

**Viral Media**  
**EMAC 6381: Special Topics in Emergent Communication**  
**HUSL 6392: Topics in Literary Studies**  
**Fall 2015**

*These descriptions and timelines are subject to change at the discretion of the Instructor.*

**Course Information**

Class No. 85304 (6381) and 87490 (6392)

Meets: T 4pm – 6:45pm

Location: ATC 2.914

Credit Hours: 3

**Contact Information**

Instructor: Kim Knight

Email (preferred method of contact): kim.knight@utdallas.edu

Phone: 972-883-4346.

Office Hours:

- Drop In (no appointment necessary) : Tue 2:30 pm - 3:30 pm
- Schedule appointments via <http://purplekimchi.youcanbook.me>

Contact policies:

- I respond to email M-F within 24 hours.
  - If I do not respond within that time frame, check my email address and re-send it.
- Use official UTD email only.
- I will not respond to
  - Email messages that request information found on the syllabus or assignment sheets.
  - Twitter direct messages.

Course wiki: [viralmedia.pbworks.com](http://viralmedia.pbworks.com)

Twitter tag: #utdviral

Twitter archive:

**Course Description**

In this course, we will explore the concept of "the viral" in relation to emerging media, art, literature, and communication. The course will begin with a look at the history of the term and its definitional and metaphorical operations, particularly in relation to biology and computation. We will then situate the term within the contemporary media landscape that produces "viral structures" that influence our engagement with media, institutions, and one another. Finally, we will examine viral structures in operation in the realms of entertainment and activism.

Throughout the semester we will consider "viral media" both as it circulated in operation, and as it is represented through the lenses of film, literature, and digital art.

No prior experience with digital media is necessary.

### **Course Goals**

In this course, students will:

- ✓ Understand the biological and computational origins of the viral metaphor.
- ✓ Apply theoretical readings to the analysis of viral media objects.
- ✓ Participate in and analyze one or more viral structures.
- ✓ Communicate with the emerging media community through the use of blogs, microblogs, social bookmarking, live presentations, etc.
- ✓ Utilize the existing research on emerging media in their own work.

### **Required Textbooks and Materials**

- Oldstone, Michael. *Viruses, Plagues, and History* ISBN-10: 0195327314
- Johnson, Steven. *The Ghost Map*. ISBN-10: 9781594482694
- Parikka, Jussi. *Digital Contagions*. ISBN-10: 0820488372
- Fuller, Matthew. *Media Ecologies* ISBN-10: 9780262562263
- Kunzru, Hari. *Transmission*. ISBN-10: 0452286514
- Rettberg, Jill Walker. *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology*. ISBN-13: 978-1137476647
- Graedon, Alena. *The Word Exchange*. ISBN-13: 978-0345806031

Various chapters and essays, available online or through course reserve.

You will also need the following: a UTD email account (that you check frequently), a Twitter account, a wordpress blog, a PBWiki account.

### **Course Policies**

Attendance: Some of the most valuable take-away from this course will come out of our class discussions. Your participation is necessary for our success. It is important that you come to every class prepared and on time. To be “prepared” means that you have read the reading, developed and considered questions, and are prepared to discuss it in class. Bring questions, comments, observations, disagreements, examples, etc.

Because your presence in class is important, more than one absence (i.e. missing more than 1 week of class) will negatively affect your participation grade. In most cases, more than four absences (i.e. missing more than 1 month of class) will result in a failing participation grade. Missing more than 8 classes (more than 2 months in class) will result in a failing course grade. There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Use that one freebie wisely. If you need to miss class for religious reasons, please speak to me ahead of time. Absences for

religious purposes do not count against the permitted number (as long as prior notification is given).

Lateness is also unacceptable; if you arrive more than thirty minutes late to class you will be marked as absent. If you leave more than 30 minutes early, you will be marked absent. In addition, please try to be as fully present and engaged as possible – silence cell phones, don't send or receive texts or emails, etc. Excessive distraction may be counted as an absence.

Accommodation: If you have a disability that requires accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act -2008(ADAAA), please present your letter of accommodations from the Office of Student AccessAbility and meet with me as soon as possible so that I can support your success in an informed manner. If you would like to know more about the University of Texas at Dallas, Office of Student AccessAbility, please contact the office at 972-883-6104 or email: [studentaccessability@utdallas.edu](mailto:studentaccessability@utdallas.edu). Their office is located in the Student Service Building (SSB), suite 3.200.

Online Due Dates: Original blog posts are due before class starts at 4pm. All other online assignments, including blog responses, are due by 11:59pm on the date listed.

Late work: You should make a concerted effort to turn in all work on-time, in the format outlined on the assignment sheet. Work submitted in formats other than that listed on the assignment sheet will not be accepted. Work emailed during class session will be considered late.

