

Data, Politics, and Power: Critical and Ethical Perspectives on Big Data and Algorithms (INSC 598 A)

Instructor: Dr. Anna Lauren Hoffmann

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Office: MGH 330H

Office hours: W, 3:00 PM - 4:30 PM

Class meeting times: MW, 3:30 PM - 5:20 PM

Class location: EEB 042

Course Description

This graduate seminar will ground students in critical social and theoretical concepts for evaluating—and normatively assessing—the data scientific practices and algorithmic processes that pervade our lives. The seminar’s frame is three-fold: biopolitics, power, and forms of administrative violence; historical perspectives on the rise and role of data-based and statistical knowledge in shaping lives and life chances; current perspectives on the role of big data and algorithms in the normative construction of bodies and identities.

Student Outcomes/Learning Goals

Upon completion of the course, students will:

- Possess a working knowledge of the selected theoretical and historical perspectives presented in the course.
- Be able to connect emerging issues in big data to longer-standing theories, debates, and frameworks.
- Improve in their ability to critically engage (connect and critique) selected scholarly debates around data, power, and society today.

Required Course Materials

Foucault, M. (1976). *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (vol. 1). New York, NY: Random House.

All other readings will be made available on Canvas.

Assignments

During the quarter, students will be evaluated on the following:

- *Attendance & Participation* (20%): Students should attend all classes and actively participate in in class discussions and exercises. (More detail on attendance policy below.)
- *In-Class Reflection Writing* (10%): Each week, a small amount of class time will be set aside for written reflection. (These reflections will be shared with the instructor and evaluated on a “did do/did not do” basis.)
- *Discussion Opener* (20%): Starting with Week 4, students will introduce and open discussion on one selected reading during the quarter. This should include a short written summary and outline to be shared with the class.
- *Abstract & Annotated Bibliography* (20%): Midway through the quarter, students will submit a paper abstract as well as a short, annotated bibliography. This assignment will serve as a proposal for the final paper.
- *Final paper* (30%): At the end of the term, students will submit a final scholarly paper relevant to both the course topic and the student’s own individual research/theoretical interests. The paper need not be itself publishable, but it should strive to be eventually publishable or presentable (as a journal article, conference paper, theory section of a dissertation or book, etc...).*

*Alternatives to the abstract and final paper assignments may be negotiated with the instructor, so long as the alternative: 1) is of equivalent rigor and effort and 2) clearly dovetails with the student’s personal and professional goals.

More detailed information for each assignment will be available on Canvas.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Big Data - Questions & Dilemmas

THURSDAY (09/21)

- boyd, d., & Crawford, K. (2012). Critical questions for big data. *Information, Communication and Society*, 15(5), 662–679.
- Ekbia, H., Mattioli, M., Kouper, I., Arave, G., Ghazinejad, A., Bowman, T., ... Sugimoto, C. R. (2015). Big Data, Bigger Dilemmas: A Critical Review. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 66(8), 1523–1545.
- Kitchin, R. (2014). Big Data, new epistemologies and paradigm shifts. *Big Data & Society*, 1(1), 1–12.

Week 2: Foucault, Discipline, & Biopower

TUESDAY (10/03)

- Foucault, M. (1975). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York, NY: Random House. (Read provided selection on "Panopticism" from Scharff, R. C., & Dusek, V. (Eds.). (2003). *Philosophy of Technology: The Technological Condition - An Anthology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.)
- Foucault, M. (1976). *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. New York, NY: Random House.
(Skim parts 1-3 [pp. 1-74]; concentrate on part 4 [pp. 75-132].)

Optional:

- Foucault, M. (2003). *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France 1975--1976*. New York, NY: Picador. (For more on the genesis of biopower in Foucault's work, especially lecture 11.)
- McHoul, A., & Grace, W. (1993). *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power, and the Subject*. New York, NY: New York University Press. (Ch. 1 & 3, if you'd like some extra help navigating the week.)

