GEOG 3414A –
Digital Technology, Society & The Environment

Course Syllabus*: Fall 2023
This course is taught in-person

*Syllabus subject to change

1. Course Information

*Details about design and delivery of the course are listed below in Section 6

Classes Start	Spring Reading Week	Classes End	Study day(s)	Exam Period
Sept 7	Oct 30-Nov 5	Dec 8	Dec 9	Dec 10-22

September 15, 2023: Last day to add a second-term half course
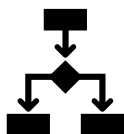October 9, 2023: Thanksgiving Holiday
November 13, 2023: Last day to drop a first term half course without penalty

Course Instructor	Contact Information	Office Hours
Dr. Agnieszka Leszczynski	aleszczy@uwo.ca	Tues 11:30 – 12:30 SSC 1402

Teaching Assistant(s)	Contact Information	Office Hours
Huiyan He	hhe247@uwo.ca	TBC

2. 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 lecture hours per week, 1 lab hours per week, 0.5 course
    Antirequisite(s): None
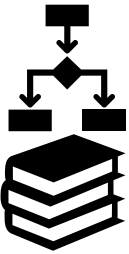   Prerequisite(s): Registration in Year 3 or 4 in any module.
Prerequisite checking is the student's responsibility

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."

3. 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 **7. Weekly Readings & Podcasts** for readings assigned each week.

4. Course Objectives and Format

Research is the systematic pursuit of answers to questions that fascinate us. Social science research investigates a vast range of problems related to inequality, prejudice, mobility, social behaviour, cultural identity, and more. This course is designed 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.

☒ Attendance is required.

☒ Missed work must be completed within 48 hours of the stated submission deadline (excluding weekends). Missed assignments/assessments not submitted within 48 hours (excluding weekends) of the original submission date will not be accepted for grading.

All course material will be posted to OWL: http://owl.uwo.ca. 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.

5. Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students 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.

6. Course Content and Schedule

Week	Lecture Topic	Lab Activity	Notes	*Podcast Progress "Benchmarks"*
Week 1 • **Lec:** Weds Sept 13th	Course Overview & Introduction	**NO LAB**		
Week 2 • **Lec:** Weds Sept 20th • **Lab:** Thurs Sept 21st	N/A *No lecture; professor away at conference*	Podcast team member "round robin" (think of this as 'speed dating' to identify team members for your podcast group) *Those who do not show up in person will be randomly assigned to a group*		
Week 3 • **Lec:** Weds Sept 27th • **Lab:** Thurs Sept 28th	The Cloud (aka Data Centres)	Term Project Specifics (led by Dr. Leszczynski)		
Week 4	Crypto	Podcast team group work:		*Your team should collectively decide*

Week	Lecture Topic	Lab Activity	Notes	*Podcast Progress "Benchmarks"*
• **Lec:** Weds Oct 4th • **Lab:** Thurs Oct 5th		• brainstorming podcast topic and idea		*on a tentative topic by next week*
Week 5 • **Lec:** Weds Oct 11th • **Lab:** Thurs Oct 12th	Ridehailing	<u>Group Discussion</u> (led by TA): **Types of podcasting roles**, based on Podcast Review #1 (see **Notes** for this week) • *participation points accrued this week*	• **Podcast Review #1** due @ start of lab	*Your team should decide on audio (vocal) roles for each team member by next week*
Week 6 • **Lec:** Weds Oct 18th • **Lab:** Thurs Oct 19th	Micromobilities	<u>Group Discussion</u> (led by TA): **Podcast structures**, based on Podcast Review #2 (see **Notes** for this week) • *participation points accrued this week*	• **Podcast Review #2** due @ start of lab	
Week 7 • **Lec:** Weds Oct 25th • **Lab:** Thurs Oct 26th	MIDTERM EXAM (1 hr, in-class)	**Podcast team group work**: • dedicated time to work towards your proposals		*You should be working towards your podcast proposals, which are due @ start of lab the week after reading week*
OCT 30 – NOV 05	**F A L L R E A D I N G W E E K**			
Week 8 • **Lec:** Weds Nov 8th • **Lab:** Thurs Nov 9th	Gig Economy	<u>Group Discussion</u> (led by TA): **Ways of enrolling evidence in podcasts**, based on Podcast Review #3 (see **Notes** for this week) • *participation points accrued this week*	• *Group podcast proposals due @ start of lab this week* • **Podcast Review #3**	

