Connection & Consciousness in the Digital Age

PSYCH 222 | University of Washington | Early Fall Start 2018

This course will explore the ways technology is shaping how we know ourselves, how we perceive others, and how we communicate and interact. For example: Is social media making us more connected or more isolated? What makes us human? Could a machine think and feel? In relying on technology, are we becoming less human? And what role will technology play in our future? Through readings, films, discussions, and social experiments, we will explore questions about consciousness and humanity as they relate to our relationship with technology.

ESSENTIAL INFO

Professor: Tabitha Kirkland (tabithak@uw.edu)

Class meetings: Tues-Fri 9:30-11:50 (8/21-9/14)

Office hours: Tue & Thu 12-1, Guthrie 133

> *Office hours are a specific time set aside to meet with students about the course. No appointment or advance notice is needed; I see students on a drop-in basis during this time. If you cannot make it to office hours but need to meet in person, please email me.*

Social hours: Wed & Fri 12-1, The HUB Starbucks

> *Social hours are an open gathering time to chat about the course material, psychology, college life, Seattle, etc. You are encouraged to use this time to chat with one another. I will not necessarily attend every social hour. Also, due to the open nature of this format, I don't discuss confidential personal issues with individual students during this time.*

Course website: Canvas (http://canvas.uw.edu). Canvas will be used for downloading materials, submitting assignments, etc. Plan to check it regularly. Our course home page can be accessed on the main dashboard or from the *Courses* link on the left menu.

Course materials: You will interact with a variety of materials in this course. Expect to read, listen, watch, or otherwise interact with material to prepare for class every day. Materials are from popular sources such as news articles, popular science books, podcasts, TED talks, etc. All materials are posted on Canvas.

LEARNING GOALS

1. Understanding and evaluation of one's personal relationship with technology, including some of the costs and benefits

2. Ability to describe factors that influence perceptions of "humanness" in both people and machines

3. College-level research and writing skills

4. Ability to evaluate data and think critically

5. Interpersonal skills, including articulating one's arguments and demonstrating respect and appreciation for diverse perspectives

EXPECTATIONS

My role as teacher

I am here to guide you in exploring this fascinating material. I will do my best to make class time interesting, engaging, and enjoyable for everyone. I will use on a variety of methods to promote learning, including videos, discussions, and activities. I will create and enforce a learning atmosphere that is safe, comfortable, and respectful for everyone. I will communicate my expectations clearly and hold all learners to equitable standards. I will welcome questions, comments, and suggestions, and I will adapt to individual needs whenever possible. I may modify this syllabus as needed to accommodate your learning. I am here to guide you in exploring this fascinating material – please see me as a resource!

Your role as learner

Students learn best when they are actively engaged and involved in the learning process. This is an active and interactive course in which you will often learn by discussing and/or doing. You are expected to observe the world, read, discuss, and participate. This means that you read the book before class, think about what you read, and come prepared to discuss the ideas in class. I think of our classroom as a *collaborative learning community* wherein we all teach and learn from each other. Every time you make a comment or ask a question, you teach something to the rest of us. Challenge assumptions: ask "why?" or "how do we know?" Come to office hours and debate ideas with me. Consider the implications and applications of course material. Share the ideas you learn, or the thoughts they inspire, with other people. Get to know your classmates, and discuss the ideas in this class with them over coffee. Write down your thoughts privately, and reflect on them later. Thinking deeply about the course material will be worth your time (really!). I challenge you to abandon the traditional passive student role and to get involved with teaching and learning – I think you'll enjoy it.

Note. This is a fast-paced class in which you will be given a good deal of independence. Consequently, you will need to be responsible for managing your time appropriately, and to contact me in a timely manner if any circumstances arise that interfere with your ability to participate fully in class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Assignment	Points	%
1. Discussion Questions	50	11
2. Quizzes	150	34
3. Assignments	100	23
4. Unessay Project	100	23
5. Participation	40	9
Total Points	**440**	**100**

1. Discussion Questions (50 pts)

Before class on each day for which you have assigned reading, please submit on Canvas one discussion question related to each of that day's readings. Discussion questions should be thoughtful, open-ended, and involve critical thinking rather than summarizing content. Effective discussion questions might pose intriguing moral dilemmas or raise big philosophical questions, link together multiple readings, propose future research directions, and so forth. Questions should clearly relate to the reading on which they are based.

