SC317 Social Media and Social Research
T/Th 4:30-5:45
Gasson 207
Instructor: Margaret Willis
Email: margaret.willis@bc.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-3 in McGuinn 410B, and by appointment

Course Description

Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and search engines like Google, have become indispensable in our daily lives. Much of what we do on these sites generates large amounts of data: what we search for, what we “like,” whom we “follow.” Marketers, journalists, and researchers analyze these data for many different purposes and interests. In this course, we will use a sociological perspective to examine what these new forms of data are, how they are produced through our actions online, and how these data are then used, sometimes in questionable ways. Prerequisites: some familiarity with the use of data in social inquiry, as introduced in SC200 (Statistics) and SC210 (Research Methods).

Course Objectives

This course will help you to:
- Examine the social processes of data production and interpretation, including race, class, and gender dynamics
- Understand what kind of data are generated when we use social media sites or Google
- Strengthen your skills for critically evaluating social research
- Sharpen and extend skills introduced in SC200 and SC210
- Apply sociological analysis to an emergent and pervasive social phenomenon that you are likely to encounter in your career and/or in your everyday life
- Build research, writing, and data analysis skills through an extended, hands-on research project

Required Texts

All other readings available on Blackboard

Course Requirements

30 points Six response papers/participation
30 points Midterm (in-class, short essay responses)
15 points Research project proposal (4-5 pages)
5 points Brief in-class presentation of research findings
20 points Final research project (8-10 pages, including tables/graphs)
1. **Six Response Papers & Participation** (30 points)—There will be eight response paper options. You need to complete and submit six response papers over the course of the semester. Each response that you complete will be worth up to five points. Prompts for each response paper will be on Blackboard in the “Assignments” section. For each response paper, answer all of the questions fully but concisely. Your responses should be approximately 500 words. When citing ideas from our class materials, use in text, parenthetical citations like this: (Author last name, year). Include page numbers for any “direct quotes” (Author, 2013, p. 3). Post your responses on Blackboard by Thursday at 4:30PM to receive credit for that week; late responses will not be accepted.

**Participation** in class and good attendance is expected. You get three “free” absences for illnesses, etc. For every absence beyond those three you will lose one point (that translates to one point off your final grade). Please contact me about extenuating circumstances (substantial illnesses with a note from a doctor, family emergencies) as soon as possible.

2. **Midterm** (30 points)—The in-class midterm is scheduled for **February 27th**. The format will include short essay responses about material covered in the first portion of the course.

3. **Research Proposal** (15 points)—A detailed (4-5 page) proposal for your final research proposal will be due on Sunday **April 6th** at midnight on Blackboard. Guidelines for the final project and the research proposal will be distributed and discussed in class.

4. **Brief Presentation** (5 points)—You will share a very brief presentation of your final research project during the final week of class, **April 29th** or **May 1st**.

5. **Final Research Project** (20 points)—Final research project reports (8-10 pages, including tables/graphs) will be due electronically by Tuesday, **May 6th**, by 6PM. This project will require you to articulate a research question and use one of the publicly available interfaces to work with Google or Twitter data.

**Grade Scale**

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-86</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>74-76</td>
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<td>C-</td>
<td>70-73</td>
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<td>D+</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>60-63</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;60</td>
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Course Policies

Technology: You are welcome to use laptops or tablets for only three purposes in class: taking notes, looking at an electronic copy of a course reading, or following along in class exercises. No email or other distractions. Please silence and store all cell phones.

Class etiquette: Arrive on time. Come with a paper or electronic copy of all of the day's readings. Do all required readings before class and come prepared to discuss. No food, but drinks are fine.

Late work: Late response papers will not be accepted. In the event of extenuating circumstances (substantial illness, family emergency), you must arrange any extensions for other assignments with me as soon as possible. If no arrangement has been made, your grade for the assignment will decrease by one point for each day it is late.

Academic integrity: I expect that all work that you submit will be your own work. You must cite any published work that you use in your writing. Plagiarism will lead to a failure for the assignment. Please see me with any questions regarding citations or collaborations, and also familiarize yourself with Boston College’s academic integrity policy: [www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity](http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity).

Accommodations: If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, dugganka@bc.edu, 617-552-8093, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD, or Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, paulette.durrett@bc.edu, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities, including temporary disabilities. Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.

Schedule of Topics and Assignments

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<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1: Introduction—The rise of Big Data</td>
<td>1/14</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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**Response 1** due on Blackboard by class time |
1/30 | 1. boyd. 2011. Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites. *Gender, Race, and Class in Media*.  
**Response 2** due on Blackboard by class time |
| --- | --- | --- |
**Response 3** due on Blackboard by class time |
3. Pew Research Reports:  
2013: Internet Use in the U.S.  
2012: Search Engine Use in the U.S.  
2013: Social Network/Social Media Use in the U.S.  
**Response 4** due on Blackboard by class time |
**Response 5** due on Blackboard by class time |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/27</td>
<td>In-class Midterm</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
<td>3/4</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
<td>3/6</td>
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| Week 8: Data acquisition, data mining | 3/11 | **SKIM** (you won’t be responsible for the technical details):  
**Response 6** due on Blackboard by class time |
**Response 7** due on Blackboard by class time |
| Week 11: LAB—using data interfaces  | 4/1 | *Bring laptop OR meet in computer lab: TBA*  
*Will work with Google tools in class* |
|       | 4/3 | *Bring laptop OR meet in computer lab: TBA*  
*Will work with Twitter tools in Excel in class*  
**Research Proposal DUE** Sunday 4/6 by Midnight, Blackboard |
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Response 8</strong> due on Blackboard by class time</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/17</td>
<td><strong>EASTER BREAK</strong></td>
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<td>4/15</td>
<td><strong>Week 14: Labor and Case Study: Medicine</strong></td>
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<td>4/22</td>
<td><strong>Bring laptop OR meet in computer lab: TBA</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Come prepared to work on your data analysis; in-class trouble shooting</strong></td>
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<td>4/24</td>
<td><strong>Week 15: Presentations</strong></td>
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<td>1. In-class presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/1</td>
<td><strong>In-class presentations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>5/6</td>
<td><strong>FINAL DUE electronically by 6PM</strong></td>
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**ADVANCED RESOURCES** about social media data mining and data science, for the curious:

**Online:**
- UCLA Intro to Digital Humanities: [http://dh101.humanities.ucla.edu/](http://dh101.humanities.ucla.edu/)
- Twitter’s Official “Twitter University”: [http://www.youtube.com/twitteruniversity](http://www.youtube.com/twitteruniversity)

**Books:**