Week	Lecture Topic	Lab Activity	Notes	*Podcast Progress "Benchmarks"*
			due @ start of lab	
Week 9 • **Lec:** Weds Nov 15th • **Lab:** Thurs Nov 16th	On-demand Delivery	<u>Group Discussion</u> (led by TA): **Podcast reporting/presenting styles**, based on Podcast Review #4 (see **Notes** for this week) • *participation points accrued this week*	• **Podcast Review #4** due @ start of lab	*Your 'script' should be more or less finalized by the end of next week, to give your group time to record next week*
Week 10 • **Lec:** Weds Nov 22nd • **Lab:** Thurs Nov 23rd	Short-Term Rentals	<u>Group Discussion</u> (led by TA): **Podcast audiences**, based on Podcast Review #5 (see **Notes** for this week) • *participation points accrued this week*	• **Podcast Review #5** due @ start of lab	*Your 'script' should be finalized*
Week 11 • **Lec:** Weds Nov 29th • **Lab:** Thurs Nov 30th	AI	**Podcast team group work**: • time dedicated to finalizing recording	• **Podcast Review #5** due @ start of lab • **PODCAST AUDIO DUE via OWL by 4 pm on FRI DEC 1st**	*Podcast audio due next week*
Week 12 • **Lec:** Weds Dec 6th • **Lab:** Thurs Dec 7th	The Smart Home	**LAB TIME dedicated to PODCAST LISTENING ACTIVITY & PODCAST PEER REVIEW** **this is an in-lab activity – a Room Number will be confirmed*	• **Annotated bibliography & podcast script due via OWL by 4 pm on FRI DEC 8th**	

7. Readings and Podcasts

Week	Topic	Readings and Podcasts
Week 1	Intro	• N/A
Week 2	N/A	• N/A
Week 3	The Cloud	Readings: • Hogan M (2018) Big data ecologies. *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization* 18(3): 631-657. Podcast (see *next page*): • Spark (CBC Podcasts), Episode 557 (2022). "Data centres in a time of crisis". **https://pca.st/g9421nit**
Week 4	Crypto	Readings: • Lally N, Kay K & Thatcher J (2022) Computational parasites and hydropower: A political ecology of bitcoin mining on the Columbia River. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 5(1): 18-38. Podcast: • A Matter of Degrees, Season 3 Episode 5. "Crypto has a climate problem". **tinyurl.com/2p96dx9w**
Week 5	Ridehailing	Readings: • Brown A (2019) Prevalence and Mechanisms of Discrimination: Evidence from the Ride-Hail and Taxi Industries. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. DOI: 10.1177/0739456X19871687. • Brown A & Williams R (2021) Equity Implications of Ride-Hail Travel during COVID-19 in California. *Transportation Research Record.* DOI: 10.1177/03611981211037246. Podcasts: • Marketplace (APM, 2021). "How ride-hailing accelerates climate change" **tinyurl.com/mryakxcb**
Week 6	Micromobilities	Readings: • Hosford K & Winters M (2018) Who Are Public Bicycle Share Programs Serving? An Evaluation of the Equity of Spatial

Week	Topic	Readings and Podcasts
		Access to Bicycle Share Service Areas in Canadian Cities. *Transportation Research Record* 2672(36): 42-50.
		• Kong V & Leszczynski A (2022) Dockless micromobility sharing in Calgary: A spatial equity comparison of e-bikes and e-scooters. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 31(1): 97-110.
		Podcast:
		Marketplace (APM, 2018) "Scooters could improve mobility in low-income areas, but have an image problem" **tinyurl.com/3jtpsuxb**
Week 7	N/A (Midterm)	• N/A
Week 8	Gig Economy	Readings: • Ticona J, Mateescu A & Rosenblat A (2018) Beyond Disruption: How Tech Shapes Labor Across Domestic Work & Ridehailing. *Data & Society*. https://datasociety.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Data_Society_Beyond_Disruption_FINAL.pdf Podcast: • Eh Sayers (Statistics Canada, 2022) "Who Wins and Who Loses in the Gig Economy?". **https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/sc/podcasts/eh-sayers-ep04**
Week 9	On-demand Delivery	Reading: • Shapiro A (2022) Platform urbanism in a pandemic: Dark stores, ghost kitchens, and the logistical-urban frontier. *Journal of Consumer Culture*. DOI: 10.1177/14695405211069983 Podcasts: • Planet Money (2022) Grocery Delivery Wars. **https://www.npr.org/2022/02/18/1081710046/grocery-delivery-wars** • Marketplace (2022) Could food delivery apps help close the "grocery gap"? **https://www.marketplace.org/2022/05/16/could-food-delivery-apps-help-close-the-grocery-gap/**
Week 10	Short-Term Rentals	Reading: • Wachsmuth D & Weisler A (2018) Airbnb and the rent gap: Gentrification through the sharing economy. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 50(6): 1147–1170.

