

GEOG 3414B – Digital Technology, Society & The Environment

Course Syllabus*: Winter 2025

This course is taught in-person

*Syllabus subject to change

1. Course Information



	Delivery Mode
Lecture	In-person
Lab	In-person

^{*}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
January 6	February 17-23	April 4	April 5 & 6	April 7-30

January 14, 2025: Last day to add a second-term half course

February 17, 2025: Family Day

March 7, 2025: Last day to drop a second term half course without penalty

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



- 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 through which technologies are framed.
- Critically evaluate the merits of competing claims about technologies and their potential social and environmental consequences.
- Understand digital technologies, infrastructures, and services as both social and environmental phenomena.



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 the new OWL Brightspace learning environment: https://westernu.brightspace.com/d2l/home. Any changes will be indicated on the OWL site and discussed with the class.

Current versions of all popular browsers (e.g., Safari, Chrome, Edge, Firefox) are supported with OWL Brightspace; what is most important is that you update your browser frequently to ensure it is current. All JavaScript and cookies should be enabled.

If students need assistance, they can seek support on the <u>OWL Brightspace Help page</u>. Alternatively, they can contact the <u>Western Technology Services Helpdesk</u>. 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 Jan 8 th	Course Overview & Introduction	NO LAB		
Week 2 • Lec: Weds Jan 15 th • Lab:	The Cloud (aka Data Centres)	Podcast team member "round robin" (think of this as 'speed dating' to identify team members for your podcast group) *Those who do not show		
Thurs Sept 21 st		up in person will be randomly assigned to a group		
Week 3 • Lec: Weds Jan 22 nd	Cryptocurrency mining	Term Project Specifics (led by Instructor)		
• Lab: Thurs Jan 23 rd				

Week	Lecture Topic	Lab Activity	Notes	Podcast Progress "Benchmarks"
Week 4 • Lec: Weds Jan 29 th • Lab: Thurs Jan 30 th	Al Pt I - Environment	Podcast team group work: brainstorming podcast topic and idea		Your team should collectively decide on a tentative topic by the end of this week
Week 5 • Lec: Weds Feb 5 th • Lab: Thurs Feb 6 th	Ridehailing	Group Discussion (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 @ 12:30 pm Tues Feb 4 th	Your team should decide on audio (vocal) roles for each team member by the end of this week
Week 6 • Lec: Weds Feb 12 th • Lab: Thurs Feb 13 th	MIDTERM EXAM (1 hr, in- class)	Podcast team group work: working on podcast proposal		You should be working towards your podcast proposals, which are due @ start of lab the week after reading week
FEB 17 - 23		WINTER READI	NG WEEK	
Week 7 • Lec: Weds Feb 26 th • Lab: Thurs Feb 27 th	Micromobilities	Group Discussion (led by TA): Podcast structures, based on Podcast Review #2 (see Notes for this week) • participation points accrued this week	 Podcast Review #2 due @ 12:30 pm Tues Feb 25th Group podcast proposals due @ start of lab this week 	

Week	Lecture Topic	Lab Activity	Notes	Podcast Progress "Benchmarks"
Week 8 • Lec: Weds Mar 5 th • Lab: Thurs Mar 6 th	The Gig Economy	Group Discussion (led by TA): Ways of enrolling evidence in podcasts, based on Podcast Review #3 (see Notes for this week) • participation points accrued this week	Podcast Review #3 due @ 12:30 pm Tues Mar 4 th	
Week 9 • Lec: Weds Mar 12 th • Lab: Thurs Mar 13 th	On-Demand Delivery	Group Discussion (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 @ 12:30 pm Tues Mar 11 th	Your 'script' should be more or less finalized by the end of this week
Week 10 • Lec: Weds Mar 19 th • Lab: Thurs Mar 20 th	AI Pt II - Society	Group Discussion (led by TA): Podcast audiences, based on Podcast Review #5 (see Notes for this week) • participation points accrued this week	• Podcast Review #5 due @ 12:30 pm Tues Mar 18 th	
Week 11 • Lec: - • Lab: Thurs Mar 27 th	No Lecture; Professor Away @ Conference	Podcast team group work: time dedicated to finalizing recording/producing	PODCAST AUDIO DUE via OWL @ 4 pm on Thurs Mar 27 th	Podcast audio due @ end of this week
Week 12 • Lec: Weds Apr 4 th • Lab: Thurs Apr 5th	Short-Term Rentals	Podcast peer review *this is an in-lab activity that must be attended in person	 Annotated bibliography & podcast script due via OWL @ 4 pm on Thurs Apr 3rd 	

