Social Media & Politics
POLI 3546
Winter 2020
Monday and Wednesdays 10:05-11:25
Studley MCCAIN ARTS&SS 1102

Instructor: Dr. Scott Pruysers
Office: Henry Hicks Building, Room 360
Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:00am-11:30am
Email: scott.pruysers@dal.ca

On weekdays, I will generally respond to your emails within 24 hours. Substantive questions are best discussed in person during office hours. Feel free to email me or to drop by during office hours to see me with any questions you may have or simply to chat about your progress in the course. This time is for you so I hope that you will use it. I look forward to getting to know you better.

Course Description
This course provides students with an introduction to politics in the digital era. Election campaigns are increasingly being fought on the internet, municipalities across the country are removing paper ballots entirely and replacing them with online voting, and citizens and voters are turning to social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) more and more for opportunities to participate in, and learn about, politics. While the course explores digital politics broadly, the primary focus will be on social media, especially debates surrounding the role and importance of social media in contemporary political life. Does social media encourage individuals who would not normally participate in politics to become active? Does social media increase political knowledge via exposure to ‘shared’ content? Can social media be used to effectively organize social movements and spur protests? Who ‘falls’ for fake news and shares this content online? Is social media a threat to democracy and the integrity of elections? These are some of the questions we will address throughout the course. Weekly topics will include political communication (new and old media); digital democracy and concerns regarding the digital divide; political memes and user generated content; fake news; incivility and online polarization; the relationship between social media and political knowledge and participation; the role of social media in elections, social movements and protests; and concerns regarding privacy, surveillance, and election interference.

Required Texts

See course schedule for additional readings each week.

**see word document in Brightspace for links to journal article readings**
Course Learning Outcomes

1. Provide students with an introduction to, understanding of, the following:
   a. the changing media landscape including the intersection of old and new media
   b. the role and significance of social media in contemporary political life (elections, protests, social movements, everyday politics, etc.)
   c. the challenges associated with social media (privacy, surveillance, etc.) as well as possible threats to the democratic process (fake news, election interference, etc.)
2. Assist students in rooting their arguments in the relevant empirical literature and expose them to the fundamental arguments of scholars in the field regarding the role and influence of social media in politics.
3. Help students develop and practice critical reading and writing skills.

Class Format
The class is scheduled to meet twice a week. For the first number of weeks I will lecture on both Monday and Wednesday. After this, the typical weekly structure will include a lecture for the first class of the week (Monday) and a student (group) presentation and discussion on the second day (Wednesday). As student-centered discussions are an important component of the course, students are expected to attend having read the required readings for that week. Attendance and participation will be graded.

Course Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement/Assessment</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; Participation</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Presentation and Discussion</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Reflection</td>
<td>January 29</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 1</td>
<td>February 10</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 2</td>
<td>March 16</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Media Campaign Document</td>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>30%</td>
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</table>

Attendance & Participation (10%)
An important component of this course will be student-centered discussions. Classroom participation provides students with the ability to interact with one another as well as critically engage with the course material. Attendance will be taken each week. Students are expected to attend having read the required materials for that week and actively participate in discussion (see Course Schedule).

Group Presentation & Discussion (25%)
Starting in week 5 of the course, the Wednesday class each week will be devoted to student presentations. In groups (~ 4 or 5 students per group), students will present on a specific case study (recent election, social movement, etc.) regarding the intersection of social media and politics. Presentations should include a discussion of the case in question (i.e., background and context, etc.), an explanation of the outcome of the case, examples of how social media was used (i.e., show YouTube videos, tweets, etc.), and an analysis of the use, role, and effectiveness of social media (drawing on academic literature) in the particular case. Where possible, presentations should make connections to course material and major themes. Topics for presentation will be discussed in class and posted online but include elections, referendums, and social movements such as the 2012 US election, the Brexit campaign, Idle no More, the Arab Spring protests, and so on. Presentations should be approximately 40-45 minutes. In addition to the group presentation, each group will develop a
series of discussion questions relating to their specific case to lead the remainder of the class.

**Reflection (15%)**
In his New Yorker article, “Small Change. Why the Revolution will not be Tweeted”, Malcolm Gladwell is critical of those who argue that social media is profoundly changing political life. The purpose of this assignment is to read the article and respond to Gladwell in a short (5-6 page double spaced) reflection. What does social media add to our democratic politics? What, if anything, does it take away? What are the major concerns regarding the use (and abuse) of social media in Canadian politics and elections? Importantly, is Gladwell correct in his assessment? The reflection is due in hardcopy the class of January 29.