Types of effective questions include:

- **Analysis:** questions beginning with "Why…" "How would you explain…" "What is the importance of…" "What is the meaning of"
- **Compare and contrast:** "What is the difference between…" "What is the similarity between…"
- **Cause and effect:** "What are the causes/results of…" "What connection is there between…"
- **Clarification:** "What is meant by…" "Explain how…"

Types of questions to avoid include:

- **Yes/no:** produces little discussion
- **Elliptical:** questions that are vague, in which it is unclear what is being asked
- **Leading:** questions that convey the expected answer
- **Slanted:** closes down students who do not agree with the implied assumption

Each day of questions will be graded as full credit (5 pts), partial credit (2 pts), or no credit (0 pts). You must submit effective questions for *all* readings for that day to receive full credit. You will receive the highest 10 scores out of the 12 days' questions you submit, beginning on Day 2. Students who are unable to attend class on the day the question is due may still receive credit for submitting their question online by class time. Questions submitted up to one day late may receive partial credit. Questions more than one day late are not accepted.

2. Quizzes (150 pts)

Three quizzes covering all aspects of class (lecture, discussion, reading, videos, podcasts, etc.) will be due online at the start of each week, beginning in week 2. Each quiz is worth 50 points, untimed, and covers the preceding week of material.

In the "real world," problem-solving at work involves taking one's time, researching, thinking deeply, and discussing problems with colleagues. So you are encouraged to refer to your notes and class materials throughout the quiz. You can also collaborate with classmates if needed.

Also in the real world, people who submit work late will quickly find themselves out of a job. Your first late quiz will incur a 20% deduction per day. Second and third late quizzes are not accepted.

3. Assignments (100 pts)

Throughout the course, you will be asked to complete a few short activities outside of class and bring evidence of having completed these activities to class. Full participation in these assignments is essential to your getting the most out of class that day. Examples of assignments include:

- Document and analyze the types of things other people post on social media
- Observe and analyze your own personal use of social media and other forms of technology
- Design a survey about people's use of technology, distribute it to your social networks, and analyze the results
- Interview friends and family members about their relationship with technology

All activities may be submitted late with a 20% deduction per day.

4. Unessay Project (100 pts)

Throughout the quarter, you will develop an unessay project. The **unessay** works by throwing out all the rules you have learned about essay writing in the course of your education to date and asks you to focus instead solely on your intellectual interests and passions. In an unessay, you choose your own topic, present it any way you please (*does not need to be written*), and are evaluated on how compelling and effective you are. Here are the guidelines:

1. **You choose your own topic**

The unessay allows you to write about anything you want provided you are able to associate your topic with the subject matter of the course. You can take any approach; you can use as few or as many resources as you wish; you can even cite Wikipedia. The only requirements are that your treatment of the topic be *compelling*: that is to say presented in a way that leaves the reader thinking that you are being accurate, interesting, and as complete and/or convincing as your subject allows.

2. **You can present it any way you please**

There are also no formal requirements. Your unessay can be five paragraphs or twenty-six. If you decide you need to cite something, you can do that any way you want. If you want to use lists, use lists. If you want to write in the first person, write in the first person. Use slang. Or don't. Write in sentence fragments if you think that would be effective. Write a brochure or design a poster if you prefer. And your unessay certainly doesn't have to be written. You can create a video, diorama, podcast, slam poetry, song, board game... The possibilities are literally endless. In other words, in an unessay you have *complete freedom of form*: you can use whatever style of writing, presentation, citation, or media you want. What is important is that the format and presentation you do use helps rather than hinders your explanation of the topic.

3. **Be evaluated on how compelling and effective you are**

If unessays can be about anything and there are no restrictions on format and presentation, how are they graded? The main criterion is how well it all fits together. That is to say, how *compelling* and *effective* your work is.

