

**General Education Foundations of Society and Culture (SC) Course Information Sheet**

*Please submit this sheet for each proposed course*

Department, Course Number, and Title \_\_\_\_\_

1 Check the recommended GE foundation area(s) and subgroup(s) for this course

**Foundations of Society and Culture**

- Historical Analysis
- Social Analysis

2. Briefly describe the rationale for assignment to foundation area(s) and subgroup(s) chosen.

3. "List faculty member(s) who will serve as instructor (give academic rank):

Do you intend to use graduate student instructors (TAs) in this course?      Yes                  No

If yes, please indicate the number of TAs \_\_\_\_\_

4. Indicate when do you anticipate teaching this course over the next three years:

	2019-20	Fall	Enrollment	_____	Winter	Enrollment	_____	Spring	Enrollment	_____
	2020-21	Fall	Enrollment	_____	Winter	Enrollment	_____	Spring	Enrollment	_____

5. GE Course Units

Is this an ***existing*** course that has been modified for inclusion in the new GE?      Yes                  No

If yes, provide a brief explanation of what has changed:

Unit Guidelines: GE courses within the Society and Culture Foundation Area are all at least 5 units.  
Number of Units:

6. Please present concise arguments for the GE principles applicable to this course.

General Knowledge

Integrative Learning

Ethical Implications

Cultural Diversity

Critical Thinking

Rhetorical Effectiveness

Problem-solving

- ❑ Library & Information Literacy

**(A) STUDENT CONTACT PER WEEK (if not applicable write N/A)**

- 1. Lecture: \_\_\_\_\_ (hours)
- 2. Discussion Section: \_\_\_\_\_ (hours)
- 3. Labs: \_\_\_\_\_ (hours)
- 4. Experiential (service learning, internships, other): \_\_\_\_\_ (hours)
- 5. Field Trips: \_\_\_\_\_ (hours)

**(A) TOTAL Student Contact Per Week** \_\_\_\_\_ **(HOURS)**

**(B) OUT-OF-CLASS HOURS PER WEEK (if not applicable write N/A)**

- 1. General Review & Preparation: \_\_\_\_\_ (hours)
- 2. Reading \_\_\_\_\_ (hours)
- 3. Group Projects: \_\_\_\_\_ (hours)
- 4. Preparation for Quizzes & Exams: \_\_\_\_\_ (hours)
- 5. Information Literacy Exercises: \_\_\_\_\_ (hours)
- 6. Written Assignments: \_\_\_\_\_ (hours)
- 7. Research Activity: \_\_\_\_\_ (hours)

**(B) TOTAL Out-of-class time per week** \_\_\_\_\_ **(HOURS)**

**GRAND TOTAL (A) + (B) must equal at least 15 hours/week** \_\_\_\_\_ **(HOURS)**

## GEOGRAPHY 98T: GEOGRAPHIES OF THE PLATFORM SOCIETY

**Instructor:** Sam Nowak

**Instructor email:** nowaks@ucla.edu

**Seminar Time/Location:** TBD

Increasingly, companies in the digital economy are understood as ‘platforms’ for social interaction, exchange, and the circulation of various goods and services. Platforms like Facebook, Amazon, Bitcoin, Uber, and many others are poised to rapidly transform economies around the world through their collection, production, and exchange of “big data”. Indeed, some suggest that we now live in a “platform society” (van Dijck, 2018) in which all manner of social, economic, ecological, and cultural relationships are shaped by global online platforms, powered by big data, and organized through algorithms. Proponents argue that these digital platforms are a drivers of economic development and innovation, enabling easier, more efficient, and more flexible market exchange, while critics contend that they are leading to mass surveillance, more precarious work conditions, and strain on public resources. In this class, we will critically evaluate these competing claims by drawing on literature in science and technology studies (STS), geography, and media studies, exploring how digital technologies are changing economy, space, and society. The course is structured in three parts:

**Part 1. Data architectures:** In the first part, we will define and discuss core concepts that will help us understand what digital platforms are, how they operate through the collection and use of “big data”, and the historical antecedents of the platform economy.