Week	Topic	Readings and Podcasts
		Podcast: • The Big Story (2023) How 'the Montreal shuffle' is destroying a city's rental market. **https://tinyurl.com/4vwnrtja**
Week 11	AI	Readings: • Crawford K (2021) Atlas of AI. New Haven, London: Yale University Press. Read Chapter 1. Podcast: • Make Me Smart (Marketplace APM, 2022). "What's going on with AI?". **tinyurl.com/mrxvj557**
Week 12	The Smart Home	Readings: • Herrero ST, Nichols L & Strengers Y (2018) Smart home technologies in everyday life: do they address key energy challenges in households? *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 31: 65-70. Video: • Watch this short CBC documentary: *Internet of Everything: Home Assistants*. **tinyurl.com/4tyajs6d**

8. Communication

☒ Students should check the OWL site every 24 – 48 hours

☒ For any other communication, the centrally administered **e-mail account** provided to students – i.e., your "@uwo.ca" email address - 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 Monday - Friday; standard response time is **24 – 48 hours** *excluding weekends*.

☒ When emailing, please put **"GEOG 3414" in the subject line**

☒ If you have **lab specific questions**, attend the **TA office hours** or email your TA

9. Evaluation

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

Assessment	Format	Weighting	Due Date
Podcast Reviews (x 5; independent work)	Written	25% (5% each)	See course schedule for due datess
Participation		5% final course grade • 0.5% for attendance when participation marks are accrued • 0.5% for meaningful contribution to group conversation (when participation marks are accrued)	See course schedule for when participation marks are accrued
Podcast (group work; each member of the group receives the same grade for each component of this assignment)	Multiple	35% of final course grade • proposal: 10% of assignment grade • audio: 50% of assignment grade • script: 20% of assignment grade • annotated bibliography: 20% of final course grade	See course schedule for when different assignment components are due
Midterm Exam[†]	Written (long answer/essay)	12.5%	In class, 1 hr (see course schedule)
Final exam[†]	Written (long answer/essay)	22.5%	Final exam period, 2 hrs

[†]The written exams and their formats, as well as all other evaluation methods identified above, are essential to meeting the learning objectives in the course.

☒ Students are responsible for material covered in the lectures, labs, as well as the assigned readings and podcasts.

☒ **Participation marks are awarded for in-person participation during scheduled lab sessions, which requires physical attendance at the scheduled lab and meaningful contribution to group discussions (see course schedule). Because of the in-person nature of participation, there is no opportunity to 'make up' missed participation marks (1% of course grade per participation session) or to be**

☒ **awarded them in lieu** (e.g., reweighted from a previous week's participation), even in instances due to *minor* unexpected circumstances, such as minor illness, etc.

☒ Except where otherwise indicated, all **assignments are to be typed and submitted in PDF format via OWL by the due date specified**.

☒ Except where otherwise indicated, all **assignments are due at the start of the lab section (@ 11:30 am)** in the week that the lab is indicated as being due. Any assignments submitted **>15 minutes** after the start of a scheduled lab section will be considered late.

- **late penalties = 10% per day, up to a maximum of 48 hrs** (see item immediately below)

☒ **Assignments will be accepted up to 48 hours after their scheduled due date & time,** excluding weekends & holidays. e.g., if your lab is due on Thursday @ 11:30 am, you will have until 11:30 am on Monday to submit it.

☒ After an assessment is returned, students should wait 24 hours to digest feedback before contacting their TA. If you have questions about your grade on any one assignment, please raise this with your TA *first*. To ensure a timely response, reach out within 7 days (i.e., within a week of your lab being handed back to you).

☒ When deemed necessary, virtual proctoring may be used in the delivery of the final exam.

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

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.

Information about late or missed evaluations:

☒ Assignments (labs, term project) will **not** be **accepted for grading more than 48 hours (excluding weekends & holidays) after the scheduled due date & time**. See details below for how this applies to late assignments submitted with and without illness self-reports.

