

CSC356: Platform Activism

Smith College [Fall 2022]

Instructor

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Place & Time

Ford 345

Mondays

Usually 1:40-4:20pm

Occasionally 7:00-9:30pm

Course Overview

Networked platforms like social media sites, gig sharing apps, and game consoles have become important spaces for grassroots activism, but human-computer interaction (HCI) researchers continue to grapple with the question of how our work can be used to effect positive social change online. In CSC356 you will have the opportunity to:

- Examine how platforms shape our creative labor & communication
- Develop a critical perspective on the power of big tech
- Contrast approaches from HCI activists
- Practice participatory design with a grassroots community
- Build & release a new tech intervention on a media platform

Format & Workload

Class meets weekly on Monday afternoons, except once a month when it will be held in the evening. Those evening meetings will be marked on Moodle and announced the week prior with a reminder sent the day before. Classes will follow a **seminar format**. We will begin with a 90-minute student-led discussion of the week's readings, then after a break we will reconvene to workshop our research. Expect to spend **9 hours per week outside of class** on your readings and project assignments.

Reading Discussions & Research Projects

During this course you will critically discuss a selection of readings and complete a major project related to platform activism. You will be expected to **read 2-3 papers each week** and pose a question, reflection or topic for discussion in our Discord server. Thrice during the semester you will **act as a discussant** who leads our class meeting by drawing on the group's reflections or be **designated as a scribe** to record the content of the discussion.

You will use the knowledge you build from critically reflecting on the readings to inform the focus of your research project. Working either as individuals or in pairs, you will propose and **complete a research study or design intervention**. You may choose to undertake a literature review, conduct a community study, or build and launch a prototype. Regardless of the form, you will write a **3,000-4,000 word paper about your project** that you will present for discussion during our final meeting.

Weekly Schedule

Week	Date	Topic, Readings, Discussants & Project Due Dates
1	Sep. 5	[Labor Day]
2	Sep. 12	Welcome & Introduction
3	Sep. 19	<p>How Platforms Shape What Society Sees: The Algorithmic Lens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Twitter and Tear Gas Chap. 6: Platforms and Algorithms</i> Zeynep Tufekci (2017) • <i>Custodians of the Internet Chap. 6: Facebook, Breastfeeding, Suspension</i> Tarleton Gillespie (2018) <p>Discussants: Mariem, Sami Scribes: Connie, Christina</p>
4	Sep. 26	<p>How Platforms Hide the Humans Powering Them: The Legions of Oz</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Custodians of the Internet Chap. 5: The Human Labor of Moderation</i> Tarleton Gillespie (2018) • <i>Ghost Work Chap. 1: Humans in the Loop</i> Mary L. Gray and Siddharth Suri (2019) <p>Discussants: Meredith, Catherine Scribes: Helen, Jeriko</p>
5	Oct. 3	<p>How Platforms Harness Creative Labor: The Panoptic Ouroboros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Bit by (Twitch) Bit: "Platform Capture" and the Evolution of Digital Platforms</i> William Clyde Partin (2020) • <i>Cultures of Precarity and "Grinding" for Audiences on Twitch.tv</i> Charlotte Panneton (2023) • <i>Seeing Like the Streamers: Reprogramming the Panopticon</i> Johanna Brewer (2023) <p>Discussants: Sam, Madeleine Scribes: Asher, Carolyn</p>
6	Oct. 10	[Autumn Recess]
7	Oct. 17	<p>Platforms, Resistance, and the Power of Storytelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hollaback! The Role of Storytelling Online in a Social Movement Organization</i> Jill Dimond, Michaelanne Dye, Daphne LaRose, Amy Bruckman (2013) • <i>Design Justice Chap. 3: Design Narratives: From TXTMob to Twitter</i> Sasha Costanza-Chock (2020) <p>Discussants: Brenda, Karen Scribes: Mariem, Madeleine</p> <p>Site/Topic Selection (Due: 10/16)</p>
8	Oct. 24	<p>The Aspirations and Failings of Participatory Design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Design Matters in Participatory Design</i> Liam J. Bannon, Pelle Ehn (2012) • <i>Design Justice Chap. 2: Design Practices: "Nothing About Us Without Us"</i> Sasha Costanza-Chock (2020) <p>Discussants: Christina, Jeriko Scribes: Winnie, Sami</p> <p>Project Proposal (Due: 10/23)</p>