**Part 2. The platform society:** In the second part, we will use these concepts to question the claim that we now live in a platform society. We will discuss key debates around issues of labor, regulation, and the shifting geographies of digital platforms.

**Part 3. Case studies:** In the final part of the class, we will examine four case studies of “platformization” in different industries: urban mobility, e-commerce, short-term rentals, and currency. In these weeks, there will be more popular media readings, with academic articles to provide key theories for navigating the issue. Examining these case studies, we will draw out the environmental, social, cultural, and economic dimensions of the “platform society” and provide students with theoretical and methodological tools for conducting their own analysis of a platform company in their final paper.

### OUR LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- ◆ Understand the meaning of “digital platform,” as well as how “big data” and the collection of it is changing the global economy.
- ◆ Evaluate the merits of competing claims about the social, environmental, and economic consequences of digital platforms.
- ◆ Understand digital technologies (platforms, apps, hardware, etc.)—as both social *and* spatial phenomena.
- ◆ Navigate key debates around how digital platforms are, or are not, changing labor conditions, economic regulation, and the geography of the economy.
- ◆ Draw on interdisciplinary perspectives including science and technology studies (STS) and geography to critically analyze digital technologies and their social and spatial consequences.

## OUR POLICIES, PROCEDURES, and ASSIGNMENTS:

**Active class participation:** This is a discussion-based seminar, which means that your *active participation* is essential to the success of the class. Students are expected to come to class prepared to offer insightful contributions to that week's topic, and to listen to your classmates and your instructor. Active participation involves closely reading the materials beforehand, posting questions on the group discussion forum that will stimulate conversation, reading other students' questions, making connections between the readings for that week, and engaging with others' ideas. This also entails creating a supportive learning environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas and where students listen to one another with mutual respect. If you have any issues that may prevent you from actively participating, please come speak to me as early as possible.

**Seminar facilitation:** Twice during the quarter, you will co-facilitate our seminar with one of your peers. This means you will have read all of the readings thoroughly and understand their major arguments/contributions, carefully read through all weekly discussion board posts (see below), and developed thoughtful questions to prompt discussion during seminar. The structure of class is up to you to design, but you should begin with a brief description of the readings and their major arguments, and spend the majority of the lesson on group discussion. You are encouraged to be creative with your lesson: design an activity or tutorial, connect the readings to current events, show a short video that speaks to the themes or issues at hand for the week, etc. I will make myself available for 30 minutes before seminar if discussion facilitators wish to discuss their lesson plan. During our first seminar, I will ask students to sign up for two different weeks to facilitate.

**Weekly discussion board posts:** Additionally, I will ask you to post weekly short responses (100 – 200 words) to one of three guiding discussion questions, which I will provide. The purpose of these short responses is to ensure that you are engaged with the core questions that guide that week's readings and thinking critically about them. Responses should draw connections between the readings, pose questions about terms or ideas you are confused about, pose open-ended questions for discussion, and engage the major arguments of the readings. Posts are due at 2pm the day before our seminar so that you can all read one another's posts and identify similar questions, confusions, and ideas. Seminar facilitators are not required to post responses for that week.

**Final paper:** For the final assignment, you will utilize the theoretical and methodological skills you have learned in the course to write a term paper on a case study of a digital platform. Papers should be a critical analysis of the platform using one of the methodological approaches we have covered in the course, including the walkthrough method, political economic analysis, a short qualitative or quantitative research project, discourse analysis, etc. Regardless of the form, your paper should be at least 12 pages long, double-spaced with 1-inch margins and 12 point font (Times New Roman). As we move through the readings for the quarter, I will point out examples and make suggestions about possible methods and formats for student papers. Throughout the quarter, you will be asked to meet certain checkpoints for progress to make sure you are on track. In **week 3**, students will submit to me a very brief "pitch" of your topic. In **week 5**, students will submit an outline and thesis statement. And in **week 8**, students will submit a first draft so that I can provide feedback and suggestions for revisions before the final draft is due in **week 10**.