**Tests (10% each)**
There will be two in class tests (February 10 and March 16). The tests will cover all assigned readings, lectures, and presentations up to the date of the test. The tests will consist of two parts: a section in which students will be asked to define and explain the significance of key terms/concepts, and a short essay question.

**Social Media Campaign Document (30%)**
The major individual assignment for this course is a social media campaign document. Imagine the following hypothetical scenario: It has only been a few months since the 2019 general election but there is a by-election in the Halifax electoral district. You are tasked with developing an online strategy document for your preferred (fictional) candidate/party in the election. Each assignment must include at least 4 types of original content that you create from the following list:

- YouTube video (2+minutes)
- Political meme (x5)
- Facebook post (x5)
- Tweet (x10)
- Blog post (700 words)
- Website
- Infographic regarding a particular policy
- Op-ed for an online news outlet (500 words)
- Instagram post (x7)

In addition to creating your unique social media content, students will need to discuss the overall strategy of their social media campaign, drawing on course readings as well as original research. The strategy portion of the assignment (6-8 pages double spaced) should consider questions such as Why these forms of social media over others? Who was the intended audience? What was the primary message (were some messages better suited for different forms of media/social media)? What was the overall campaign strategy? This assignment is due April 1.

**Course Schedule and Readings**

**January 6: Introduction**

January 8: What is Social Media & Is it Political?
• Textbook Chapter 3. Where There Is Social Media There Is Politics

January 13: Old Media

January 15: Old Media Meets Social Media
• Textbook: Chapter 2: Network Media Logic: Some Conceptual Considerations

January 20: Digital Divide and Online Politics

January 22: Memes, User Generated Content (UGC), And Citizen Journalism

January 27: Information, knowledge, and fake news

January 29: Trolls, incivility, and polarization

**Reflection due in class**

**February 3: Activism and Engagement**
- Textbook Chapter 19. Cyberactivism in China: Empowerment, Control, and Beyond

**February 5: Presentation (Brexit)**

**February 10: Test in class**

**February 12: Presentation (Occupy Wall Street)**

**February 17-19: BREAK**

**February 24: Mobilization, Social Movements and Protests**
- Textbook Chapter 13. Social Media Use during Political Crises: The Case of the Gezi Protests in Turkey

**February 26: Presentation (Arab Spring)**

**March 2: Control, privacy, regulation, censorship, and surveillance**
- McKelvey, Fenwick. 2018. “Protecting our information in the age of data-driven politics.” *Policy Options*
March 4: Presentation (Migration Crisis)

March 9: Election Campaigns
- Textbook Chapter 23. Social Media in the UK Election Campaigns 2008-14: Experimentation, Innovation and Convergence
- Textbook Chapter 31. Comparing Facebook and Twitter during the 2013 General Election in Italy
- Textbook Chapter 26: Social Media Incumbent Advantage: Barack Obama’s and Mitt Romney’s Tweets in the 2012 US Presidential Election Campaign

March 11: Presentation (US 2012 Election)

March 16: Test in class

March 18: Presentation (Idle No More)

March 23: Election Interference and Related Concerns

March 25: Presentation (Canada 2015)

March 30: Documentary Shown in Class
- Chapter 5. “Cambridge Hyperbolytica.” In Outnumbered: From Facebook and google to fake news and filter bubbles – the algorithms that control our lives.

April 1: Review
**Social Media Campaign Document is due in class**
Suggested Readings

- Textbook Chapter 5. Third Space, Social Media, and Everyday Political Talk

Resources for Group presentations

**The following readings are not required for lecture but are meant to help students with their group’s presentation**

Brexit


Occupy Wall Street


**Arab Spring**

**Migration Crisis**

**US 2012**

Idle No More
• Moscato, Derek. 2016. ‘Media Portrayals of Hashtag Activism: A Framing Analysis of Canada’s #Idlenomore Movement.” Journalism.