- **Blogs:** Work associated with the blog assignment will not be accepted late.
- **Case studies:** Work associated with the case study assignment will not be accepted late.
- **Media Production Group Project:** Late submission of proposals, plans, etc. will result in a loss of 1/3 of a grade on the project for each late item. The media project will be marked down one letter grade for each day (or fraction thereof) that the media object and/or final writeup is late.
- **Research Paper:** Late submission of proposals, bibliographies, and drafts will result in a loss of 1/3 of a grade on the project for each late item. Research papers will be marked down one letter grade for each day (or fraction thereof) that they are late.

It is your responsibility to complete your work early enough to allow time for any technical difficulties. Work that is turned in late due to technical difficulties is subject to late penalties.

Respectful behavior: Our many discussions and online assignments will require vigilance to ensure that we are always preserving an atmosphere of mutual respect in which everyone is welcome to learn. Disagreements may arise and consensus may not be possible. We can, however, respect each person's right to respectfully express themselves and to have the opportunity to learn. Name calling, harassment, or menacing behavior will not be tolerated.

Online identity: This class asks students to participate in publicly accessible blogs and other forms of public writing. Writing in public has several advantages for student learning. It creates a closer analogue to offline environments, and allows for the creation of writing that is designed to be shared with an actual audience, instead of just an instructor. It also allows students to learn from each other. However, some students may have legitimate privacy concerns about participating in publicly accessible assignments. These students may choose to participate in public assignments under a pseudonym, or assumed name. If you wish to request this accommodation for any reason, please contact me immediately.

Academic Honesty: From the UT-D Handbook of Operating Procedures: “The university expects from its students a high level of responsibility with respect to academic honesty. Because the value of an academic degree depends on the absolute integrity of the work done by the student for that degree, it is imperative that a student maintain a high standard of individual honor in his or her scholastic work. The dean may initiate disciplinary proceedings under subchapter C against a student accused of scholastic dishonesty upon complaint by a faculty member or a student.” (<http://www.utdallas.edu/dept/graddean/gspolDishonesty.htm>)

Plagiarism will be reported to the Dean of Students. Possible disciplinary action by the university may include failing the assignment, failing the course, expulsion, etc. If you have any questions regarding the proper use of outside sources or the distinction between sampling and plagiarism, I encourage you to meet with me.

University Policies: Please visit <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies> for the University’s policies regarding all courses.

### **Course Requirements and Grading Policy**

#### **Grading Scale:**

<b>A Range: Excellent</b> A, A-	<b>B Range: Good</b> B+, B, B-	<b>C Range: Fair</b> C+, C, C-	<b>D: Needs Improvement</b> D+, D, D-	<b>F: Failing</b> F
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#### **Assignments:**

##### Participation – 25%

Participation includes attendance and class discussion, which may be supplemented with online discussion.

### Blogs - 20%

Each student is required to develop a blog as the center of his/her own online “presence” in the course. This will serve as a place for weekly discussion of the class reading. Blog responsibilities will rotate between writing original blog content and responding to the blogs of peers.

### Case Studies - 10%

Students will create a wiki entry to document and analyze a viral structure in a case study format. They will present their example and analysis in class.

### Collaborative Meme Project - 25%

Students will be divided into groups to collaboratively plan, execute, document, and analyze a meme event in a target community. More on this after week two.

### Research Paper - 20%

Each student will be responsible for producing a conference length (8 - 10 pages) research paper that reflects on, builds upon, and engages one of the issues surrounding viral media that we have covered in class. More on this after the midpoint of class.

**General Requirements:** This class involves a lot of theoretical reading. My hope is that you will apply the ideas from that reading to our discussions and analysis of art, literature, and media. You will be most successful in this class if you are able to have an open mind and take a critical approach to our topics. Please note that being “critical” does not necessarily mean being negative, but it does mean that you are willing to question assumptions and explore the implications of the seemingly mundane and minute aspects of contemporary media culture. Openness to experimentation and play and a willingness to try and fail are critical to the study of emerging media.

## **Academic Calendar**

**(DRAFT: Always check the course website for up-to-date assignments)**

### Unit One: Origins of the Metaphor

#### **Week One**

Tue, Aug 25: Introduction

#### **Week Two: Biological Viruses**

Tue, Sept 1

- Before class
  - Read Oldstone, *Viruses, Plagues and History*
    - Part One, Ch 4, 8, 17
  - Play <http://www.centreofthecell.org/interactives/flu/index.php>
  - Blog post due before class – A Bloggers

- Create accounts on Pbworks, Twitter, and Wordpress. Request access to the course wiki.