**Grading:**

- 30% | Term paper
- 30% | Class participation
- 15% | Weekly responses
- 10% | Seminar facilitation
- 10% | First draft
- 5% | Pitch, outline, and thesis statement

**OUR SCHEDULE:****WEEK 1: Orientations and cardinal directions**

*What are platforms and how should we think about their political, economic and social consequences?*

- ◆ Gillespie, T. 2010. The politics of ‘platforms.’ *New Media & Society* 12 (3):347–364.
- ◆ Parker, G. G., M. W. V. Alstynne, and S. P. Choudary. 2016. *Platform Revolution: How Networked Markets Are Transforming the Economy and How to Make Them Work for You*. (Chapters 1 and 2) W. W. Norton & Company.
- ◆ Winner, L. 1980. Do Artifacts Have Politics? *Daedalus* 109 (1):121–136.

**WEEK 2: Big data and the economy**

*What is data and why is it now ‘big’? How is the accumulation of it transforming the economy?*

- ◆ Kitchin, R. 2014. *The Data Revolution*. (Chapter 1: Data and Chapter 4: Big Data) New York: SAGE Publications.
- ◆ Sadowski, J. 2019. When data is capital: Datafication, accumulation, and extraction. *Big Data & Society* 6 (1).
- ◆ [The world’s most valuable resource is no longer oil, but data](#). 2017. *The Economist*.
- ◆ [Data is giving rise to a new economy](#). 2017. *The Economist*.

**WEEK 3: Big data and the platform economy in an historical context**

*How did the platform economy emerge? Why now?*

- ◆ Srnicek, N. 2016. *Platform Capitalism*. (Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2) Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity.
- ◆ Sundararajan, A. 2016. *The Sharing Economy: The End of Employment and the Rise of Crowd-Based Capitalism*. (Chapter 2) MIT Press.

**WEEK 4: The geographies of the platform society**

*What is “the platform society”? And what does it mean to study it geographically?*

- ◆ Kenney, M., and J. Zysman. 2019. *The Platform Economy and Geography: Restructuring the Space of Capitalist Accumulation*. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network.
- ◆ Kitchin, R., and M. Dodge. 2011. *Code/Space: Software and Everyday Life*. (Chapters 1 and 4) Cambridge.: The MIT Press.
- ◆ van Dijck, J., T. Poell, and M. de Waal. 2018. *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*. (Chapter 1) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**WEEK 5: Platform labor and the future of work**

*How are digital platforms, algorithms, and big data transforming work across the globe?*

- ◆ Graham, M., and M. A. Anwar. 2019. The global gig economy: Towards a planetary labour market? *First Monday* 24 (4).
- ◆ Rosenblat, A. 2018. Opinion | [When Your Boss Is an Algorithm](#). *The New York Times* 12 October.
- ◆ Ticona, J., M. Alexandra, and A. Rosenblat. 2018. *Beyond Disruption How Tech Shapes Labor Across Domestic Work & Ridehailing*. New York: Data and Society.
- ◆ van Doorn, N. 2017. Platform labor: on the gendered and racialized exploitation of low-income service work in the ‘on-demand’ economy. *Information, Communication & Society* 20 (6):898–914.

**WEEK 6: The regulation and governance of platforms**

*How and at what scale should platform companies be regulated? Or can they regulate themselves?*

- ◆ Cohen, M., and A. Sundararajan. 2015. Self-Regulation and Innovation in the Peer-to-Peer Sharing Economy. *University of Chicago Law Review Online* 82 (1).
- ◆ Gillespie, T. 2018. Regulation of and by Platforms. In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, 254–278. London: SAGE Publications Ltd
- ◆ Polanyi, K. 1944. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. (Chapter 6) Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- ◆ Yglesias, M. 2019. [The push to break up Big Tech, explained](#). *Vox*.