9	Oct. 31	<p>Supporting Grassroots Communication with Novel Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Turkopticon: Interrupting Worker Invisibility in Amazon Mechanical Turk</i> Lilly Irani and M. Six Silberman (2013) • <i>"We Come Together as One...and Hope for Solidarity to Live On": On Designing Technologies for Activism and the Commemoration of Lost Lives</i> Angelika Strohmayer, Janis Lena Meissner, Alexander Wilson, Sarah Charlton, Laura McIntyre (2020) <p>Discussants: Karen, Helen Scribes: Brenda, Asher</p>
10	Nov. 7	<p>Sending in the Good Bots</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Botivist: Calling Volunteers to Action Using Online Bots</i> Saiph Savage, Andrés Monroy-Hernández, Tobias Höllerer (2016) • <i>Bot-Based Collective Blocklists in Twitter: The Counterpublic Moderation of Harassment in a Networked Public Space</i> R. Stuart Geiger (2016) <p>Discussants: Winnie, Carolyn Scribes: Sam, Christina</p>
11	Nov. 14	<p>Channeling Community Power to Shut Down Harassment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Classification and Its Consequences for Online Harassment: Design Insights from HeartMob</i> Lindsay Blackwell, Jill Dimond, Sarita Schoenebeck, Cliff Lampe (2017) • <i>Inclusion at Scale: Deploying a Community-Driven Moderation Intervention on Twitch</i> Johanna Brewer, Morgan Romine, T.L. Taylor (2020) <p>Discussants: Connie, Mariem Scribes: Carolyn, Meredith</p>
12	Nov. 21	<p>From Perfunctory Participation to Equitable Engagements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Participation Is Not Enough": Towards Indigenous-Led Co-Design</i> Dorian Peters, Susan Hansen, Jenny McMullan, Teresa Ardler, Janet Mooney, Rafael A. Calvo (2018) • <i>Deconstructing Community-Based Collaborative Design: Towards More Equitable Participatory Design Engagements</i> Christina Harrington, Sheena Erete, Anne Marie Piper (2019) <p>Discussants: Catherine, Helen Scribes: Sami, Karen</p> <p>Rough Draft (Due: 11/20)</p>
13	Nov. 28	<p>Confronting Systemic Erasure in and through HCI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Patching Gender: Non-binary Utopias in HCI</i> Katta Spiel, Os Keyes, and Pinar Barlas (2019) • <i>Living Disability Theory: Reflections on Access, Research, and Design</i> Megan Hofmann, Devva Kasnitz, Jennifer Mankoff, and Cynthia L Bennett (2020) • <i>I Can't Breathe: Reflections from Black Women in CSCW and HCI</i> Sheena Erete, Yolanda A. Rankin, and Jakita O. Thomas (2021) <p>Discussants: Asher, Brenda Scribes: Madeleine, Connie</p>

14	Dec. 5	<p>Emerging HCI Frameworks for Substantive Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Critical Race Theory for HCI</i> Ihudiya Finda Ogbonnaya-Ogburu, Angela D. R. Smith, Alexandra To, Kentaro Toyama (2020) • <i>Anti-Racist HCI: notes on an emerging critical technical practice</i> Veronica Abebe, Gagik Amaryan, Marina Beshai, Ilene, Ali Ekin Gurgen, Wendy Ho, Naaji R. Hylton, Daniel Kim, Christy Lee, Carina Lewandowski, Katherine T. Miller, Lindsey A. Moore, Rachel Sylwester, Ethan Thai, Frelicia N. Tucker, Toussaint Webb, Dorothy Zhao, Haicheng Charles Zhao, and Janet Vertesi (2022) <p>Discussants: Meredith, Jeriko, Winnie Scribes: Catherine, Sam</p>
15	Dec. 12	<p>Research Project Presentations</p> <p>Final Paper (Due: 12/11)</p>

Communication

All online communication for this course will take place **via Discord**. If you do not already have an account, please create one. **Join our server**, then follow the instructions in the **#welcome** channel to set your nickname and pronouns.

CSC356-F22 Server Invitation: <https://discord.gg/bauEg97mjD>

- **#announcements:** Important notices about class times, deadlines, office hours, etc.
- **#general:** Introduce yourself and discuss course-related material, off-topic ideas, etc.
- **#reflections:** Share your reactions, thoughts, or questions about the weekly readings.
- **DMs:** Message me directly for matters that require individual communication.

I will try to answer time-sensitive messages within 24hrs during the work week, but please try to bring your questions to the group when possible. Chances are, someone else has been wondering the same thing. Sometimes I miss DMs, so don't be shy about pinging me again if you're waiting on a reply. Lastly, please note that I'm terrible at responding to email. I'll read it, but you'll either get a reply right away, or between two days and two years later.

