


## GEOG 3414B – Digital Technology, Society & The Environment

**Winter 2021**

*Syllabus subject to change*



Although this academic year might be different, Western University is committed to a **thriving campus**. We encourage you to check out the [Digital Student Experience](https://www.uwo.ca/dse/) website to manage your academics and well-being. Additionally, the following link provides available resources to support students on and off campus: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/>.

### 1. Technical Requirements



Stable internet connection



Laptop or computer



Working microphone



Working webcam

Recommended technical specifications are available at:

<https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/timetables.html>

### 2. Course Information



Delivery Mode	Dates	Time
Online – Virtual Asynchronous	N/A	N/A
Online – Virtual Synchronous	Thursdays, starting Jan 19 <sup>th</sup>	11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Classes Start	Reading Week	Classes End	Study day(s)	Exam Period
January 11	February 13-21	April 12	April 13	April 14-30

\* March 15, 2021: Last day to drop a second-term half course

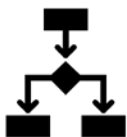


Course Instructor	Contact Information	Professor's Office Hours
Dr. Agnieszka Leszczynski	<a href="mailto:aleszczy@uwo.ca">aleszczy@uwo.ca</a>	Thursdays* 1:30 – 3 pm via <b>Zoom</b> <b>Meeting ID:</b> 973 3561 5058 <b>Passcode:</b> 315989
* Dr. Leszczynski's Office Hours start Thurs Jan 14th		

- Office hours will be held remotely using Zoom (see **Professor's Office Hours** above for details)

### 3. Calendar Description

This course engages with digital technologies as social and spatial phenomena. Through an exploration of themes including the cloud, internet infrastructures, digital platforms, and the gig/sharing economy, the course identifies the environmental and social implications of pervasive digitality.



2 asynchronous lecture hours per week plus 1 synchronous hour per week, 0.5 course

Prerequisite(s): Registration in Year 3 or 4 in any module.

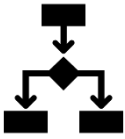
Senate Regulations state, “unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.”

### 4. Textbook



- Required textbook:** No textbook is required for this class.
- Reading resources:** Reading materials will be made available via the **Course Readings**, accessible via the OWL site for this course. See item **8. Weekly Readings** for readings assigned each week.

## 5. Course Objectives and Format



The objectives of this course are to:

- Examine the myriad societal and environmental implications of pervasive digital technologies, the digital economy, and everyday digital practices, and to trace their geographies.
- Introduce and navigate through the range of narratives and discourses which frame digital technologies as either socially beneficial or deleterious.
- Critically evaluate the merits of competing claims about technologies and their potential social and environmental consequences.

Component	Mode	Dates	Time	Frequency
Lectures	Virtual asynchronous	New lectures will be posted on OWL by <b>4:00 pm</b> each <b>Wednesday</b>	2 hours for lectures	<b>Weekly</b>
Synchronous Sessions	Virtual synchronous	<b>Thursdays 11:30 am - 12:30 pm</b>	1 hour	<b>Weekly</b> (see course schedule)

All course material will be posted to **OWL**: <http://owl.uwo.ca> (GEOG 3414 001 FW20). Any changes will be indicated on the OWL site and discussed with the class.

Google Chrome or Mozilla Firefox are the preferred browsers to optimally use OWL; update your browsers frequently. Students interested in evaluating their internet speed, please click [here](#). [Using the right browser is important, especially when using different features integrated with OWL]

If students need assistance, they can seek support on the [OWL Help page](#). Alternatively, they can contact the [Western Technology Services Helpdesk](#). They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

Details for joining synchronous sessions:	
Synchronous Session Day/Time	Zoom Details
Thursdays 11:30 am – 12:30 pm	Zoom Meeting ID: 941 1167 1196 Passcode: 136576

Synchronous sessions **do not meet** in weeks that the **Course Schedule (7. Course Content and Schedule)** does not indicate that there is a **synchronous session scheduled in that week**.

