this week - just screenings and guest lectures

Guest lecture #1: Joanna Radin, "[Digital Dystopias: How Michael Crichton Taught Me to Start Worrying and Fear the Future](#)" (2017) ← watch the linked video from **2:02:50 - 2:23:40** (i.e. scrub to the start of the talk roughly 2 hours into the video; the talk is approximately 21 minutes long)

Guest lecture #2: Lindsay Ellis and Princess Weekes, "[Afrofuturism: From Books to Blockbusters](#)" (2020)

Screening #1: [Westworld](#) (1973) - video on Google Drive; to access, sign in to Google via UCI email

Screening #2: Janelle Monáe's [Dirty Computer](#) (2018) - full feature available at Vimeo link. **Note:** Be sure to watch past the credits all the way to the end of the video file. **Content warning:** Some sexual imagery and language.

**Due this week:** Reflection 10 is *optional extra credit* (no peer response) ← Update: Week 10 materials received late, up until June 12, will not lose points for lateness. Please see the June 2 Canvas announcement for details.

**Final exam due Wednesday, June 10 at 11:59 pm** ← Update: The final exam has been made optional. Please see the June 2 Canvas announcement for details.