Canada 2015

Supplemental Blogs and Resources
Other relevant source of information and commentary about social media and politics are available at the following sites:
• ePolitics. www.epolitics.com
• Social Advocacy and Politics. www.socialmediatoday.com/special-columns/Social-Advocacy- &-Politics
• Pew Institute - https://www.pewinternet.org/topics/social-media/
• Infogagement https://medium.com/infogagement
• Twiplomacy https://twiplomacy.com
### University Grading Policy

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Pending | Neutral | Grade not Neutral and no credit obtained reported

**UNIVERSITY POLICIES, STATEMENTS, GUIDELINES and RESOURCES for SUPPORT**

This course is governed by the academic rules and regulations set forth in the University Calendar and the Senate, available at [https://academiccalendar.dal.ca/Catalog/ViewCatalog.aspx?pag...catalogid=81&chapterid=4424&loaduseredits=False](https://academiccalendar.dal.ca/Catalog/ViewCatalog.aspx?pag...catalogid=81&chapterid=4424&loaduseredits=False)

University Statements

- **Territorial Acknowledgement:**

  Dalhousie University is located in Mi’kma’ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi’kmaq. We are all Treaty people.¹

- **Academic Integrity**

  At Dalhousie University, we are guided in all of our work by the values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility and respect. As a student, you are required to demonstrate these values in all of the work you do. The University provides policies and procedures that every member of the university community is required to follow to ensure academic integrity. (read more: [https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/academic-integrity.html](https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/academic-integrity.html))

- **Accessibility**

  The Student Accessibility Centre is Dalhousie's centre of expertise for student accessibility and accommodation. The advising team works with students on the Halifax campus who request accommodation as a result of: a disability, religious obligation, or any barrier related to any other characteristic protected under Human Rights legislation (NS, NB, PEI, NFLD).

  If there are aspects of the design, instruction, and/or experiences within this course that result in barriers to your inclusion please contact the Study Accessibility Centre: [https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/accessibility.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/accessibility.html)

  Please note that your classroom may contain accessible furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom, undisturbed, so that students who require their use will be able to fully participate.

¹ For more information about the purpose of territorial acknowledgements, or information about alternative territorial acknowledgements if your class is offered outside of Nova Scotia, please visit [https://native-land.ca/](https://native-land.ca/).
● Student Code of Conduct

Everyone at Dalhousie is expected to treat others with dignity and respect. The Code of Student Conduct allows Dalhousie to take disciplinary action if students don’t follow this community expectation. When appropriate, violations of the code can be resolved in a reasonable and informal manner—perhaps through a restorative justice process. If an informal resolution can’t be reached, or would be inappropriate, procedures exist for formal dispute resolution. (read more: https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/policies/student-life/code-of-student-conduct.html)

● Diversity and Inclusion – Culture of Respect

Every person at Dalhousie has a right to be respected and safe. We believe inclusiveness is fundamental to education. Dalhousie is strengthened in our diversity and dedicated to achieving equity. We are committed to being a respectful and inclusive community where everyone feels welcome and supported, which is why our university prioritizes fostering a culture of diversity and inclusiveness.
(Read more: https://www.dal.ca/cultureofrespect.html)

University Policies and Programs

● Important Dates in the Academic Year (including add/drop dates) http://www.dal.ca/academics/important_dates.html
● Scent-Free Program https://www.dal.ca/dept/safety/programs-services/occupational-safety/scent-free.html

Learning and Support Resources

● General Academic Support – Advising https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/advising.html
● Student Health & Wellness Centre https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/health-and-wellness.html
● On Track (helps you transition into university, and supports you through your first year at Dalhousie and beyond) https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/On-track.html
● Indigenous Student Centre https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/communities/indigenous.html
● Elders-in-Residence (The Elders in Residence program provides students with access to First Nations elders for guidance, counsel and support. Visit the office in the Indigenous Student Centre or contact the program at elders@dal.ca or 902-494-6803.)
• Black Student Advising Centre: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/communities/black-student-advising.html
• International Centre https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/international-centre.html
• South House Sexual and Gender Resource Centre https://southhousehalifax.ca/
• LGBTQ2SIA+ Collaborative - https://www.dal.ca/dept/hres/education-campaigns/LGBTQ2SIA-collaborative.html
• Library http://libraries.dal.ca
• Copyright Office https://libraries.dal.ca/services/copyright-office.html
• Dalhousie Student Advocacy Services http://dsu.ca/dsas
• Human Rights and Equity Services https://www.dal.ca/dept/hres.html
• Writing Centre https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/writing-and-study-skills.html
• Study Skills/Tutoring: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/study-skills-and-tutoring.html
• Faculty or Departmental Advising Support: See https://www.dal.ca/faculty/arts/programs.html for links to departmental websites and information about advising

Safety

• Biosafety https://www.dal.ca/dept/safety/programs-services/biosafety.html
• Chemical Safety https://www.dal.ca/dept/safety/programs-services/chemical-safety.html
• Radiation Safety https://www.dal.ca/dept/safety/programs-services/radiation-safety.html