**WEEK 7: Case studies | Uber, mobility, and public urban infrastructures**

*What are the effects of private mobility platforms on our public urban infrastructures?*

- ◆ All Things Considered. 2019. [Disability Rights Group Sues San Diego Over Scooters On Sidewalks](#). *NPR.org*.
- ◆ Jin, S. T., H. Kong, R. Wu, and D. Z. Sui. 2018. Ridesourcing, the sharing economy, and the future of cities. *Cities* 76:96–104.
- ◆ Plante, S. G. 2019. [Uber and Lyft have admitted to making traffic worse in some US cities](#). *Vox*.
- ◆ Stehlin, J., M. Hodson, and A. McMeekin. 2020. Platform mobilities and the production of urban space: Toward a typology of platformization trajectories. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* :0308518X1989680.
- ◆ Zhong, R. 2017. [Southeast Asia’s Ride-Hailing War Is Being Waged on Motorbikes](#). *The New York Times* 8 December.

**WEEK 8: Case studies | Amazon, e-commerce, and mass surveillance**

*What are the privacy concerns of mass data collection by platform firms like Amazon?*

- ◆ Herrman, J. 2020. [Who’s Watching Your Porch?](#) *The New York Times* 19 January.
- ◆ Lyskey, D. 2019. [“Alexa, are you invading my privacy?” – the dark side of our voice assistants](#). *The Guardian* 9 October.
- ◆ West, E. 2019. Amazon: Surveillance as a Service. *Surveillance & Society* 17 (1/2):7.
- ◆ Zuboff, S. 2019. *The age of surveillance capitalism: the fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. (Chapter 9) New York: Public Affairs.

**WEEK 9: Case studies | Airbnb, short-term rentals, and the housing crisis**

*How do short-term rental platforms like Airbnb interact with the rental and housing markets, and what are the consequences for urban residents?*

- ◆ Ferreri, M., and R. Sanyal. 2018. Platform economies and urban planning: Airbnb and regulated deregulation in London. *Urban Studies* 55 (15):3353–3368.
- ◆ Thompson, D. 2018. [Airbnb and the Unintended Consequences of “Disruption.”](#) *The Atlantic*.
- ◆ Wachsmuth, D., D. Kerrigan, D. Chaney, and A. Shillolo. *Short-term cities: Airbnb’s impact on Canadian housing markets*. McGill University: Urban Politics and Governance Research Group.
- ◆ Wachsmuth, D., and A. Weisler. 2018. Airbnb and the rent gap: Gentrification through the sharing economy. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 50 (6):1147–1170.

**WEEK 10 : Case studies | Bitcoin, cryptocurrency, and the environment**

*How does the digital interact with the physical? What are the geographic and environmental consequences of cryptocurrency platforms?*

- ◆ Lally, N., K. Kay, and J. Thatcher. 2019. Computational parasites and hydropower: A political ecology of Bitcoin mining on the Columbia River. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* :251484861986760.
- ◆ Li, C., and G. Marchi. 2017. [In China’s Hinterlands, Workers Mine Bitcoin for a Digital Fortune.](#) *The New York Times* 13 September.
- ◆ Popper, N. 2018. [There Is Nothing Virtual About Bitcoin’s Energy Appetite.](#) *The New York Times* 21 January.
- ◆ Zook, M. A., and J. Blankenship. 2018. New spaces of disruption? The failures of Bitcoin and the rhetorical power of algorithmic governance. *Geoforum* 96:248–255.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:*****Methodological resources for your final paper:***

- ◆ Angelo, H., and C. Hentschel. 2015. Interactions with infrastructure as windows into social worlds: A method for critical urban studies: Introduction. *City* 19 (2–3):306–312.
- ◆ Bucher, T. 2016. Neither Black Nor Box: Ways of Knowing Algorithms. In *Innovative Methods in Media and Communication Research*, eds. S. Kubitschko and A. Kaun, 81–98. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- ◆ Fields, D., D. Bissell, and R. Macrorie. 2020. Platform methods: studying platform urbanism outside the black box. *Urban Geography* :1–7.
- ◆ Light, B., J. Burgess, and S. Duguay. 2018. The walkthrough method: An approach to the study of apps. *New Media & Society* 20 (3):881–900.
- ◆ Plantin, J.-C., C. Lagoze, P. N. Edwards, and C. Sandvig. 2018. Infrastructure studies meet platform studies in the age of Google and Facebook. *New Media & Society* 20 (1):293–310.
- ◆ Star, S. L. 1999. The Ethnography of Infrastructure. *American Behavioral Scientist* 43 (3):377–391.