THURSDAY (10/05)

- Foucault, M. (1976). *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. New York, NY: Random House.
(Read part 5 [pp. 133-160].)
- Foucault, M. (2009). *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*. New York, NY: Picador. (Read lectures 1 & 3)

Week 3: Grappling with Foucault

TUESDAY (10/10)

- Collier, S. J. (2009). Topologies of Power: Foucault's Analysis of Political Government beyond 'Governmentality.' *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26(6), 78–108.
- Rouse, J. (2005). Power/Knowledge. In G. Gutting (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (pp. 95-122). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge.
- Patton, P. (2015). Power and Biopower in Foucault. In V. W. Cisney & N. Morar (Eds.), *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond* (pp. 102–120). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

THURSDAY (10/12)

- Butler, J. (2004). Bodies and Power Revisited. In D. Taylor & K. Vintges (Eds.), *Feminism and the Final Foucault* (pp. 183–196). University of Illinois Press.
- Stoller, A.L. (2015). A Colonial Reading of Foucault: Bourgeois Bodies and Racial Selves. In V. W. Cisney & N. Morar (Eds.), *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond* (pp. 326–347). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Week 4: Power, Numbers, & Norms

TUESDAY (10/17)

- Desrosières, A. (2002). *The Politics of Large Numbers: A History of Statistical Reasoning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Intro & Ch. 1)
- Hacking, I. (2015). Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers. In V. W. Cisney & N. Morar (Eds.), *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond* (pp. 65–81). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

THURSDAY (10/19)

- Desrosières, A. (2002). *The Politics of Large Numbers: A History of Statistical Reasoning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Ch. 8)
- Davis, L.J. (1995). *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. London, UK: Verso. (Ch. 2)

Optional:

- Bowker, G., & Star, S. L. (1999). *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Ch. 1)

Week 5: Bodies, Censuses, & Papers

TUESDAY (10/24)

- Kertzer, D. I., & Arel, D. (2002). Censuses, Identity Formation, and the Struggle for Political Power. In D. I. Kertzer & D. Arel (Eds.), *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses* (pp. 1–42). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Torpey, J. (2000). *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State*. Cambridge University Press. (Ch. 4)
- Thompson, D. (2015). What Lies Beneath: Equality and the Making of Racial Classifications. *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 31(02), 114–136.
- Bowker, G., & Star, S. L. (1999). *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Ch. 6)

THURSDAY (10/26)

- Writing break; no class.

Week 6: Data, Digitization, & Corporate Power

TUESDAY (10/31)

- Gandy, O.H. (1993). *The Panoptic Sort: A Political Economy of Personal Information*. Boulder, CO: Westview. (Ch. 1-3 [you can just skim Ch. 2])
- Lyon, D. (1994). *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. (Ch. 3)

THURSDAY (11/02)

- Graham, S., & Wood, D. (2003). Digitizing Surveillance: Categorization, Space, Inequality. *Critical Social Policy*, 23(2), 227–248.
- van Dijck. (n.d.). Datafication, dataism and dataveillance: Big Data between scientific paradigm and ideology. *Surveillance & Society*, 12(2), 197–208.
- Thatcher, J., O’Sullivan, D., & Mahmoudi, D. (2016). Data colonialism through accumulation by dispossession: New metaphors for daily data. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 1–17.

Week 7: Power in the Algorithm

TUESDAY (11/07)

- Rouvroy, A., & Berns, T. (2013). Algorithmic governmentality and prospects of emancipation. *Réseaux*, No 177(1), 163–196.
- Bucher, T. (2012). Want to be on the top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook. *New Media & Society*, 14(7), 1164–1180.

Optional:

- Gillespie, T. (2014). The relevance of algorithms. In T. Gillespie, P. J. Boczkowski, & K. A. Foot (Eds.), *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society* (pp. 167–194). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (If you need a good intro into the critical and cultural study of algorithms.)

THURSDAY (11/09)

- Cheney-Lippold, J. (2011). A New Algorithmic Identity: Soft Biopolitics and the Modulation of Control. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28(6), 164–181.
- de Vries, K. (2010). Identity, profiling algorithms and a world of ambient intelligence. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 12(1), 71–85.

Week 8: Data, Security, & Freedom

TUESDAY (11/14)

- Ralph, M. (2012). “Life...in the midst of death”: Notes on the Relationship Between Slave Insurance, Life Insurance and Disability. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 32(3), n.p.
- Spade, D. (2015). *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. (Ch. 4)
- Levy, K. E. C. (2015). The Contexts of Control: Information, Power, and Truck-Driving Work. *The Information Society*, 31(2), 160–174.

Optional:

- O’Neil, C. (2016). *Weapons of math destruction: how big data increases inequality and threatens democracy*. New York, NY: Crown.

THURSDAY (11/16)

- Amoores, L. (2006). Biometric borders: Governing mobilities in the war on terror. *Political Geography*, 25(3), 336–351.
- Browne, S. (2015). *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. (Ch. 4)
- Beauchamp, T. (2009). Artful Concealment and Strategic Visibility: Transgender Bodies and U.S. State Surveillance After 9/11. *Surveillance & Society*, 6(4), 356–366.

Optional

- Hall, R. (2015). *The Transparent Traveler: The Performance and Culture of Airport Security*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. (Ch. 3)

Week 9: Postscript

TUESDAY (11/21)

- Deleuze, G. (1992). Postscript on the Societies of Control. *October*, 59, 3–7.

THURSDAY (11/23)

- Thanksgiving Break; no class.

Week 10: Working Week

TUESDAY (11/28)

- Individual meetings w/ Dr. Hoffmann

THURSDAY (11/30)

- Writing day; no class.

Week 11: Workshopping Week

TUESDAY (12/05)

- Peer Paper Workshops

THURSDAY (12/07)

- Peer Paper Workshops

Week 12: Finals Week

- No final exam. Final papers due Tuesday, 12/12/17 at 12 PM.

Grading

Work will be evaluated according to a 4.0 grading scale, as set forth by the University. The scale is as follows:

Letter	Number	Letter	Number
A	4.0-3.9	C	2.1-1.9
A-	3.8-3.5	C-	1.8-1.5
B+	3.4-3.2	D+	1.4-1.2
B	3.1-2.9	D	1.1-0.9
B-	2.8-2.5	D-	0.8-0.7
C+	2.4-2.2	E	0.6-0.0

(Final grades will be rounded to the nearest tenth of a point above. For example, both 3.41 and 3.47 would be rounded up 3.5.)

Attendance Policy

Students will be granted one unexcused absence during the quarter without penalty. Other absences—for example, university-sanctioned religious observances, military service, or other reasons approved in advance by the instructor—will not incur penalty. If these excused absences significantly impact a student's ability to participate in discussion, alternative arrangements or work may be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Late Assignments

Late work will not be accepted, unless either 1) a late submission has been approved in advance by the instructor or 2) it is the result of extenuating circumstances or for a university-sanctioned reason. Please refer to the iSchool's complete [Academic Policies & Conduct](#).

Diversity and Inclusivity

At the University of Washington, diversity is integral to excellence. We value and honor diverse experiences and perspectives, strive to create welcoming and respectful learning environments, and promote access, opportunity and justice for all.

Access and Accommodations

It is the policy and practice of the University of Washington—as well as your instructor—to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have already established accommodations with Disability Resources for Students (DRS), please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course.

If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but not limited to; mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924 or uwdrs@uw.edu or disability.uw.edu. DRS offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions.

Academic Conduct

The Information School encourages an environment of academic integrity and mutual respect that is tolerant, inclusive and supportive of the educational goals of all its members.

In this course, mutual respect includes respect for standards of academic integrity. This includes a commitment to avoid willfully or maliciously violating instructor directions to students or cheating on class assignments or exams, deliberately engaging in plagiarism, or—in more severe offenses—stealing or altering academic materials.

All incidents of alleged academic misconduct are reported to the associate dean for academics who will investigate the situation. Academic misconduct reviews will adhere to the policies outlined in the Student Conduct Code and managed by the [Office of Community Standards and Student Conduct](#).

Additional Resources

[Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)](#) – This FAQ was created by the University of Washington to help students impacted by the recent rescission of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in the United States. Though the FAQ does not constitute legal advice, it can direct you to useful resources. In addition, the City of Seattle maintains a list of relevant workshops, legal resources, and other information for Seattle residents [here](#).

[iSchool Technology Requirements](#) - The iSchool has a set of technology requirements for both online and residential students. We highly recommend that students adhere to these standards which are updated annually and located [here](#). Students who do not meet these standards may experience technology problems throughout the course.

[iSchool Technology Training](#) - Knowledge base for Canvas, VoiceThread, web conferencing systems, and other online learning tools.

[UW Libraries](#) - In this course you may be required to access a large number of databases through the Internet. Several of these databases are publicly available, but some are proprietary and access requires authentication through the [UW Libraries](#). Information about logging in to use these databases is available on the [Connecting to the Libraries](#) page.

[iSchool Academic Policies](#) - If you have additional questions regarding the above, you may wish to review the iSchool's Academic Policies. These policies cover:

- Students with Disabilities
- TA Concerns
- Grading Criteria
- Academic Conduct
 - Academic Integrity
 - Copyright
 - Privacy
 - Student Code of Conduct
 - Evaluation of Student Work