Office Hours

Office hours are a time when you can **ask me questions about... anything!** Weekly hours are for any student who would like to chat with me and I hold them on a rotating schedule. To see upcoming office hours and ensure you get a slot, please **book a time via Calendly**. By default your visit will be scheduled **remotely on Gather** but I will announce during class the weeks when you are also welcome to attend office hours in person.

Reserve Time via Calendly: <https://calendly.com/johannabrewer>

Virtual Meetings on Gather: <https://gather.town/app/NfY57eEoJJb22wzP/InclusiveDesignLab>

Grading

This course follows an **“ungrading” approach**. You will receive qualitative feedback throughout the semester and only final papers will be formally graded. Additionally, you will be asked to **review your own performance** and weigh in on your final letter grade. Your overall assessment will be weighted to reflect the workload.

- 50% Research project
- 25% Reading reflections & class participation
- 25% Discussant duties & scribe service

Your success in this class will depend on **active engagement** with both the material and each other because platform activism is a group effort. To do well, you must demonstrate that you are working to master both **critical reflection and collective action**.

Academic Integrity

Most of the work for this class will be completed individually or in pairs. Regardless of the assignment, if you assist one another, either as a teammate or peer reviewer, you must **acknowledge your collaborators**. Likewise, I expect you to always **cite all sources** used in the preparation of your research project. This includes not only scholarly books, papers, and articles but also online magazines, YouTube videos, social media posts, etc.

Participation & Absences

Though formal attendance will not be taken, you won't be able to fully participate in class if you are not there. We only meet thirteen times so **your presence in each class matters**. You should **make arrangements with me in advance** of a planned absence, especially if you have discussant or scribe duties. If you have an emergency, inform me after you are safe. If you must isolate for health reasons, you may **ask to join via Gather**. Regardless, please remember to **stay home if you feel unwell**.

Extensions & Lateness

It is essential you complete your **work in a timely fashion** in order to meaningfully participate in the class discussions. **Late is always better than never** but you should expect delayed feedback on work submitted after the deadline. Extensions for the final paper will only be given in cases where the student's Dean provides a written request

Comfy Class Policies

Laptops and phones can be distracting, but they are important tools for us. Please avoid using your devices in class for purposes other than coursework. Hydration is essential, so bring beverages, but you must use **closed containers** to avoid spills. We will have a break during which you can have a snack, but please **refrain from eating** during class. Everyone is welcome to use **concentration accommodations** like fidget toys, knitting, doodling, standing up, or moving around; just be mindful not to disrupt the conversation.

Fostering Respect & Inclusion

During this course we will engage in intense scholarly discussions. When communicating with one another, I expect you to practice **active listening**. When someone is talking, focus on understanding what they are expressing rather than thinking of how you will respond. Additionally, keep in mind that our wide array of individual backgrounds shape our unique perspectives, so please **respect one another** when we have sincere differences of opinion.

Diversity Statement & Equity Commitment

As a mixed-race, Native, non-binary, neurodivergent person who was the first in their family to earn a doctoral degree, I have stake in bettering, and a first-hand knowledge regarding, the experience of marginalized folks in our society. I know that a welcoming learning environment can have a real impact, and so I am committed to making this **classroom a comfortable place** for all my students. Please let me know if you ever have thoughts, questions, or concerns about ensuring that we **treat one another equitably**.

Accessibility & Accommodations

Learning and teaching while masked has been a challenge for all. You are welcome to use a live captioning app on your mobile device if it increases your ability to understand when others speak. Course materials including readings, slides, and lecture notes will be provided as PDFs that are screen reader compatible. If you have any issues accessing the materials, let me know as soon as possible and I will work to find a solution. Should you encounter barriers to participation in this or any other course, please reach out to Laura Rauscher, **Director of Disability Services, by calling (413) 585-2071** to make an appointment to discuss support and accommodations.

Health Resources

College can be stressful, even more so in the midst of a pandemic, but you are not alone. Please reach out for help if you are feeling unwell or overwhelmed. The Schacht Center on campus provides a variety of **free & confidential** health and counseling services. You can email healthservices@smith.edu or call (413) 585-2250 for any medical concerns. To set up an appointment for mental health support you can email counselingservices@smith.edu or **call (413) 585-2840 if you are in crisis**.

Acknowledgments

Some of the conceptualization for this course was inspired by previous classes at Smith and other institutions. Thanks to my academic colleagues for sharing their syllabi.