

**GINS 4090D Digital Platforms in Global Contexts**  
Thursdays 9:00-11:25, 412 St. Patrick's Building

***\*This course will be delivered offline and masking is strongly recommended.\****

*It is the responsibility of all students to follow the University's policy and guidance about COVID-19.*

*Please visit Carleton's COVID-19 page for the latest updates: <https://carleton.ca/covid19/>*

**Instructor:** Xiaofei Han

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**Office Hour:** via Zoom, by appointment. Zoom link provided on Brightspace.

### **Course Description and Objective**

How has the internet become the way it is today and how will it evolve in the future? Platform has become a buzz word in the past several years, but what is a “platform” exactly? How have platform technologies played out in different localities and what are the social implications that digital platforms entail? This course provides an overview of the key historical and contemporary issues around the economics and politics of the internet and platforms in global contexts. During this semester, we will critically engage with topics such as the technical constructs of network technologies, key debates and the power interplay between different regions and countries in global internet governance and policies, the dominant business models for popular platforms, economics and governance of (big)data, and platform cultural politics at both local and transnational levels. This course aims to cultivate students’ critical thinking about their daily encounters with the internet and platforms as users, consumers, and citizens as well as the social impacts of such encounters through the theoretical lens and analytical tools provided.

### **Course Format and Guidance during the Ongoing COVID-19**

This course will be delivered offline. Masking is strongly recommended during our weekly meetings in the classroom. Please be considerate of others and do *not* come to class when you are tested positive, show symptoms of COVID-19/flu, have close contacts with individuals who are recently tested positive, or simply feel sick/doubt that you might be contagious. Feel free to get in touch with me in any of the scenarios that you have to miss a class due to COVID-19 related issues to receive support for the course.

This class is a small-sized, discussion-based seminar. The first half of the class will be lecture. After a 15-minute break, the second half of the class will be saved for students’ individual presentations of the weekly theme and following class discussion.

### **Course Materials**

Readings are available through the Ares reserve on Brightspace via the sources subscribed to by the MacOdrum Library. Otherwise, links are provided in the syllabus and on Brightspace page.

## Evaluations

Assignment	Value	Due Date
Synthesis Reading Response & Presentation	30%	Sign up in the first week
Participation & Engagement	10%	On-going
Platform Value Chain Tracking Project	30%	April 6
Final Paper	30%	April 20

*Synthesis Reading Response & Presentation (30%= 20% Reading Response + 10% Presentation)*

You will write an 800-1000 words synthesis paper in response to one particular week's assigned readings. This assignment is an exercise for you to articulate arguments, key facts, and perspectives provided by different authors on a specific topic. A good synthesis reading response should be essentially *analytical*, which shows the connections and/or distinctions across different readings in a coherent way, instead of merely summarizing each author's arguments. The paper is worth 20%.

In addition to the paper, each student will also need to deliver a 7-10 min presentation during the class of their selected week. The presentation should be well-articulated and concise. Instead of repeating the whole reading response, your presentation should highlight the key concepts/issues that you have discussed in your paper, which you would like to bring people's attention to. Each student should also prepare 2-3 three relevant questions and share at the end of their presentation, which aims to generate further discussion of the class. The presentation is worth 10%. It is totally acceptable if there are some parts of the readings that you do not fully understand. The presentation is the perfect opportunity for you to share your questions with the whole class and establish a better understanding after hearing about others' opinions. Yet you must show the efforts and thinking process that you have already made to understand the materials in the presentation and following discussion.

In the first week, I will circulate a sign-up sheet for you to select your preferred weekly theme for this assignment. Ideally there are up to three students each week and it is on first-served basis. You can choose the week that best fits your interest and/or schedule. The reading response is due by the end of Wednesday (23:59) of your selected week on Brightspace. Tips regarding how to write a good synthesis paper will be provided later.

*Participation & Engagement (10% and possible bonus marks – up to 5%)*

This is a small, discussion-based class. Participation—attending classes, engaging in discussion, having the weekly readings done *ahead of* classes, assignments done on time, paying attention when others are speaking, etc.—therefore, is crucial for this course. Students should take the classroom as a safe, respectful environment to voice their opinions, try out new ideas, engage in critical debates, and comment on the issues and global events related to the digital platforms and the internet. While I understand that not everyone would contribute every week, please try to contribute as often as you can.

*Platform Value Chain Tracking Project (30% = 20% for Group Report + 10% for Presentation)*

After the reading week, students will work in groups of 4-5 and each group will select a product/service in platform economies to analyze. You can team up with the people you want to work with. If you wish to do so, you must send me the group list before the reading week (by the end of Feb.17). Otherwise I will divide students into groups randomly. The group list will be finalized and posted on Brightspace on March 2.

There are two parts of this project. Firstly, each group will need to submit an 800-1000 words group report before the class in week 14, summarizing their key findings. Secondly, each group will deliver a 15-minute presentation with slides in week 14 and share their findings with the whole class.

Students will work together to track and deconstruct the global value chain(s) of a particular product or platform service (examples including but limiting to, for instance, an iPhone, online shopping service on Amazon/Taobao, or Uber service, etc.). Each group will focus on one single product/service after discussing with the instructor. Students will map out the major production and distribution stages of this product/service, main actors and labor involved, coordination and logistics of key resources (e.g. raw materials, data, etc.), relevant regulations and policies that overwatch the value chains, key technologies adopted, cultural politics, and so on. Student will also need to relate their analysis back to at least two key themes/debates/concepts discussed throughout the term in class. More details about the group project will be provided on Brightspace and in the workshop in week 9.

*Final Paper (30%)*

Students will write a 2000 words research paper. Your potential topics can be one of the followings:

- Platform economies and platformized labor, with specific examples;
- Business model(s) of a particular platform and what challenges it imposes on the societies, with specific examples;
- Platform's personalized marketing and user privacy, with specific examples;
- Transnational data flow, data localization, and competition for digital sovereignty, with a focus on one or between two specific countries/regions;
- Platform economies and underclass, with specific examples;
- Platform economies and gender, with specific examples;
- Platform economies and race, with specific examples;
- Platforms, consumerism, and environment, with specific examples;
- Platform economies and rural-urban divide, with specific examples;
- Platform economies and imperialism, with specific examples;
- Platform economies and (de)colonization, with specific examples;

- Other topics related to the course theme approved by the instructor (if you want to go with your own topic, please send it to me by April 1)

You need to draw on at least three course readings and at least two external, quality academic sources for your final paper. Your final paper must show a thorough understanding of your selected topic and extend the analyses provided in course materials. A strong final paper is a combination of demonstrated good command of the key concepts and texts from the course, concrete analysis of specific examples, a critical perspective into the issues you focus on, and a concise and coherent writing style. More details will be provided in the workshop in week 13.

### Assignment Format and Style

- 1-inch margin, size 12, a common legible font, and pagination for all written assignments;
- Word counts provided exclude the title page and reference;
- Citation: APA
- All assignments are submitted and returned via Brightspace
- No late assignments will be accepted for this course, with only a few exceptions that apply (e.g. personal health situation or family emergency, etc. and in that case please communicate with me as early as you could).

### Weekly Schedules

(Please note that I may make changes to the schedules and readings during the semester. Any changes will be communicated via email and Brightspace course page in advance.)

---- Section I. From Network to Platform ----

#### Week 1 (Jan. 5) Greeting and Introduction

Sign up for reading response & a few tips on how to write a synthesis reading response

#### Week 2 (Jan. 12) Understand network

Winner, L. (1980). Do artifacts have politics? In *Daedalus*, 109(1), pp. 121-136.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20024652.pdf>

Lessig, L. (2006). Chapter 3 Is-Ism: Is the way it is the way it must be? In *Code 2.0*. Basic Book.

P.31-38. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Code\\_v2.pdf](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Code_v2.pdf)

Check the global internet traffic map: <https://global-internet-map-2021.telegeography.com/>

Check the global submarine cable map: <https://www.submarinemap.com/>

#### Week 3 (Jan. 19) Here come the platforms

van Dijck, Jose., Nieborg, David., & Poell, Thomas. (2019). Reframing Platform Power. *Internet Policy Review*, 8(2).

Dror, Y. (2015). 'We Are Not Here For The Money': Founders' Manifestos. *New Media & Society*, 17(4), 540-555.

---- Section II. The So-called “Platform Capitalism” ----

**Week 4 (Jan.26) “Platform capitalism” I: business models**

- Zuboff, Shoshana. (2019). Chapter 3 The Discovery of Behavioral Surplus. In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, p.63-97. New York: Public Affairs.
- Levine, Y. (2018). The Cambridge Analytica Con: How media coverage misses the mark on the Trump data scam. *The Baffler*. <https://thebaffler.com/latest/cambridge-analytica-con-levine>

**Week 5 (Feb. 2) “Platform capitalism” II: global capital and value chains**

- Schiller, D. (2014). Chapter 2 Networked Production and Reconstructed Commodity Chains in *Digital Depression: Information Technology and Economic Crisis*. University of Illinois Press.
- Kelly, A. (2019, December 16). Apple and Google named in US lawsuit over Congolese child cobalt mining deaths. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/dec/16/apple-and-google-named-in-us-lawsuit-over-congolese-child-cobalt-mining-deaths>
- Jia, L. & Winseck, D. (2018). The Political Economy of Chinese Internet Companies: Financialization, Concentration, and Capitalization. *International Communication Gazette*. 80 (1). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1748048517742783>.

**Week 6 (Feb. 9) “Platform capitalism” III: the “invisible” and “flexible” labor around the globe**

- Gray, M. L. & Suri, S. (2019). Introduction: Ghosts in the Machine. In *Ghost Work: How to Stop Silicon Valley from Building a New Global Underclass*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Available online via the catalogue of Carleton Library.
- Andrijasevic, R. (2021). “Just-in-Time Labor”: Time-Based Management in the Age of On-Demand Manufacturing. In *Media and Management* edited by Andrijasevic, R., Chen, J. Y., Gregg, M. & Steinberg, M. meson press & the University of Minnesota Press.
- Zhang, L. (2020). When Platform Capitalism Meets Petty Capitalism in China: Alibaba and an Integrated Approach to Platformization. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 114-134. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/download/10935/2900>

---- Section III. Issues in the Era of Platform ----

**Week 7 (Feb. 16) The underclass in global platform economies**

- Hou, J. (2021). A platform for underclass youth: Hanmai rap videos, social class, and surveillance on Chinese social media. In *First Monday*, 26(9). <https://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v26i9.10587>
- GIGA (2019). Digital Platforms in Africa: The “Uberisation” of Informal Work. *GIGA Focus Afrika*. German Institute for Global and Area Studies. ISSN: 1862-3603. <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/12318599-digital-platforms-africa-uberisation-informal-work/>
- Shen, X. & Qu. T. (Oct.28, 2020). Older women on China’s TikTok are being scammed by flirtatious fake celebrities, highlighting a prevalent problem on the platform. *The Southern China Morning Post*. [https://www.scmp.com/abacus/tech/article/3107118/older-women-chinas-tiktok-are-being-scammed-flirtatious-fake?module=perpetual\\_scroll\\_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3107118](https://www.scmp.com/abacus/tech/article/3107118/older-women-chinas-tiktok-are-being-scammed-flirtatious-fake?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3107118).

## **Week 8 (Feb. 23) Reading Break: No class & Enjoy**

### **Week 9 (Mar. 2) Global accessibility and adoption of digital platforms**

Napoli, P. M. & Obar, A. J. (2014). The emerging mobile internet underclass: A critique of mobile internet access. *The Information Society*, 30(5), 323-334. DOI: 10.1080/01972243.2014.944726

Jin, D.Y. (2015). Chapter 7 Challenge to the Global Digital Divide. In *Digital Platforms, Imperialism and Political Culture*. Routledge.

### **Group list finalized & workshop for group project**

### **Week 10 (Mar. 9) Data as the new oil?:The assetization and weaponization of data**

Pasquale, F. (2015). Introduction: The Need to Know, in *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms that Control Information and Money*. Harvard University Press.

Cyphers & Gebhart. (2019). *Behind the One-Way Mirror: A Deep Dive Into the Technology of Corporate Surveillance*. Electronic Frontier Foundation. <https://www.eff.org/wp/behind-the-one-way-mirror>

Cartwright, M. (2020). Internationalising state power through the internet: Google, Huawei and geopolitical struggle. *Internet Policy Review*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2020.3.1494>

What you've "consented" to?:

Go through Meta's Data Policy here: <https://privacycenter.instagram.com/policy>

### **Supplemental Readings**

Beauvisage, T. & Mellet, K. (2020). Datasets: Assetizing and Marketing Personal Data in Birthc, K. & Muniesa, F. (eds) *Assetization: Turning Things into Assets in Technoscientific Capitalism*. The MIT Press.

## **Week 11 (Mar. 16) class cancelled/guest lecture – TBD (instructor will be gone for conference)**

### **Week 12 (Mar. 23) Platform and celebrity culture**

Han, X. (2022). Platform as new "daddy": China's gendered wanghong economy and patriarchal platforms behind. *Internet Policy Review*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2022.1.1631>

Zhang, Q., & Negus, K. (2020). East Asian pop music idol production and the emergence of data fandom in China. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23(4), 493-511.

Abidin,C.(2020).Mapping Internet Celebrity on TikTok: Exploring Attention Economies and Visibility Labours. *Cultural Science Journal*,12(1) 77-103. <https://doi.org/10.5334/csci.140>

### **Week 13 (Mar. 30) Governance of and by platforms**

Gillespie, T. (2017). Governance of and by platforms. In Burgess, J., Poell, T. & Marwick, A. (eds). *SAGE Handbook of Social Media*.

<https://culturedigitally.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/06/Gillespie-Governance-ofby-Platforms-PREPRINT.pdf>

Holden, K. & Van Klyton, A. (2016). Exploring the tensions and incongruities of internet governance in Africa. *Government Information Quarterly*, 33(4), 736-745.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2016.08.006>

Supplemental readings:

DeNardis, L. (2014). Chapter 1 The internet governance oxymoron in *The global war for internet governance*, pp.1-32. Yale University Press.

Powers, S. M. & Jablonski, M. (2015). Introduction & Chapter 1 in *The Real Cyber War*.

**Week 14 (Apr. 6) Group Presentations and Workshop for Final Paper**

**Apr.20 Final Paper Due at 23:59 on Brightspace**

---- End of Term ----

**Submission and Return of Term Work**

All assignments will be submitted electronically through Brightspace assignment portals. The detailed requirements and supplemental information will be posted on Brightspace course page and discussed in our synchronous workshops. You are also welcome to send me emails or drop by during the virtual office hours via zoom link if you have any questions.

Assignments will be graded and feedbacks returned via Brightspace. Assignments will be returned within maximum two weeks after the submission. No feedbacks will be provided to forum posts, yet I will jump in on the online forum discussion where I see suitable. Grades of final paper, forum posts, and bonus marks will be accessed/posted after the end of term in late April.

**Grading**

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor, subject to the approval of the faculty Dean. Final standing in courses will be shown by alphabetical grades. The system of grades used, with corresponding grade points is:

Percentage	Letter grade	12-point scale	Percentage	Letter grade	12-point scale
90-100	A+	12	67-69	C+	6
85-89	A	11	63-66	C	5
80-84	A-	10	60-62	C-	4
77-79	B+	9	57-59	D+	3
73-76	B	8	53-56	D	2
70-72	B-	7	50-52	D-	1

Approval of final grades: Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by an instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

### **Carleton E-mail Accounts**

Please use your Carleton University e-mail accounts for all emails related to this class with course code in the subject line. All email communication to students from this course will be via official Carleton University e-mail accounts.

### **Declining Imaging and Recording Statement**

Students are not permitted to take photographs or record other students, TAs, or instructors during the class sessions unless they obtain explicit permission from the professor and all other students well in advance of class.

### **Posting Course Materials on Course-Sharing Websites and Social Media**

Teaching materials and learning activities created for this course, including presentations, posted notes, weekly courses, forum posts, assignments and exams, etc. by both the instructor and students, remain the intellectual property of the author(s) and are copy protected. Students registered in this course may take notes and make copies of course materials for their own educational use only. Students are not permitted to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly without prior written consent of the author(s).

### **Statement on Student Conduct**

As part of a learning community, it is our responsibility to contribute to an engaging, inclusive, and safe learning environment. During all class-related activities, please engage in respectful and courteous communication, follow the [Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy](#), and avoid discrimination and harassment. Harassment of any kind will not be tolerated in this class.

Do not cut and paste, screen shot, share course content, or post the words of your classmates, TA, or Instructor outside of class without permission. All work submitted in this course must be uniquely your own. When submitting assignments and/or completing exams, you are expected to articulate responses in your own words rather than cutting and pasting from course materials without permission, which is a form of plagiarism.

### **Statement on Plagiarism**

Please be careful to avoid plagiarism and other Academic Integrity violations. The Carleton University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas, or work of others as one’s own”.

Examples of plagiarism can include the following:

- Reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the source;
- Submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- Using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- Using another's data or research findings;
- Failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- Handing in "substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without the prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs."

You can find more details here:

<https://carleton.ca/registrar/wp-content/uploads/Academic-Integrity-policy-June-2021.pdf>

### **Requests for Academic Accommodation**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows.

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the EIC's website: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the EIC's website: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The *Paul Menton Centre* for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your *Letter of Accommodation* at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (*if applicable*) at <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>

You can visit the EIC's website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

## Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: [carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support](https://carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support)

## Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

## Student Supports

There are many supports for student across campus. Please see below for supports that might be helpful for you.

The Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): Need support with your learning goals? CSAS may be able to help. Visit CSAS on the 4th floor of MacOdrum Library or online at [carleton.ca/csas](https://carleton.ca/csas). CSAS offers academic assistance with:

- course content
- academic writing
- skills development

Carleton Health and Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>

International Students Support Office (ISSO): <https://carleton.ca/isso/>

Centre for Indigenous Initiatives: <https://carleton.ca/indigenous/students/>

Ojigkwanong Indigenous Student Centre: <https://carleton.ca/indigenous/students/ojigkwanong-indigenous-student-centre/>