***Undergraduate Writing Center:*** For additional assistance with writing, the Undergraduate Writing Center offers *scheduled appointments* to go over composition or English as a Second/Other Language



issues, and *walk-in appointments* during regular appointment hours. Writing centers are not remedial spaces for “bad writers” to improve a single piece of writing, rather they are a constructive space in which you can work cooperatively with a peer to become a better writer. I encourage all students to utilize this service.

***Center for Accessible Education:*** If you feel you have special needs and you would like different accommodations to meet the course requirements, please contact the Center for Accessible Education (<https://www.cae.ucla.edu/>). After consulting with them, inform me of your situation.



## New Course Proposal

### Geography 98T Geographies of the Platform Society

**Course Number** Geography 98T

**Title** Geographies of the Platform Society

**Short Title**

**Units** Fixed: 5

**Grading Basis** Letter grade only

**Instructional Format** Seminar - 3 hours per week

**TIE Code** SEMT - Seminar (Topical) [T]

**GE Requirement** Yes

**Major or Minor Requirement** No

**Requisites** Enforced: Satisfaction of entry-level Writing requirement. Freshmen and sophomores preferred.

**Course Description** Seminar, three hours. Requisite: satisfaction of Entry-Level Writing requirement. Freshmen/sophomores preferred. Drawing on interdisciplinary social science perspectives, this seminar explores how digital platforms like Amazon, Facebook, Uber, and Bitcoin are transforming the global economy and the consequences of such a shift on various social, geographical, environmental, and cultural relationships.

**Justification** Part of the series of seminars offered through the Collegium of University Teaching Fellows

**Syllabus** File [Syllabus Nowak.docx](#) was previously uploaded. You may view the file by clicking on the file name.

**Supplemental Information** Instructor (Samuel Nowak) UID: 504517129  
Professor Eric Sheppard is the faculty mentor for this course. UID: 104244466  
Approved by the Collegium of University Teaching Fellows Faculty Advisory Committee on April 13, 2020

**Grading Structure** 30% | Term paper  
30% | Class participation  
15% | Weekly responses  
10% | Seminar facilitation  
10% | First draft  
5% | Pitch, outline, and thesis statement

**Effective Date** Spring 2021

**Discontinue Date** Summer 1 2021

<b><u>Instructor</u></b> Name	Title
<b>Sam Nowak</b>	<b>Teaching Fellow</b>

**Quarters Taught**  Fall  Winter  Spring  Summer

**Department** Geography

<b><u>Contact</u></b> Name	E-mail
<b>ALISON FEDYNA</b>	<b>afedyna@teaching.ucla.edu</b>

**Routing Help**

## ROUTING STATUS

**Role:** Registrar's Scheduling Office

**Status:** Pending Action

**Role:** L&S FEC Coordinator - Corrado, Leah Marcos (lcorrado@college.ucla.edu) - 310/825-1021

**Status:** Approved on 9/4/2020 3:35:39 PM

**Changes:** No Changes Made

**Comments:** No changes. Approved on behalf of Jeff Lewis, Chr, College FEC, per e-mail 8/21/2020

**Role:** CUTF Coordinator - Fedyna, Alison (afedyna@teaching.ucla.edu) - 310/825-9149

**Status:** Approved on 9/3/2020 12:40:08 PM

**Changes:** No Changes Made

**Comments:** on behalf of Professor Kathleen L. Komar, Chair, CUTF Faculty Advisory Committee

**Role:** Initiator/Submitter - Fedyna, Alison (afedyna@teaching.ucla.edu) - 310/825-9149

**Status:** Submitted on 8/31/2020 4:59:42 PM

**Comments:** Initiated a New Course Proposal

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