## 6. Learning Objectives



Students who complete Geography 3414 will be able to:

- Understand digital technologies as phenomena that are socially and spatially produced.
- Identify the consequences of digital assemblages along social, ecological, and economic axes.
- Critically navigate through false binaries of utopian versus dystopian discourses of digital technologies.
- Identify the global and local geographies of digital technology production, circulation, and impacts.

## 7. Course Content and Schedule

Week	Lecture Topic	Podcasts (listen to <i>in advance of Synchronous Session</i> )	Synchronous Session / Group objectives (Thursdays)
Week 1 Week of Jan 11th	Course Introduction		
Week 2 Week of Jan 18th	The Cloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Henn S (2014) Searching The Planet To Find Power For The Cloud. <i>All Tech Considered</i>, 21 April. <a href="https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2014/04/21/305666363/searching-the-planet-to-find-power-for-the-cloud">https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2014/04/21/305666363/searching-the-planet-to-find-power-for-the-cloud</a></li> </ul>	Information about the term project podcast assignment

Week	Lecture Topic	Podcasts (listen to <i>in advance of Synchronous Session</i> )	Synchronous Session / Group objectives (Thursdays)
Week 3 Week of Jan 25th	Cryptocurrency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vanek Smith S and Garcia C (2019) Bitcoin's Energy Bill. <i>The Indicator from Planet Money</i>, July 12<sup>th</sup>. <a href="https://www.npr.org/2019/07/12/741216855/bitcoins-energy-bill">https://www.npr.org/2019/07/12/741216855/bitcoins-energy-bill</a></li> </ul>	Podcast team "speed dating"
Week 4 Week of Feb 1	Ridehailing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young N (2018) Ride-sharing was supposed to make traffic better. It's making it worse. <i>Spark</i>, September 7<sup>th</sup>. <a href="https://www.cbc.ca/radio/spark/s-park-404-1.4811760/ride-sharing-was-supposed-to-make-traffic-better-it-s-making-it-worse-1.4811762">https://www.cbc.ca/radio/spark/s-park-404-1.4811760/ride-sharing-was-supposed-to-make-traffic-better-it-s-making-it-worse-1.4811762</a></li> </ul>	Identifying a podcast topic
Week 5 Week of Feb 8	Bikesharing & e-scooters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>McCarty Carino M (2018) Scooters could improve mobility in low-income areas, but have an image problem. <i>Marketplace</i>, December 5<sup>th</sup>. <a href="https://www.marketplace.org/2018/12/05/scooters-could-improve-mobility-low-income-areas-they-have-image-problem/">https://www.marketplace.org/2018/12/05/scooters-could-improve-mobility-low-income-areas-they-have-image-problem/</a></li> </ul>	Group work: Identifying team roles; work on proposal
Week of Feb 15	<b>WINTER READING WEEK</b>		
Week 6 Week of Feb 22	NO CLASS		<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b> (1 hour, remotely proctored, Thurs Feb 25 <sup>th</sup> , 11:30 – 12:30) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Podcast proposal due <b>Fri Feb 26<sup>th</sup> by 4:00 pm (email directly to Dr. Leszczynski: aleszczy@uwo.ca)</b></li> </ul>