7. Readings and Podcasts



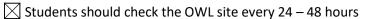


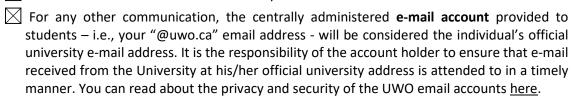
Week	Topic	Readings and Podcasts				
Week 1	Intro	• N/A				
Week 2	The Cloud	 Readings: Hogan M (2018) Big data ecologies. Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization 18(3): 631-657. Podcast (see next page): Spark (CBC Podcasts), Episode 557 (2022). "Data centres in a time of crisis". https://pca.st/g9421nit 				
Week 3	Cryptocurrency Mining	Lally N, Kay K & Thatcher J (2022) Computational parasites and hydropower: A political ecology of bitcoin mining on the Columbia River. <i>Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space</i> 5(1): 18-38. Podcast:				
		 A Matter of Degrees, Season 3 Episode 5. "Crypto has a climate problem". <u>tinyurl.com/2p96dx9w</u> 				
Week 4	AI Pt I	 Readings: No readings for this week; instead, 3 podcasts (see below) Podcasts: Make Me Smart (Marketplace APM, 2022). "What's going on with AI?". tinyurl.com/mrxvj557 				
		 Marketplace Tech (APM, 2024) "Al's appetite for electric power fuels interest in nuclear option" https://tinyurl.com/3k6cdbwu Marketplace Tech (APM, 2024) "How Big Tech is courting Big Oil" https://tinyurl.com/msxnybyk 				
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. Podcasts: Marketplace (APM, 2021). "How ride-hailing accelerates climate change" tinyurl.com/mryakxcb 				

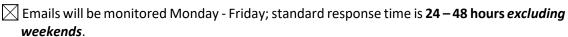
Week	Торіс	Readings and Podcasts			
Week 6	N/A	MIDTERM (no readings/podcasts this week)			
Week 7	Micromobilities	 Readings: Kong V & Leszczynski A (2022) Dockless micromobility sharing in Calgary: A spatial equity comparison of e-bikes and e-scooters. Canadian Journal of Urban Research 31(1): 97-110. Podcast: Marketplace (APM, 2018) "Scooters could improve mobility in low-income areas, but have an image problem" tinyurl.com/3jtpsuxb 			
Week 8	Gig Economy	 Readings: Orth, B. (2024). Stratified pathways into platform work: Migration trajectories and skills in Berlin's gig economy. Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space 56(2): 476-490. Podcast: Eh Sayers (Statistics Canada, 2022) "Who Wins and Who Loses in the Gig Economy?".			
Week 9	On-demand Delivery	 Reading: Richardson L (2020) Coordinating the city: platforms as flexible spatial arrangements. <i>Urban Geography</i> 41(3): 458–461. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2020.1717027 Podcasts: The Journal (WSJ, 2021) Can Food Delivery Make Money? https://tinyurl.com/bdfk7z63 Marketplace (APM, 2022) Could food delivery apps help close the "grocery gap"? https://tinyurl.com/4f3kxes5 			

Week	Topic	Readings and Podcasts			
Week 10	Al Pt II - Society	 Reading: Crawford K (2021) <u>Atlas of Al</u>. New Haven, London: Yale University Press. Read Chapter 2: Labour. Podcast: 1A (NPR, 2023) The Human Labour Powering Al Engines. https://tinyurl.com/yc5ntcua 			
Week 11	Professor away @ conference	• N/A			
Week 12	Short-Term rentals	 Reading: Wachsmuth D & Weisler A (2018) Airbnb and the rent gap:			

8. Communication







- 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 dates
Participation (x 4; 5 opportunities, best 4/5 counted towards grade)	Oral participation	 4% final course grade (1% each). Per each lab session where participation marks are accrued: 0.5% for attendance 0.5% for meaningful contribution to group conversation 	See course schedule for when participation marks are accrued
'In The Media' Presentation (team work [2- person pair])	Oral/visual presentation	5%	
Podcast Research Assignment (group work; each member of the group receives the same grade for each component of this assignment)	Multiple	 30% 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%	In class, 1 hr (see course schedule)
Final exam [†]	Written (long answer/essay)	24%	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. As such, alternative assessment formats will <u>not</u> be offered in lieu of the evaluation methods listed immediately above.

Stude	ents are respo	nsible for materia	al covered in th	e lectures,	labs,	as well a	as the	assigned	readings
and p	odcasts.								

\boxtimes	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 item 6 - Course Schedule). Only the top 4 of 5 opportunities for participation are counted
	towards a student's final grade.

\boxtimes	Except where otherwise indicated,	all written	assignments are t	o be typed and	submitted in	PDF
	format via OWL by the due date spe	cified.				

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).

Click <u>here</u> 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
Α	80-89	Superior work which is clearly above average
В	70-79	Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
С	60-69	Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50-59	Fair work, minimally acceptable
F	below 50	Fail

Grades <u>will not be adjusted</u> 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.

10. Information about Late or Missed Assessments and Evaluations

General information about missed work:

University policy on academic considerations are described here. This policy requires that all requests for academic considerations must be accompanied by a self-attestation. Further information about academic considerations, and information about submitting this self-attestation with your academic consideration request may be found here.

Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline.

Podcast reviews will be accepted up to 48 hours after their scheduled due date & time, excluding weekends & holidays. Assignments will not be accepted for grading beyond the 48-hour submission window.

Because the submission deadline for this assessment already includes flexibility in the form of a 48-hour submission window, requests for academic consideration for assignments which are submitted following the end of the period of flexibility will be denied. This includes the use of undocumented, self-attested accommodation requests. These cannot be used to extend the already-flexible 48-hours submission window for this assessment.