☒ **Late assessments without** formal accommodation will be subject to a late penalty of 10%/24 hour period up to a maximum of 20% (where/when submitted within 48 hours of the scheduled submission deadline).

10. 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

The University recognizes that a student's ability to meet their academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by medical illness. Illness may be acute (short term), or it may be chronic (long term), or chronic with acute episodes. The University further recognizes that medical situations are deeply personal and respects the need for privacy and confidentiality in these matters. However, in order to ensure fairness and consistency for all students, academic accommodation for work representing 10% or more of the student's overall grade in the course shall be granted only in those cases where there is documentation indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet their academic responsibilities. In these instances, an appropriate extension matching the temporality of the formal accommodation will be given. This does not apply to the midterm exam, which if missed will be reweighted towards the final exam pending formal accommodation. The final exam will not be reweighted towards other course components.

For any assessments representing less than 10% of the student's overall grade in the course, students need to contact Dr. Leszczynski. However, as per the details under item 9 above, there will be no opportunity to make up in-person participation marks, nor to have them reweighted towards other weeks' participation.

Policy on Academic Consideration for Medical Illness - Undergraduate Students

Student Medical Certificate (SMC)

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.

11. Make-up Examinations

No makeup will be offered for the midterm exam. All documentation for missed exams must be provided to the Academic Counselling Office within 48 hours of the scheduled exam, otherwise the instructor will assign a grade of zero. If the midterm exam is missed (with approved accommodation from Academic Advising in your home faculty; required for course components worth >10% of course grade), midterm exam will be reweighted to the final exam.

Makeups for the final exam will be granted with approved documentation only. All documentation for missed exams must be provided to the Academic Counselling Office within 48 hours of the scheduled exam, otherwise the instructor will assign a grade of zero.

The format and content of make-ups may differ substantially from the scheduled test or examination.

Note: missed work can only be excused through one of the mechanisms above. Being asked not to attend an in-person course requirement due to potential COVID-19 symptoms is not sufficient on its own. Students should check the Western website to see what directives for Covid are to be followed. Western has been and will continue to follow directives established by the Middlesex-London Health Unit. That directive will state whether students should or should not come to campus/class and any other requirements (e.g., masks are mandatory). Please check on your own and do not email the instructor, the Department Undergraduate Advisor/Coordinator or the Faculty of Social Science Academic Counselling Office.

12.   Use of Electronic Devices

☒ **The use of electronic devices for purposes of photographing and/or recording still images (e.g., photos), video, or audio of lectures or labs is strictly prohibited.** This means that you cannot audio or video record the instructor, TAs, or other members of the lab teaching staff.

- If you require an accommodation on this policy, please contact the instructor (Dr. Leszczynski). For further information about accommodations, please see item 18 (Western's Commitment to Accessibility) below.

☒ **No electronic devices will be allowed during examinations.**

13.   Lecture materials and course content

All course materials – including lecture slides, lecture audio and vide – 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. **Should Dr. Leszczynski become aware that materials are being circulated online, pdfs of lecture slides will cease to be made available.**

14.   How to Be Successful in this Class:

Students enrolled in this class should understand the level of autonomy and self-discipline required to be successful.

1. Invest in a planner or application to keep track of your courses. Populate all your deadlines at the start of the term and schedule time at the start of each week to get organized and manage your time.
2. Make it a daily habit to log onto OWL to ensure you have seen everything posted to help you succeed in this class.
3. Follow weekly checklists created on OWL or create your own to help you stay on track.

4. Take notes as you go through the lesson material. Keeping handwritten notes or even notes on a regular Word document will help you learn more effectively.
5. Connect with others. Try forming a study group and try meeting on a weekly basis for study and peer support.
6. Do not be afraid to ask questions. If you are struggling with a topic, check the online discussion boards or contact your instructor(s) and or teaching assistant(s).
7. Reward yourself for successes. It seems easier to motivate ourselves knowing that there is something waiting for us at the end of the task.

15. Western's Commitment to Accessibility

The Department of Geography and Environment 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.

16. 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.

17. Support Services

Western's Support Services
Student Development Centre

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html.

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

18. Important Dates

September 7: Classes resume
September 15: Last day to add a first term half course
October 9: Thanksgiving Holiday – Department Office Closed
October 30-November 5: Fall Reading Week (No classes; Department Office open)
November 13: Last day to drop a first term half course without penalty
November 30: Last day to drop a full course without penalty

December 8: Classes end
December 9: Study day
December 10-22: Examination Period