Sociology 928 Data & Society

Spring 2019

Instructor: Noelle Chesley (chesley@uwm.edu; Bolton 752)

Class Time and Location: Thursdays 1 – 3:40; Bolton 757

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1 – 2 PM; Thursdays 11AM – 12PM

What Is This Class About?

Data scientists are creating powerful tools that are widely applied throughout society. There is clear evidence to show that these tools can have social consequences. What are the social implications of integrating data into our everyday lives? What role does data play in shaping our institutions and social interaction? How is the rise of “big” data and its application in tools such as artificial intelligence and algorithms influencing social (in)equality, if at all? We will engage these and related questions drawing largely on theorizing and empirical research from the social sciences, especially sociology (with a focus on digital sociology/inequalities literatures). The thrust of this class is not on how to analyze sources of big data (although we may touch on that), but to look more systematically at social science evidence that outlines possible implications (good, bad, or neutral) that flow from the entrenchment of data systems and data science in contemporary society. This class should be of interest not only to graduate students in the social sciences but also those training for careers as data scientists, in academia or industry.

How Will Taking This Class Improve My Research Training?

The goal of this class is to bring social and data scientists in training together to discuss these questions, informed by theoretical and empirical writings in the social sciences, but also drawing on the background of both computational and social science students. Those planning a career in data or analytic science will benefit by learning about the larger social implications of their work and their role in contemporary society as part of their training. Social scientists in training also need to be aware of these issues. This sort of training will help cultivate: 1) transdisciplinary, collaborative thinking about key social problems; 2) thoughtful and insightful
data science leadership; and 3) innovative ways for strengthening our communities by combining insights of data and social science.

**What Books are Required?**

We will be reading significant portions of these books, so they should be purchased outright. Other course readings will be available through our Canvas website.


**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Course Workload**

The UW System notes “that study leading to one semester credit represents an investment of time by the average study of not fewer than 48 hours” (UWS ACPS 4). This means that a 3-credit course such as this one will require a minimum of 144 (3 x 48) hours of your time. In this course, you will spend about 9 hours each week engaged in course activities, including the time you take to read through course materials, prepare for and engage in discussions, and complete assignments.

**Seminar Preparation and Engagement**

Seminars are designed to facilitate the exchange and development of ideas. At their best, they are places where active learning and intellectual growth takes place. How good this seminar is will depend a lot on what everyone brings to our in-person meetings in terms of his/her preparation. I will require the active involvement of all participants in discussing the topics we cover, including involvement from students who are relatively shy or are new to the topic. Active participation does not mean dominating conversation, but it does mean you showing that you are prepared for class, actively listening to your colleagues, making comments and asking questions.

Because discussion is an integral part of this course, I want to ensure that the classroom is a safe place for frank and open discourse. Although we may have different viewpoints, I expect
all of us to treat one another with respect. As we all come to the class with different experiences (both real-world and academic), we should be attentive to maintaining openings in discussion for everyone. If you realize you are not speaking very much, you should step into the conversation. If you realize you are speaking a lot, you should step back, and encourage others to engage. Asking questions should be a top priority—questions that appear simple may end up being both difficult and productive to address. Your active seminar participation will involve both advance preparation as well as active engagement during our seminar meeting. Both are described further below.

*Article Preparation:* While everyone is expected to read all of the readings assigned for a particular week, each student will have responsibility for deep reflection and presentation of one of the weekly readings. This will involve a careful reading of your assigned piece, a brief oral presentation of key points of the reading in class, and presentation of 2-3 questions meant to spur further discussion of the article during our in person meeting time. Your overview and questions will be guided by the seminar handout you prepare (see instructions on the course website). The number of articles that each student will prepare depends on class enrollment and will be determined at the organizational meeting.

Your preparation handouts (25%) and your participation in our classroom discussions (25%) are collectively worth 50% of your final grade.

*Final Paper/Project & Presentation*

This paper or project will examine some aspect of big data using a social science framework. This means that you will use the ideas explored in this class to somehow examine specific social implications of data or technology. The paper should be negotiated with the instructor early in the semester but can include: 1) A literature review paper; 2) an empirical paper; or 3) a research proposal. A 1-page prospectus for the paper/proposal is due within the first third of the course (see course schedule for details). Final papers are to be 12 – 15 pages in length, not including references or tables, and should draw on a minimum of 15 social science, peer-reviewed sources (50% of the source material can draw from assigned course readings). See my handout for more detailed instructions about the final paper. Each student will also prepare a 15-minute presentation of his/her final paper/project for one of the last class sessions. The prospectus (5%), presentation (15%), and final paper (30%) are collectively worth 50% of your final grade.