Week	Lecture Topic	Podcasts (listen to <i>in advance of Synchronous Session</i> )	Synchronous Session / Group objectives (Thursdays)
Week 7 Week of Mar 1	Gig Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brancaccio A (2020) The gig economy and how workers might win it back. <i>Marketplace Tech</i>, 31 August. <a href="https://www.marketplace.org/2020/08/31/after-the-gig-juliet-schor-sharing-economy-uber-lyft/">https://www.marketplace.org/2020/08/31/after-the-gig-juliet-schor-sharing-economy-uber-lyft/</a></li> </ul>	Annotated bibliography
Week 8 Week of Mar 8	Delivery & On-Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mojtehedzadeh, S (2020). <i>Hustled: The complete 6 part podcast</i>. <a href="https://www.thestar.com/podcasts/hustled/2020/06/26/hustled-when-your-boss-is-an-app-the-complete-6-part-podcast.html">https://www.thestar.com/podcasts/hustled/2020/06/26/hustled-when-your-boss-is-an-app-the-complete-6-part-podcast.html</a></li> </ul>	Hustled: group discussion and key takeaways
Week 9 Week of Mar 15	Short-Term Rentals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wendland T and Goldmark A (2019) Episode 897: New Orleans Vs. Airbnb. <i>Planet Money</i>, 28 February. <a href="https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2019/02/28/698763891/episode-897-new-orleans-vs-airbnb">https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2019/02/28/698763891/episode-897-new-orleans-vs-airbnb</a></li> </ul>	Group work: script writing
Week 10 Week of Mar 22	The Internet of Things (IoT) and the Smart Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rutledge D (2020) AI home devices: A feminist perspective. <i>The Philosopher's Zone</i>, 16 August. <a href="https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/ai-home-devices-a-feminist-perspective/12564584">https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/ai-home-devices-a-feminist-perspective/12564584</a></li> </ul>	Group discussion: The 'smart wife'
Week 11 Week of Mar 29	Algorithms & AI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Watch this short CBC documentary: <i>Internet of Everything: Home Assistants</i>. <a href="https://www.cbc.ca/cbcdocspov/features/your-smart-speaker-is-hurting-the-environment">https://www.cbc.ca/cbcdocspov/features/your-smart-speaker-is-hurting-the-environment</a></li> </ul>	Group work (recording)

Week	Lecture Topic	Podcasts (listen to <i>in advance of Synchronous Session</i> )	Synchronous Session / Group objectives (Thursdays)
Week 12	Peer listening activity (all group podcasts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listen to all groups' podcasts</li> </ul>	Synchronous final exam review

## 8. Weekly Readings

Week	Lecture Topic	Readings
Week 1 Week of Jan 11th	Course Introduction	
Week 2 Week of Jan 18th	The Cloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blum A (2012) Chapter 7, "Where data sleeps", in <u><i>Tubes: A Journey to the Center of the Internet</i></u>. New York: Ecco. pp 227-262.</li> <li>Hogan M (2018) Big data ecologies. <i>Ephemera: Theory &amp; Politics in Organization</i>. 18(3): 631-657.</li> </ul>
Week 3 Week of Jan 25th	Cryptocurrency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lally N, Kay K and Thatcher J (2019) Computational parasites and hydropower: A political ecology of Bitcoin mining on the Columbia River. <i>Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space</i>, doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848619867608">10.1177/2514848619867608</a></li> <li>Crandall J (2019) Blockchains and the "Chains of Empire": Contextualizing Blockchain, Cryptocurrency, and Neoliberalism in Puerto Rico. <i>Design and Culture</i> 11: 279-300.</li> </ul>
Week 4 Week of Feb 1	Ridehailing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rodier C (2018) The Effects of Ride Hailing Services on Travel and Associated Greenhouse Gas Emissions. A White Paper from the National Centre for Sustainable Transportation. Download available at: <a href="https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2rv570tt">https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2rv570tt</a></li> <li>Brown A (2019) Prevalence and Mechanisms of Discrimination: Evidence from the Ride-Hail and Taxi Industries. <i>Journal of Planning Education and Research</i>. DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X19871687">10.1177/0739456X19871687</a>.</li> </ul>