An unessay is *compelling* when it shows some combination of the following attributes:

- it is as interesting as its topic and approach allows

- it is as complete as its topic and approach allows (it doesn't leave the audience thinking that important points are being skipped over or ignored)

- it is truthful (any questions, evidence, conclusions, or arguments you raise are honestly and accurately presented)

An unessay is *effective* when it shows some combination of the following attributes:

- it is readable/watchable/listenable (the production values are appropriately high and the audience is not distracted by avoidable lapses in presentation)

- it is appropriate (it uses a format and medium that suits its topic and approach)

- it is attractive (it is presented in a way that leads the audience to trust the author and his or her arguments, examples, and conclusions)

Students generally work individually, though I am open to collaborative proposals. I am happy to discuss your ideas for the project and show you examples during office hours.

The project should be submitted on the last day of class. You may submit it up to three days late with a 20% deduction per day. More details on the unessay project are on Canvas.

5. Participation (40 pts)

Participation will include seminars, workshops, class discussions, guest speaker presentations, film sessions, and other in-class activities. Participation is not the same thing as attendance – just being physically present in class is not the same as actively participating. Participation is worth 10 pts per week. Students who are absent from class may complete the assigned participation activity or its equivalent at a mutually agreed-upon alternative time for credit. You must notify me of your wish to make up the participation activity either before your absence or no more than two days afterward, unless extreme extenuating circumstances are present.

GRADES

The UW uses a numerical grading system from 0.0-4.0 GPA. Final course grades will be assigned according to the following grading scale: 94%+ = 4.0. Each percentage below this drops 0.1 GPA point. For example, 85% = 3.1, 75% = 2.1, etc. Note: 0.7 is the lowest passing grade used at the UW. Any grade below that is a 0.0. You can check Canvas for your current course grade.

Incompletes: Only students with special circumstances beyond their control who have obtained permission are eligible for a grade of Incomplete. I will not give incompletes at the end of the quarter to escape a poor grade.

Personal responsibility: it is your responsibility to **earn** the grade you want, starting on the first day of class. I do not reward poor performance with extra credit, nor do I give special extra credit opportunities to individual students, so please don't ask.

COURSE POLICIES

Email Communication

Please use standard professional guidelines for all written communication, including using a formal greeting, writing in complete sentences, and signing your name. Please set the subject heading as the class name. I will respond to all messages within 24 hours on weekdays. Weekend responses may take longer; please plan accordingly.

Guidelines for Discussion

- When the class is engaged in lecture and whole-class discussion, please raise your hand to ask questions or otherwise contribute. Side comments and conversations are distracting. If you feel tempted to whisper comments to a classmate, either participate in the whole-class discussion instead or write your comments to share privately.
- If you contribute frequently, I may call on other people to get a variety of perspectives.
- In an academic setting, everyone has the right to express different views in a respectful atmosphere. Please be considerate of your classmates.

Technology in the Classroom

- Mobile phones should be *silenced* and put away before class. Unless we are actively engaged in a participation activity that requires it, **do not use your phone during class.** Limit the temptation to check your phone by keeping it in your bag.
- You may bring a laptop to class for specific computer-related activities. However, **you may not use a laptop to take notes during class.** Scientific research has shown that typing notes in class causes *worse* learning of the material compared to writing – and not just because of their (high) potential for distraction. People actually think about material less deeply when typing (we can do it much faster and more automatically than writing), therefore limiting the extent of learning.[1] However, you are welcome to use a tablet that lies flat on the desk.
- If you are learning English, you are welcome to use an electronic dictionary during class.

Punctuality

- Please be on time for class. Arriving late or leaving early breaks the flow of the class and can be a cause for distraction. If you *must* occasionally arrive late or leave early, please take a seat near the door.

---

[1] Mueller, P. A., & Oppenheimer, D. M. (2014). The pen is mightier than the keyboard: Advantages of longhand over laptop note taking. *Psychological Science, 25,* 1159-1168. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614524581

- Please wait until class ends to pack your things. I will always end class on time. Packing early invariably causes a "domino effect," which is distracting to everyone and may result in your missing important information.

Attendance

This is a fast-paced class that packs 10 weeks' worth of material into four. Try not to miss any classes. If you do, consult the schedule to see what topics were covered and get notes from a classmate. If you have questions concerning the material from the missed class that you are unable to answer yourself after reviewing a classmate's notes, please see me during office hours for clarification. You can contact me about making up participation activities before or up to two days after your absence.

RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS

Follow These Study Tips

- Highlighting is actually the *worst* way to study. It makes us feel productive while actually accomplishing very little in terms of deep thought. The best way to study is to **take notes on the reading** or other material as you engage with it, writing in your own words. Include personal reactions or responses in these notes (e.g., questions about the material, connections to other material from this or other courses, real-world examples, etc.) and test yourself frequently on what you have just read/consumed.
- Study in **frequent, short, focused sessions** (e.g., 15 minutes), with periodic breaks. Research shows that we learn best by absorbing information over time. This will also give you more opportunities to review difficult concepts. "Cramming," or attempting to study a lot of material in a single session, results in very weak learning and retention of the material. This strategy is a poor use of your valuable time.
- **Talk to people about what you learn** in class, and think about examples of the class material from your own life. Research shows that we learn best when we connect new ideas to the things we already know.
- I strongly encourage forming a **study group** with your classmates – you can help each other review material, quiz each other, and create accountability for staying on top of the work. Also, studying with other people is more fun than studying alone and will help you build community and social support as you begin college.
- Research shows that when we do more than one thing at a time, we're not actually doing them simultaneously. Instead, we're shifting our attention from one thing to another. During that shift, we lose focus, and it takes effort to refocus on the new task. In fact, some research shows that the more often we "multitask," the more distracted we are by irrelevant information, and the worse we are at concentrating. **Limit the temptation to multitask** in class and when studying by putting away any distracting materials.

Attend Office Hours

These hours (listed at the top of the syllabus) are a specific time set aside specifically to talk with students. I am *always* available during office hours – no appointment needed. Just stop by! Come to office hours with questions, comments, or topics for debate. I am also happy to talk about other psychology-related topics, such as getting into the psychology major, becoming involved in research, or applying to graduate school, during office hours or social hours. Please email me to set an appointment if those times don't fit your schedule.

Get Extra Help Studying

There are many resources on campus to help you improve your study skills, time management, reading speed, and content knowledge. For example, check out the Instructional Center for drop-in tutoring and workshops for several courses in psychology. More info.

Stay Healthy

The UW offers a wide array of services for staying physically and mentally healthy, from rec sports to meditation to counseling, crisis intervention, and support groups.

Access and Accommodations

Your experience in this class is important to me. If you have already established accommodations with Disability Resources for Students (DRS), please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course.

If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but are not limited to: mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924, uwdrs@uw.edu, or disability.uw.edu. DRS offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s) and DRS. It is the policy and practice of the University of Washington to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law.

COURSE SCHEDULE

All course materials listed should be completed before class. This schedule is subject to change.

Week	Day	Date	Topic	Course Materials [R] = reading, [V] = video, [P] = podcast	Assignments, Quizzes, etc.
1: Social Media	Tuesday	21-Aug-18	On being human	[R] Syllabus	**Assignments due August 22:** 1. Phone use observation. Observe frequency of phone usage in public places. 2. Bring personal artifact to class
	Wednesday	22-Aug-18	Our phones, ourselves	[R] "Your phone vs. your heart" (Barbara Fredrickson, *New York Times*)	
				[P] *Hidden Brain:* "Prisons of Our Own Making"	
	Thursday	23-Aug-18	Digital life vs. real life, part one	[R] "Hard questions: Is spending time on social media bad for us?" (David Ginsberg & Moira Burke, *Facebook)*	**Assignment due August 28:** Social media observation. Document the types of things people post on Instagram, Snapchat, etc.

Week	Day	Date	Topic	Course Materials [R] = reading, [V] = video, [P] = podcast	Assignments, Quizzes, etc.
				[P] *Hidden Brain:* "Schadenfacebook"	
	Friday	24-Aug-18	Digital life vs. real life, part two	[P] *Hidden Brain:* "I, Robot"	
				[V] *TED Talk:* Sherry Turkle, "Connected, but Alone?"	
2: Becoming Less Human	Tuesday	28-Aug-18	Connection and isolation	[R] "Stop Googling. Let's talk." (Sherry Turkle, *New York Times*)	**Quiz 1** (due today by class time)
				[V] *TED talk:* John Cacioppo, "The Lethality of Loneliness"	
	Wednesday	29-Aug-18	Technology & cognition	[R] "You're not as busy as you say you are" (Hanna Rosin, *Slate*)	**Assignment due August 31:** Personal Social Media Monitoring or Blackout.