*Avoiding Plagiarism in Academic Writing*

Beginning researchers may struggle with the academic citation process, which requires clear attribution for other’s ideas in our writing. Using the ideas of others without crediting them is plagiarism. While definitions of plagiarism seem straightforward, it can be difficult to know when citations are required. The UWM Libraries provides guidance about plagiarism and how to avoid it here. You can review UWM’s policy on academic misconduct, which outlines how
instructors should deal with instances of plagiarism, here. If you have questions about citation practices or plagiarism, please come talk to me or ask questions in class.

### Summary of Grading Structure

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<td>Seminar Prep and Engagement</td>
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<td>Prospectus, Presentation, and Final Paper</td>
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### Matching Points to Letter Grade

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1 (1/23):
Organizational Meeting  [Will not be a full seminar meeting]

*Foundations: Thinking “Sociologically” About Technology and Data*

Week 2 (1/30):


*Recommended, but Not Required:*


**Week 3 (2/6):**


Collett, Clementine & Sarah Dillon. 2019. AI and Gender: Four Proposals for Future Research. [Read Executive Summary, Introduction, and Research Theme 1 (pp. 1 – 12)


*For Fun:* Read the short story “Saving Alan Idle” by Katherine Mankiller [You can hear an audio version of this story at: http://escapepod.org/2013/07/05/ep403-saving-alan-idle/]

*Recommended, but Not Required:*


**Week 4 (2/13):**


*Recommended, but Not Required:*


**Interlude: Data Science Practice**

**Week 5 (2/20): The Data Scientist as Social Engineer**

*Guest Lecture: Dr. Matt McCarthy (Sociology); Data Scientist, Harley Davidson.*

Kitchin, Rob. 2014. *The Data Revolution: Big Data, Open Data, Data Infrastructures and Their Consequences.* (Read chapters 1, 5-7, 9-10)

Shane, Janelle. 2019. *You Look Like a Thing and I Love You: How Artificial Intelligence Works and Why It’s Making the World a Weirder Place.* Voracious Publishing, NY (Chapter 7 scan is on course website; chapter 5 is recommended).

**Recommended, but Not Required:**


Seaver, Nick. 2015. The nice thing about context is that everyone has it, 37(7): 1101-1109; [https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715594102].


**Week 6 (2/27): Data, Health, & Society**

*Guest Lecture (90 minutes): Dr. Jake Luo, Health Informatics and Administration [Readings to be assigned by Jake]*

***We will also go over the Final Paper and Prospectus Assignment in this session***

**Recommended, but Not Required:**


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**Social Contexts and Cases**

**Week 7 (3/5): Surveillance Culture**


**Week 8 (3/12): Crime, Policing, and Punishment**


**Week 9 (3/19):**

***Spring Break --- NO CLASS***

**Week 10 (3/26): Social Welfare Services**

Eubanks, Virginia. 2018. *Automating Inequality* [Introduction, Ch 1, 4, and Conclusion]

**Week 11 (4/2): Parenting and Family Life**

Guest Lecture, Dr. Andra Siibak, University of Tartu, Estonia
[Readings to be assigned by Andra]


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**Recommended, but not required:**


DOI:10.1177/2056305117710455.


Turkle, Sherry. 2011. *Alone Together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. Basic Books: NY, NY.

**Week 12 (4/9): Work and Employment**


**Recommended, but not required:**


Muro, Mark, Robert Maxim, and Jacob Whiton. 2019. *Automation and artificial intelligence: How machines are affecting people and processes*. Brookings, brookings.edu/metro.


**Week 13 (4/16): Research Issues and Methods**

Raghavan, Prabhakar. 2014. It’s time to scale the science in the social sciences; *Big Data & Society*.

DiMaggio, Paul. 2015. Adapting computational text analysis to social science (and vice versa); *Big Data & Society*.


**Recommended, but Not Required:**


Grimmer, Justin. 2015. We are all social scientists now: How big data, machine learning, and causal inference work together.