Week	Lecture Topic	Readings
Week 5 Week of Feb 8	Bikesharing & e-scooters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hosford K &amp; Winters M (2018) Who Are Public Bicycle Share Programs Serving? An Evaluation of the Equity of Spatial Access to Bicycle Share Service Areas in Canadian Cities. <i>Transportation Research Record</i> 2672(36): 42-50.</li> </ul>
Week of Feb 15	<b>WINTER READING WEEK</b>	
Week 6 Week of Feb 22		
Week 7 Week of Mar 1	Gig Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ticona J, Mateescu A and Rosenblat A (2018) Beyond Disruption: How Tech Shapes Labor Across Domestic Work &amp; Ridehailing. <i>Data &amp; Society</i>. <a href="https://datasociety.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Data_Society_Beyond_Disruption_FINAL.pdf">https://datasociety.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Data_Society_Beyond_Disruption_FINAL.pdf</a></li> </ul>
Week 8 Week of Mar 8	Delivery & On-Demand	
Week 9 Week of Mar 15	Short-Term Rentals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wachsmuth D and Weisler A (2018) Airbnb and the rent gap: Gentrification through the sharing economy. <i>Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space</i> 50(6): 1147-1170.</li> <li>Wachsmuth D, Kerrigan D, Chaney D &amp; Shillolo A (2017) Short-term cities: Airbnb's impact on Canadian housing markets. A report from the Urban Politics and Governance research group, School of Urban Planning, McGill University. <a href="https://upgo.lab.mcgill.ca/publication/short-term-cities/short-term-cities.pdf">https://upgo.lab.mcgill.ca/publication/short-term-cities/short-term-cities.pdf</a></li> </ul>
Week 10 Week of Mar 22	The Internet of Things (IoT) and the Smart Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Herrero ST, Nichols L and Strengers Y (2018) Smart home technologies in everyday life: do they address key energy challenges in households? <i>Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability</i> 31: 65-70.</li> <li>Strengers Y and Nicholls L (2018) Aesthetic pleasures and gendered tech-work in the 21st-century smart home. <i>Media International Australia</i> 166(1): 70-80.</li> </ul>



Week	Lecture Topic	Readings
Week 11 Week of Mar 29	Algorithms & AI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Benjamin R (2019) Chapter 1, "Engineered Inequality", in <u>Race After Technology</u>. Cambridge, UK &amp; Malden, MA: Polity Press. pp. 49-76.</li> <li>Boulamwini J &amp; Gebru T (2018) Gender Shades: Intersectional Accuracy Disparities in Commercial Gender Discrimination. <i>Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> Conference on Fairness, Accountability and Transparency</i>, PMLR 81: 77-91. <a href="http://proceedings.mlr.press/v81/boulamwini18a.html?mod=article_inline">http://proceedings.mlr.press/v81/boulamwini18a.html?mod=article_inline</a></li> </ul>
Week 12	Peer listening activity (all group podcasts)	

## 9. Communication



- Students should check the OWL site every 24 – 48 hours
- For any other communication, the centrally administered **e-mail account** provided to students will be considered the individual's official university e-mail address. It is the responsibility of the account holder to ensure that e-mail received from the University at his/her official university address is attended to in a timely manner. You can read about the privacy and security of the UWO email accounts [here](#).
- Emails will be monitored daily M-F; students will receive a response in 24 – 48 hours (excluding weekends)

## 10. Evaluation



Below is the evaluation breakdown for the course. Any deviations will be communicated.

Assessment	Format	Weighting	Due Date
Midterm exam	Essay format	<b>20%</b>	In scheduled synchronous session in Week 6 (Thurs Feb 25 <sup>th</sup> , 11:30 am -12:30 pm); exam will be remotely proctored.

Term Podcast Project (Group Work)	<p>Audio podcast recording (to be submitted in <b>.mp3</b> format)</p> <p>Written script (to be submitted in <b>.pdf</b> format, submitted using <b>Turnitin</b>)</p> <p>Written annotated bibliography (to be submitted in <b>.pdf</b> format)</p>	<p><b>50%</b> of final grade</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Podcast: 80%</li> <li>Script: 5%</li> <li>Annotated bibliography: 15%</li> </ul>	<p><b>PODCAST RECORDING is DUE on MONDAY APRIL 5 by 3:30 PM via OWL assignment submission.</b></p> <p>Script + annotated bibliography are due on Monday April 12 by 4:00 pm via OWL assignment submission.</p>
Final Exam	Essay format (x 2 essays)	<b>30%</b>	<b>Final exam period;</b> exam will be remotely proctored.

Students are responsible for material covered in the lectures as well as the assigned chapters/sections in the text.

- Virtual proctoring will be used for the midterm and final exams.
- After an assessment is returned, students should wait 24 hours to digest feedback before contacting the professor; to ensure a timely response, reach out within 7 days.

Click [here](#) for a detailed and comprehensive set of policies and regulations concerning examinations and grading. The table below outlines the University-wide grade descriptors.