Week	Day	Date	Topic	Course Materials [R] = reading, [V] = video, [P] = podcast	Assignments, Quizzes, etc.
				[R] "Answering emails after work is bad for your health" (Mandy Oaklander, *Time*) [P] *Hidden Brain:* "You 2.0: Deep Work"	Keep track of how many minutes/hours you use various forms of social media in one day, or try foregoing all forms of social media entirely.
	Thursday	30-Aug-18	Technology & human development	[R] "Have smartphones destroyed a generation?" (Jean Twenge, *The Atlantic*) [R] "Yes, smartphones are destroying a generation, but not of kids" (Alexandra Samuel, *Jstor Daily*)	
	Friday	31-Aug-18	Unplugging – no class meeting *Field trip:* Go for a hike! Carpool to location of your choice with classmates. Some ideas here.	[R] "This is your brain on nature" (*National Geographic*) [R] "Preface" (William Davies, *The Happiness Industry*)	**Assignment due September 4:** Go for a hike! Take several photos during today's hike and submit a photojournalistic account of your adventure. **Unessay Project Title** (due online today)

Week	Day	Date	Topic	Course Materials [R] = reading, [V] = video, [P] = podcast	Assignments, Quizzes, etc.
3: Humanity in Machines	Tuesday	4-Sep-18	What is consciousness?	[R] "Can a Machine Think?" (Clinton Kelly, *iMP Magazine*)	**Quiz 2** (due today by class time)
				[P] *You Are Not So Smart:* "The Self Illusion"	**Assignment due September 6:** Tech Survey. Distribute a survey to your social networks to learn more about how people use technology, and analyze the findings.
	Wednesday	5-Sep-18	Anthropomorphism	[R] "Uncanny valley: Why we find human-like robots and dolls so creepy" (*The Conversation*)	
				[P] *Hidden Brain:* "Could You Kill a Robot?"	
	Thursday	6-Sep-18	Machine morality	[R] "If machines can think, do they deserve civil rights?" (Raya Bidshahri, *SingularityHub*)	**Assignment due September 12:** Video Interviews. Conduct two interviews with people about their

Week	Day	Date	Topic	Course Materials [R] = reading, [V] = video, [P] = podcast	Assignments, Quizzes, etc.
				[R] "Do we have free will?" (Seth Schwartz, *Psychology Today*)	relationship with technology; record these on video.
			Love in the digital age: part one *Guest lecture:* Katherine Oleson, Bellevue College		
	Friday	7-Sep-18	Love in the digital age: part two (*Her*)		**Unessay Project Plan** (due today by class time) Bring movie snacks today
4: Becoming Better Humans	Tuesday	11-Sep-18	Technology and human potential	[P] *Invisibilia:* "Our Computers, Ourselves"	**Quiz 3** (due today by class time)
				[R] "Manna: Two Views of Humanity's Future" (Marshall Brain)	Liability waiver for field trip due September 13 (signed by parent/guardian if under 18)
				[R] selections from *Smarter Than You Think* (Clive Thompson) to be posted	

Week	Day	Date	Topic	Course Materials [R] = reading, [V] = video, [P] = podcast	Assignments, Quizzes, etc.
	Wednesday	12-Sep-18	Using technology for social good	[V] *TED Talk:* Chris Milk, "How virtual reality can create the ultimate empathy machine"	
			Guest lecture: Andrés Monroy-Hernández, Lead Research Scientist, Snap Inc.	[R] "Are we already living in virtual reality?" (Joshua Rothman, *The New Yorker)*	
	Thursday	13-Sep-18	*Field trip:* Portal VR Arcade, 2601 NW Market St (Ballard neighborhood of Seattle). Arrive by 10:00am.		**Assignment due today**: Course reflection and feedback
	Friday	14-Sep-18	Students' Choice and Closing		**Unessay Project** (due today in class)