Schroeder, Ralph. 2014. Big data and the brave new world of social media research; *Big Data & Society*.
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**Week 14 (4/23): Responsible Data Practices**

Guest Lecture: Ms. Sheri Luckett, MS; Data Analytics, Kohl’s Corporation

*Readings to be assigned by Sheri*

**Course Wrap-Up**

**Week 15 (4/30):**

Student Presentations

**Week 16 (5/7):**

Student Presentations & Final Paper/Project Due

**Other Research Resources:**

[https://socialmediacollective.org/reading-lists/critical-algorithm-studies/#0.1](https://socialmediacollective.org/reading-lists/critical-algorithm-studies/#0.1)
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UNIVERSITY AND SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT POLICIES

The Secretary of the University maintains a web page that contains university policies that affect the instructor and the students in this course, as well as essential information specific to conduct of the course. The link to that page is: https://uwm.edu/secu/wp-content/uploads/sites/122/2016/12/Syllabus-Links.pdf

Students with Disabilities. In the pursuit of equal access and in compliance with state and federal laws, the University is required to provide accommodations to students with documented disabilities. To learn more, please visit: http://uwm.edu/arc/

Religious Observances. Policies regarding accommodations for absences due to religious observance are found at the following: http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S1.5.htm

Students called to active Military Duty. Accommodations for absences due to call-up of reserves to active military duty are found at the following: https://uwm.edu/active-duty-military/

Incompletes. A notation of "incomplete" may be given in lieu of a final grade to a student who has carried a subject successfully until the end of a semester but who, because of illness or other unusual and substantiated cause beyond the student's control, has been unable to take or complete the final examination or to complete some limited amount of term work. https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_31_INCOMPLETE_GRADES.pdf

Discriminatory Conduct. Discriminatory conduct will not be tolerated by the University. It poisons the work and learning environment of the University and threatens the careers, educational experience and well-being of students, faculty and staff. Policies regarding discriminatory conduct can be found at: https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discriminatory_Policy.pdf

Title IX/Sexual Violence. Title IX is a federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in education program or activities, and UWM policy prohibits such conduct (see Discriminatory Conduct, above). This includes sexual violence, which may include sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence, and/or stalking in all educational programs and education-related areas. UWM strongly encourages its students to report any instance of sex discrimination to UWM’s Title IX Coordinator (titleix@uwm.edu). Whether or not a student wishes to report an incident of sexual violence, the Title IX Coordinator can connect students to resources at UWM and/or in the community including, but not limited to, victim advocacy, medical and counseling services, and/or law enforcement. For more information, please visit: https://uwm.edu/sexual-assault/

Academic misconduct. Cheating on exams or plagiarism are violations of the academic honor code and carry severe sanctions, including failing a course or even suspension or dismissal from the University. http://uwm.edu/academicaffairs/facultystaff/policies/academic-misconduct/

Complaint procedures. Students may direct complaints to the head of the academic unit or department in which the complaint occurs. If the complaint allegedly violates a specific university policy, it may be directed to the head of the department or academic unit in which the complaint occurred or to the appropriate university office responsible for enforcing the policy. https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_47_Discriminatory_Policy.pdf

Grade appeal procedures. A student may appeal a grade on the grounds that it is based on a capricious or arbitrary decision of the course instructor. Such an appeal shall follow the established procedures adopted by the department, college, or school in which the course resides or in the case of graduate students, the Graduate School. These procedures are available in writing from the respective department chairperson or the Academic Dean of the College/School. https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_28_Grade_Appeal_by_Students.pdf

LGBT+ resources. Faculty and staff can find resources to support inclusivity of students who identify as LGBT+ in the learning environment. http://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/

Smoke and Tobacco-Free campus. UWM prohibits smoking and the use of tobacco on all campus property. https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_49_Smoke_Tobacco_Free_Policy.pdf

Final Examinations. Information about the final exam requirement, the final exam date requirement, and make-up examinations. https://www4.uwm.edu/secu/docs/other/S_22_Final_Examinations.pdf

Book Royalties. In accord with department policy, the royalties from the sale of UWM sociology faculty-authored books to students in their classes are donated to a UWM Foundation/Sociology Account to support future awards and activities of UWM sociology students.

Updated 08/2019

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