

Unlearning the Internet

Digital Humanities 150 | Spring 2019 | UVic English | Jentery Sayers | jentery@uvic.ca
Office hours: Monday, 12-2pm in CLE D334 | Ria Karve, Ian Waddell + Stefan Higgins (TAs)

What's this course about?

The internet runs on habits. This course prompts us to change them from the inside. We will study ignored histories of digital stuff, examine dominant beliefs about tech and culture, and compose our own content, from audio and images to prototypes and websites, all with the goal of making critical media, with the past in mind, in the present moment.

What will we do in class?

We'll usually have lecture and group discussion on Monday and then a workshop and more discussion on Thursday. The lectures will be about case studies pertinent to contemporary digital culture. The workshops will be about digital research techniques.

What will we do between classes?

I'll ask you to read, watch, and/or listen to a short piece or two each week. I may also ask you to do something to prep for a workshop. You'll keep a log, too (see below).

Is there a textbook?

Nope. I'll point to all materials via the course website, which will be ready later this week :)

What are the assignments?

I'm asking you to keep a "log": a website you'll create and contribute to each week, based on prompts I'll provide in writing. It will be graded three times: mid-term (25%), end of term (25%), and during the exam period (25%). For your final project (25%), you'll make a simple "zine" about a current issue (related to the course theme) you consider important. There is no midterm or final exam, and you will not write a research paper.

Why are we making a zine?

It's an informative, low-tech way to share information with people you care about. It's also pretty fun, and zines have historically been important for cultural approaches to tech.

Wait, is this a technical course?

The only technical competencies I assume are that you know how to send an email and also check the course website. I will approach all workshops with only these assumptions.

Why unlearn the internet?

To unlearn is to identify habits and constraints, rethink them, and experiment with alternatives. Unlearning requires being open about what you don't know and what you take for granted. The internet is an infrastructure that shapes how a lot of knowledge is produced these days. It's at once a force and a relation that easily becomes "common sense" or "second nature." It's content, too: rather than only using it, you can study it, the material it circulates, and the patterns it enables. You can contribute to it as well, and this course is in part about contributing meaningful or compelling content.

What's digital humanities?

It's a collection of methods and strategies for conducting humanities research with and through digital technologies. Some consider it to be a field, but don't worry about that.

How can I succeed in this course?

Check the course website each week. Take notes. Come to class. Ask questions. Annotate as you engage. Participate in workshops. Chat with Ria, Ian, Stefan, and me about the course material. Respond directly to the prompts I provide. Revise and polish the log before you submit it. Find topics that interest you and then pursue them, especially for your zine.

What should I do for the next class meeting?

Please read and annotate this article by Marie Hicks: <https://goo.gl/rmy5x2>.

So what's the schedule?

Here you go! Note that the themes for each week engage popular assumptions or beliefs people tend to have about tech and culture. We'll aim to unlearn them. (Modest, right?) Whenever possible, I'll publish online my notes and slides.

- Week 1 (Jan 10): The Myth of Lone Male Inventors
- Week 2 (Jan 14 + 17): The Desire for Immediate Interfaces
- Week 3 (Jan 21 + 24): The Investment in Neutral Instruments
- Week 4 (Jan 28 + 31): The Rhetoric of Raw Data
- Week 5 (Feb 4 + 7): The Appeal to Interactivity
- Week 6 (Feb 11 + 14): Writing and Publishing Workshop
- Week 7 (Feb 18 + 21): Reading Break
- Week 8 (Feb 25 + 28): The Assertion of Autonomous Algorithms
- Week 9 (March 4 + 7): The Belief in Sourcery
- Week 10 (March 11 + 14): The Ideology of Landless Territory
- Week 11 (March 18 + 21): The Fallacy of Extended Man
- Week 12 (March 25 + 28): The Futures of Digital Labour
- Week 13 (April 1 + 4): Zine Fair