Saturday, Sept 5

Blog responses due – B & C bloggers

### **Week Three: Epidemiology**

Tue, Sept 8

- Before Class
  - Read Johnson, *The Ghost Map*
  - Blog post – B Bloggers

Sat, Sept 12

- Blog responses due – A & C bloggers

### **Week Four: Computer Viruses**

Tue, Sept 15

- Before Class
  - Read Parikka, *Digital Contagions*
    - Intro, Ch 1, Ch 2
  - Browse Solanki, *The Lovers* (images in the left sidebar are links. Follow all of them to see screenshots and simulations of the installation)
    - <http://electronicartist.net/the-lovers/index.html>
  - Read and watch Waldorf, *I love you, but* (read the description and watch the short movie)
    - <http://www.digitalcraft.org/iloveyou/love.htm>
  - Blog post – C Bloggers

Event of Interest: Thurs, Sept 17 & Fri, Sept 18 - Digital Frontiers Conference at UTD

Sat, Sept 19

- Blog responses due – A & B bloggers
- Event of Interest: Digital Frontiers THATCamp

### **Week Five: Representations**

Tue, Sept 22

- Before Class
  - Watch Peterson, dir. *Outbreak*
    - available via Amazon streaming
  - Read Butler, “Speech Sounds” from *Bloodchild and Other Stories*
    - link TBD
  - Blog post – A Bloggers

Sat, Sept 26

- Blog responses due – B & C bloggers

## Unit Two: Toward a Theory of the Viral Structure

### **Week Six: Media Ecologies**

Tue, Sept 29

- Before Class
  - Read Fuller, *Media Ecologies*
    - Intro, Ch 1, Ch 3, Inventory
- Blog post – B bloggers

Sat, Oct 3

- Blog responses due – A & C bloggers

### **Week Seven: Representations**

Tue, Oct 6

- Before Class
  - Read Kunzru, *Transmission*
- Blog post – C bloggers

Sat, Oct 10

- Blog responses due – A & B bloggers

### **Week Eight: Web 2.0 and Participatory Culture**

Tue, Oct 13

- Before Class
  - Read van Dijck, *Culture of Connectivity*
    - Chapters 1 and 2
    - Chapter 8
  - Read Burgess and Green, “The Entrepreneurial Vlogger: Participatory Culture Beyond the Professional-Amateur Divide.”
    - <http://kimknight.com/readings/burgessgreen-entrepreneurialblogger.pdf>
  - Read Grusin, “YouTube at the End of New Media”
    - <http://kimknight.com/readings/grusin-youtubeatendofnewmedia.pdf>
  - Blog post – A bloggers
- Event of Interest: Ada Lovelace Day; Feminist Makerspace Launch

Sat, Oct 17

- Blog responses due – B & C bloggers

### **Week Nine: Seeing Ourselves Through Media**

Tue, Oct 20

- Before Class

- Read Rettberg, *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology*
- Blog post due – B bloggers

Sat, Oct 24

- Blog responses due – A & C bloggers

### **Week Ten: Representations**

Tue, Oct 27

- Before Class
  - Read Graedon, *The Word Exchange*
  - Blog post due - C bloggers

Event of Interest: Wed, Oct 28 - A rare sighting: Dr. Knight gives a lecture: “Viral Anxieties in Art and Antiviral Technology,” sponsored by the Center for Values in Medicine, Science, and Technology

Sat, Oct 31

- Blog responses due – A & B bloggers

### **Week Eleven: Theory of the Viral Structure**

Tue, Nov 3

- Before Class
  - Read Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"
    - <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>
  - Read DeCerteau, "General Introduction" to The Practice of Everyday Life
    - [http://www.ubu.com/papers/de\\_certeau.html](http://www.ubu.com/papers/de_certeau.html)
  - Knight, *Media Epidemics* Intro
    - link TBD
- Blog post – A bloggers

Sat, Nov 7

- Blog responses due – B & C bloggers

### **Week Twelve: Representations**

Tue, Nov 10

- Before Class
  - Watch Nakata, dir. *Ringu*
  - Read Knight, *Media Epidemics* Ch 2
    - link TBD
  - Browse Ring Transmission Timeline <http://kimknight.com/ring>
- Blog post due – B bloggers

Sat, Nov 14

- Blog responses due – A & C bloggers

### Unit Three: Viral Structures in Action

#### Week Thirteen: Viral Activism

Tue, Nov 17

- Before Class
  - Read Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*
    - “Changing the World in Network Society” and “Beyond Outrage, Hope”
    - Link TBD
  - Read Audre Lord, “Learning from the 60s”
    - <http://www.blackpast.org/1982-audre-lorde-learning-60s>
  - Read Owens, “We Have to Make Them Feel Us: Open Letters and Black Mothers’ Grief”
    - <http://aaihs.org/we-have-to-make-them-feel-us-open-letters-and-black-mothers-grief/>
  - Read Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement”
    - <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/>
  - Read Bennet, “I don’t know what to do with good white people”
    - <http://jezebel.com/i-dont-know-what-to-do-with-good-white-people-1671201391>
  - Read Berger, “In Ferguson, Photographs as Powerful Agents”
    - [http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/in-ferguson-photographs-as-powerful-agents/?smid=tw-share&\\_r=0](http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/in-ferguson-photographs-as-powerful-agents/?smid=tw-share&_r=0)
  - Read Gould-Wartofsky, “When Rioting is Rational”
    - <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/01/when-rioting-is-rational-ferguson>
  - Read Johnson, “After Baltimore and Ferguson, