



FTVM/DIGITAL 376

Digital Media Theory

Winter 2026

MW, 1:00-2:15PM in MLB Lecture Room 2

Syllabus Outline

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instructor and GSI Information• Course Description• Learning Objectives• General Course Overview | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grading Overview• Course Policies• Accommodations and Support• Course Schedule |
|---|---|

Instructor and GSI Information

Instructor Information

Josef Nguyen (he/him/his) | Office: NQ 6429 | josefn@umich.edu

Instructor office hours are by email appointment, with in-office and online options.

GSI Information

Bailey Apollonio (she/her/hers) | bcompt@umich.edu

GSI office hours are by email appointment, with in-office and online options.

Contact Information

Please format and address all emails to the Instructor and GSI professionally, include the course information in the subject line, and allow up to 24 hours for responses (and longer for weekends).

Course Description

This course is an in-depth foray into the study and analysis of digital media technologies, practices, and cultures through a focus on theory as critical and conceptual linguistic tools for describing, analyzing, and (re)imagining the world. As such, students will engage in critical reading, thinking, and writing practices to examine the workings of digital culture. Specifically, the course is structured as a semester-long glossary that features readings that prioritize particularly salient (and often contested) terms, concepts, and language in both popular and academic discussions of digital culture—new media, technology, algorithm, artificial intelligence, platform, raw data, network neutrality, etc.—as a representative sample of digital media theory.

Learning Objectives

- Become familiar with digital media theory as an expansive collection of conceptual and linguistic tools for critical analysis of contemporary digital media technologies, practices, and cultures in their historic complexities
- Apply digital media theory to reflect critically on personal experiences of and practices with digital media
- Advance proficiencies in critical reading, thinking, research, and writing
- Refine multimodal writing and content generation about and using digital media technologies
- Incorporate insights from existing scholarship into their own critical and creative practices

General Course Overview

Upper-Level Writing Requirement

This course is approved to fulfill the Upper-Level Writing Requirement (ULWR). The goal of the ULWR is to teach students to recognize and practice a range of writing activities and forms typical of academic and professional contexts. As such, this is a writing-intensive course.

Required Texts and Materials

- There are no texts or materials that require purchase.
- All readings and additional materials are available through the Dropbox folder for the course.
- Assignments are submitted to students' individual folders for the course on Dropbox.

Grading Overview

Coursework will be graded per the following breakdown:

- Thoughtful Class Engagement – 25% of final grade
- DMT Audio Journal – 25% of final grade
- DMT Writing Portfolio – 50% of final grade broken down as follows:
 - DMT Primer – 30% of final grade
 - Content Creation – 20% of final grade

Course Policies

Classroom Conduct

It is our responsibility to work together to produce a classroom environment where everyone can share, discuss, and question the materials at hand as well as contribute their own work respectfully and productively. Conflicting perspectives are unavoidable. To ensure that participants feel comfortable contributing a diverse set of thoughts, comments, and views, we will not use oppressive or harmful language nor tolerate harassment, personal attacks, and other actions or behaviors that unduly distract from the educational mission and that inflict emotional, physical, or psychological harm on those involved.

Part of the role of encouraging a diverse learning environment is acknowledging that individuals should feel safe and respected to contribute to the classroom in good faith. This involves not only allowing everyone opportunities to contribute their thoughts but to be mindful of how we recognize and address others. Do not assume things about others' identities, backgrounds, or experiences—whether that is age, race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, etc... Address people by their names, pronouns, and other identifiers that they disclose. Avoid insisting on imposing identity markers onto others. Allow people to self-identify as they feel comfortable.

What you share with and create for this class reflects not only you as both a student and a civic subject, but it also reflects on me as your instructor, the class as a learning community, and the University of Michigan as an academic institution.

Please discuss with me any concerns you have regarding an unsafe or hostile classroom environment, particularly if something arises that causes distress.

Sexual Misconduct

Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes sexual misconduct — including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. We understand that sexual violence can undermine students' academic success. We encourage anyone dealing with sexual misconduct to talk to someone about their experience, so they can get the support they need. Confidential support and academic advocacy can be found with the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC) on their 24-hour crisis line, 734.936.3333 and at sapac@umich.edu.

Alleged violations can be non-confidentially reported to the Equity, Civil Rights, and Title IX Office (ECRT) at ecrtooffice@umich.edu.

Class Attendance

Attend class regularly and in full to the best of your reasonable ability.

Severe Inclement Weather

In cases of severe inclement weather that may impede safe travel to campus, we may instead meet on Zoom. In such situations, I will do my best to notify the class by 8am the day of. For those already on campus or in Ann Arbor and who do not otherwise have a designated space to attend an online course meeting without disruption, our regular classroom will still be available during our scheduled meeting time for such purposes.

Please reach out with any concerns about access to appropriate computing equipment to attend any online class meetings.

Technology in the Classroom

Laptops, phones, tablets, and other computing devices can be used in the classroom specifically for purposes directly pertinent to the educational activities and discussions at-hand. Please avoid any technology use in the classroom that may be distracting you or others from the course during class meetings.

Classroom Recording

Unless specified in approved documented accommodations and with a completed Audio Recording agreement between student and instructor, students are prohibited from recording and distributing any part of this course. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student's own private use as relevant for the course.

Additional information regarding course recordings and privacy concerns can be found on the UM ITS Recording and Privacy Concerns webpage.

Late Work

If you need an extension on assignments, please let me know in advance as soon as possible so we can make appropriate arrangements.

Academic Misconduct

The University of Michigan community functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. The college promotes the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct. All cases of academic misconduct will be referred to the LSA Office of Student Academic Affairs. Being found responsible for academic misconduct will usually result in a grade sanction, in addition to any sanction from the college. For more information, including examples of behaviors that are considered academic misconduct and potential sanctions, please see the [LSA's Academic Integrity policy](#).

Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI)

Any potential use of generative AI tools (e.g. U-M GPT, ChatGPT, Dall-e, etc.) for work in this course should be done only in the interest of supporting the successful achievement of our student learning outcomes and assignment objectives and with a critical perspective on how such use contributes to learning and development. Major assignments for the course all include an accompanying critical reflection that asks students to discuss their process and experience for ideating and completing the assignment (e.g. original plans and goals, sources of inspiration, tools and skills used, encountered challenges, and self-assessment of the completed assignment). Please disclose and discuss any use of generative AI in the assignment's corresponding critical reflection to demonstrate thoughtful and critical use of such tools in supporting achievement of student learning outcomes and assignment objectives.

Accommodations and Support

Disability Accommodations

The University of Michigan recognizes disability as an integral part of diversity, equity, and inclusion; and is committed to creating as accessible educational environment for students with disabilities/disabled students as possible. Disability also includes mental health conditions, ADHD, learning disabilities, autism, chronic illness, physical conditions, sensory conditions, and more.

If you anticipate or are experiencing barriers based on disability or temporary injuries, [Services for Students with Disabilities \(SSD\)](#) is the office that students work with to explore reasonable accommodations, tools, and resources.

- If **you are already connected** with SSD and have approved accommodations, please share your letter through Accommodate as soon as possible so that we can discuss how your

accommodations will be implemented in this course. The sooner I know about your disability access-needs, the more equipped I can be to facilitate accommodations.

- **You should reach out to me as soon as possible so we can discuss how to meet your specific accommodation needs as they relate to this specific course.** A letter from SSD alone is insufficient for us to address your individual needs in the context of this course, as accommodation letters only provide abstracted and general guidelines.
- If **you have not connected** with SSD and anticipate or are experiencing a disability-related barrier, and would like to discuss accommodations and/or resources, please contact SSD by completing their [initial information form](#).
- If you have a **temporary medical injury/condition**, such as a broken arm, I may be able to assist in minimizing classroom barriers. In situations where additional assistance is needed, you should contact the SSD as noted above.

For more information, call 734-763-3000 or email ssdoffice@umich.edu.

Health and Wellbeing

While regular attendance and engagement in class are important, it should not be done at the undue expense of student health and well-being. As such, please treat your health and well-being, as well as the health and well-being of others, as a priority, such as by focusing on resting and recovering when ill. It is also important to care for one's needs for rest outside of those concerns typically designated as valid medical illness and injury, such as during periods of high stress, menstruation, or fatigue.

Additionally, university students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. These may include academic pressures and challenges associated with relationships, mental health, alcohol or other drugs, identities, finances, etc.

If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. If the source of your stressors is academic, please contact me so that we can find solutions together. For personal concerns, U-M offers a variety of resources, many of which are listed on the [Resources for Student Well-being](#) webpage. You can also search for additional well-being resources on that website.

Student Parents and Caregivers

If you are pregnant, a parenting student, or primarily responsible for providing care for a loved one or family member, and you need any accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible. You may also reach out to [Michigan Caregivers and Student Parents](#) and the [Center for the Education of Women+](#) for resources and community support.

Writing Support

The [Sweetland Center for Writing](#) offers free one-to-one writing support to all U-M undergraduate and graduate students, regardless of assignment type or discipline. Sweetland faculty and peer writing consultants meet with student writers to help with any stage of the writing process, from initial brainstorming to final revisions.

Course Schedule

<u>UNIT 0: BEGINNINGS</u>	
<u>Week 01:</u> Getting Started	Wednesday, 7 January 2026 <u>IN CLASS:</u> Syllabus Overview Class Introductions

Table 1: Course Schedule - Week 01

<u>UNIT I: MEDIA/TECHNOLOGY</u>	
<u>Week 02:</u> “Theory” / “Technology”	Monday, 12 January 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Kyla Wazana Tompkins, “We Aren’t Here to Learn What We Already Know” (2016), [https://avidly.org/2016/09/13/we-arent-here-to-learn-what-we-know-we-already-know/] <u>IN CLASS:</u> Introduce DMT Writing Portfolio Assignment Introduce DMT Audio Journal Assignment Wednesday, 14 January 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Marisa Elena Duarte, “Network Thinking,” <i>Network Sovereignty: Building the Internet across Indian</i> (University of Washington Press, 2017)
	Monday, 19 January 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING – IN OBSERVANCE OF MLK JR. DAY</u> Wednesday, 21 January 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Carolyn Marvin, “Introduction,” <i>When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century</i> (Oxford University Press, 1988) READ: Benjamin Peters, “And Lead Us Not into Thinking the New Is New: A Bibliographic Case for New Media History,” <i>New Media & Society</i> (2009) <u>IN CLASS:</u> Introduce DMT Primer Assignment

Table 2: Course Schedule - Week 02-Week 03

<u>Week 04:</u> “Platform” / “Algorithm”	Monday, 26 January 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Tarleton Gillespie, “The Politics of ‘Platforms,’” <i>New Media & Society</i> (2010) Wednesday, 28 January 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Nick Seaver, “Algorithms as Culture: Some Tactics for the Ethnography of Algorithmic Systems,” <i>Big Data & Society</i> (2017)
<u>Week 05:</u> “Artificial Intelligence” / “Glitch”	Monday, 2 February 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Tero Karppi and Yvette Granata, “Non-Artificial Non-Intelligence: Amazon’s Alexa and the Frictions of AI,” <i>AI & Society</i> (2019) PLAY: <i>Sentient Sisters</i> (Kara Stone, 2018), [https://karastone.itch.io/sentient-sisters] Wednesday, 4 February 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Ruha Benjamin, “Default Discrimination: Is the Glitch Systemic,” <i>Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code</i> (Polity, 2019)
<u>Week 06:</u> Work on DMT Primer Milestone Draft	Monday, 9 February 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u> Work on DMT Primer Milestone Draft and Reflection Essay Wednesday, 11 February 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u> DMT Primer Milestone Draft and Reflection Essay due by 11:59PM

Table 3: Course Schedule - Week 04-Week 06

<u>UNIT II: EMBODIMENT/MATERIALITY</u>	
<u>Week 07:</u> “Attention Economy” / “Work”	Monday, 16 February 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Olivia Banner, "Algorithms, the Attention Economy, and the Breast Cancer Narrative," <i>Communicative Biocapitalism: The Voice of the Patient in Digital Health and the Health Humanities</i> (Michigan University Press, 2018) <u>IN CLASS:</u> Introduce Content Creation Assignment Wednesday 18 February 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Minh-Ha T. Pham, “The Racial and Gendered Job Performances of Fashion Blogger Poses,” <i>Asians Wear Clothes on the Internet: Race, Gender, and the Work of Personal Style Blogging</i> (Duke University Press, 2015)
	Monday, 23 February 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Anna Munster, “Interfaciality,” <i>Materializing New Media: Embodiment in Information Aesthetics</i> (Dartmouth College Press, 2011) Wednesday, 25 February 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Hector Postigo, “The Socio-technical Architecture of Digital Labor: Converting Play into YouTube Money,” <i>New Media & Society</i> (2016)