Where a student receives documented academic considerations or academic accommodations which overlap with the built-in flexibility of the assessment, the longest period of accommodation will determine the deadline. Here too the built-in flexibility of the assessment should not be taken to extend any considerations or accommodations.

This course has 5 scheduled opportunities for accruing in-person participation marks during 5 designated lab sections between weeks 5-10. Only 4/5 participation marks count towards your final grade. As such, requests for academic consideration for missed opportunities for scheduled in-class participation will be denied. This includes the use of undocumented, self-attested accommodation requests. If students miss more than 1 opportunity to participate in lab, they will receive a grade of 0 on each missed participation opportunity.

This course has a midterm exam scheduled in Week 6.

No makeup exam will be offered for the midterm. If a student does not write the midterm exam, it will automatically be reweighted towards the final exam, which will count for 36% of the student's final course grade.

This course has an in-person presentation component to be delivered in the lab sections.

If a presenting pair miss their scheduled presentation date (to be determined), they will automatically be rescheduled to present in lab in the subsequent week in which an in-person lab session is scheduled. Because of this built-in flexibility in the scheduling of presentations, if either or both of the pair miss their rescheduled presentation date, requests for academic consideration will be denied. This includes the use of undocumented, self-attested accommodation requests.

The Podcast Research Assignment has a Formal Documentation Designation. It is considered to be central to the learning objectives for this course. Accordingly, students seeking academic consideration for this all components of this assessment — including audio, annotated bibliography, and script - will be required to provide formal supporting documentation. Students who are granted academic consideration for this assessment will be provided with the opportunity to submit their work up to 48 hours beyond the original submission deadline, with a 10% penalty (10% of achieved grade) per each 24 hours (for a total of 20%). This penalty will apply to all members of a podcast group, as this is a group work assignment.

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: Accommodation for Students with Disabilities.

Absence from Course Commitments

Students must familiarize themselves with the <u>Policy on Academic Consideration</u> – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs

Students missing course work for medical, compassionate or extenuating circumstances can request academic consideration by completing a request at the central academic consideration portal. Students are permitted one academic consideration request per course per term without supporting documentation. Note that supporting documentation is **always** required for academic consideration requests for examinations scheduled by the office of the registrar (e.g. December and April exams) and for practical laboratory and performance tests typically schedule during the last week of the term. Students should also note that the instructor may designate one assessment per course per term that requires supporting documentation. This designated assessment is described elsewhere in this document. Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor of this course, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline. Supporting documentation for academic considerations for absences due to illness should use the <u>Student Medical Certificate</u> or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation by a health care practitioner.

Course Assessments that Require Supporting Documentation

As per **item 10 above**, for this course the following assessment has been designated as requiring supporting documentation:

Podcast Research Assignment, with due dates on Thursday March 27th (audio component) and Thursday April 3rd (annotated bibliography and script components).

Academic Consideration for Course Components with Flexible Deadlines

This course employs flexibility assignment submission and completion. The assignment deadlines can be found above in the course outline (item 6 – Course Schedule). Details about flexibility in assessment submission are provided for each assignment type under item 10 – Information About Late or Missed Assessments and Evaluations.

As flexible assessment policies are in use in this course, requests for academic consideration – including self-attested undocumented accommodation requests – will not be granted. If you have a long-term academic consideration or an accommodation for disability, it is your responsibility to contact your instructor about extended deadlines, etc.

Accommodation for Religious Holidays

Students should review the policy for <u>Accommodation for Religious Holidays</u>. Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but not later than two weeks prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

12. Make-up Examinations

No makeup will be offered for the midterm exam. If the midterm exam is missed, the midterm exam will be reweighted to the final exam. See **item 10** for more information.

Makeups for the final exam will be granted with approved documentation only. All documentation for missed final 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.

13. 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. For further information about accommodations, please see item 18 (Western's Commitment to Accessibility) below.
- No electronic devices will be allowed during examinations.

14. Lecture Materials and Course Content

All course materials – including lecture slides, lecture audio and video – 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 the Instructor become aware that materials are being circulated online, pdfs of lecture slides will cease to be made available.

15. 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.

- 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.
- 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.

16. Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a <u>Scholastic Offence</u>.

The use of generative AI is not permitted in this course. It may not be used to complete, in whole or in part, any component of assessed work in this course.

Written assessments including the podcast script and annotated bibliography will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All work submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (http://www.turnitin.com).

17. 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. <u>Information regarding accommodation of exams</u> is available on the Registrar's website.

More information about "Accessibility at Western" is available.

18. 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 <u>Health and Wellness website</u> for more information on mental health resources.

19. 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.

20. Important Dates

Monday January 6: Classes resume

Tuesday January 14: Last day to add a second term half course Monday February 17: Family Day – Department Office Closed

February 17-23: Spring Reading Week (No classes; Department Office open)

Friday March 7: Last day to drop a second term half course

Friday April 4: Classes end April 5 and 6: Study days

April 7-30: Examination Period