A+	90-100	One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level
A	80-89	Superior work which is clearly above average
B	70-79	Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
C	60-69	Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50-59	Fair work, minimally acceptable
F	below 50	Fail

**Information about late or missed evaluations:**

- Late assessments without illness self-reports will be subject to a late penalty of 10%/24 hrs for the first 48 hours, for a maximum penalty of 20%. No assignments will be accepted without medical documentation more than 48 hours after the posted deadline.
- Late assessments with illness self-reports should be submitted within 24 hours of the end of the illness self-report period.

- Late assessments with medical documentation must be submitted directly to the appropriate Faculty Dean's office as soon as possible. It will be the Dean's office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.

**Grades will not be adjusted on the basis of need. It is important to monitor your performance in the course. Remember: *You* are responsible for your grades in this course.**

## 11. Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

### Academic Consideration for Student Absence

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are *not* met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see

[Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)

and for the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf).

## Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

## 12. Make-up Examinations

No make-up exam will be offered for the midterm exam. If an SRA is used for the midterm exam – or the midterm exam is missed due to documented medical illness - then the final exam will be reweighted to be worth 50% of the student's final grade.

## 13. Use of Electronic Devices

N/A.

## 14. Online Proctoring Notice and Guidelines

Tests and examinations in this course will be conducted using the remote proctoring service, Proctortrack. By taking this course, you are consenting to the use of this software and acknowledge that you will be required to provide **personal information** (including some biometric data) and the session will be **recorded**. More information about this remote proctoring service is available in the Online Proctoring Guidelines at the following link:

<https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/onlineproctorguidelines.pdf>.

I have judged that online proctoring represents the best solution for some of the assessments in this course. This allows us to assess students in a way that preserves the integrity of the course without increasing the number of papers assigned, which would both add to student workload and divert limited teaching resources to marking, and away from supporting learning. Use of online proctoring assures students that they can write assessments on equal terms with their classmates and signals to prospective employers, graduate supervisors, and professional schools that, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Western has endeavoured to maintain the high standards that are at the core of our degrees.

Completion of this course will require you to have a reliable internet connection and a device that meets the technical requirements for this service. Information about the technical requirements are available at the following link:

<https://www.proctortrack.com/tech-requirements/>.

## 15. Lecture Recordings

**Lecture audio-video recordings are the copyright of the instructor**, and may not be disseminated, posted, shared, or made available online through any course notes websites, or any other channels.

## 16. Statements concerning Online Etiquette

Some components of this course will involve online interactions. To ensure the best experience for both you and your classmates, please honour the following rules of etiquette:

- **Please use “GEOG 3414” in the subject headings of all email correspondence.**
- When joining labs and office hours, please minimize background noise, and kindly mute your microphone for the entire class unless speaking.
- In Office Hours and during the synchronous sessions, you can also use the Chat function to let the host know that you would like to raise a new question or that you would like further clarification on a point being discussed.
- Please be prepared to turn your video camera off at the instructor’s request if the internet connection becomes unstable
- Unless invited by your instructor, do not share your screen in the meeting

## 17. Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a [Scholastic Offence](#).

## 18. Western’s Commitment to Accessibility

The Department of Geography strives at all times to provide accessibility to all faculty, staff, students and visitors in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities.

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519-661-2147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. [Information regarding accommodation of exams](#) is available on the Registrar’s website.

More information about [“Accessibility at Western”](#) is available.

## 19. Mental Health

If you or someone you know is experiencing distress, there are several resources here at Western to assist you. Please visit Western’s [Health and Wellness website](#) for more information on mental health resources.

## 20. Support Services

[Western’s Support Services](#)  
[Student Development Centre](#)

## 21. Important Dates

January 11: Classes resume  
January 19: Last day to add a second term half course  
February 15: Family Day – Department Office Closed  
February 13 to February 21: Spring Reading Week (No classes; Department Office open)  
March 15: Last day to drop a first term half course without penalty

April 2: Good Friday  
April 12: Classes end  
April 13: Study day  
April 14 to April 30: Examination Period