Table 4: Course Schedule - Week 07-Week 08

<u>SPRING BREAK</u>	Monday, 2 March 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u> Wednesday, 4 March 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u>
<u>Week 09:</u> “Branding” / “Webcam Operator”	Monday, 9 March 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Simone Browne, “B®anding Blackness: Biometric Technology and the Surveillance of Blackness,” <i>Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness</i> (Duke University Press, 2015) Wednesday, 11 March 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Michele White, “Too Close to See, Too Intimate a Screen: Men, Women, and Webcams,” <i>The Body and the Screen: Theories of Internet Spectatorship</i> (MIT Press, 2006)
<u>Week 10:</u> “Raw Data” / “E-waste”	Monday, 16 March 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Lisa Gitelman, “‘Raw Data’ Is an Oxymoron,” <i>New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader</i>, 2nd edition, edited by Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Anna Watkins Fisher, and Thomas Keenan (Routledge, 2016) Wednesday, 18 March 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Jennifer Gabrys, “Media in the Dump: Salvage Stories and Spaces of Remainder,” <i>Digital Rubbish: A Natural History of Electronics</i> (University of Michigan Press, 2013) PLAY: <i>Phone Story</i> (Molleindustria, 2011), [https://phonestory.org/] (contains enslaved child labor; suicide)

Table 5: Course Schedule - Spring Break-Week 10

<u>Week 11:</u> Work on Content Creation Milestone Draft	Monday, 23 March 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u> Work on Content Creation Milestone Draft and Reflection Essay Wednesday, 25 March 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u> Content Creation Milestone Draft and Reflection Essay due by 11:59PM
<u>UNIT III: ECONOMIES/EXCHANGES</u>	
<u>Week 12:</u> “Terms of Service” / “Network Neutrality”	Monday, 30 March 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Gordon Hull, “The Death of the Data Subject,” <i>Law, Culture and the Humanities</i> (2024) PLAY: <i>Terms and Conditions Apply</i> (Jonathan Plackett and Alex Bellos, 2021), [https://termsandconditions.game/] (contains flashing) Wednesday, 1 April 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Danny Kimball, “The Broadband Battle,” <i>Net Neutrality and the Battle for the Open Internet</i> (University of Michigan Press, 2022)
<u>Week 13:</u> “Creative Commons” / “Free Labor”	Monday, 6 April 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Séverine Dusollier, “The Master’s Tools v. the Master’s House: Creative Commons v. Copyright,” <i>Columbia Journal of Law & the Arts</i> (2006) Wednesday, 8 April 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Abigail De Kosnik, “Fandom as Free Labor,” <i>Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory</i>, edited by Trebor Scholz (Routledge, 2013)

Table 6: Course Schedule - Week 11-Week 13

<u>Week 14:</u> “Sharing Economy” / “Blockchain”	Monday, 13 April 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Alexandra J. Ravanelle. “What Is the Sharing Economy,” <i>Hustle and Gig: Struggling and Surviving in the Sharing Economy</i> (University of California Press, 2019) Wednesday, 15 April 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Lana Swartz, “Blockchain Dreams: Imagining Techno-Economic Alternatives After Bitcoin,” <i>Another Economy Is Possible: Culture and Economy in a Time of Crisis</i>, edited by Manuel Castells (Polity Press, 2017)
<u>Week 15:</u> Work on DMT Writing Portfolio	Monday, 20 April 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u> Work on DMT Writing Portfolio • DMT Primer Revised Draft and Revision Essay • Content Creation Revised Draft and Revision Essay
<u>FINALS WEEK</u>	DMT Writing Portfolio due Thursday, 30 April 2026 by 11:59PM

Table 7: Course Schedule - Week 14-Finals Week

The descriptions and timelines in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.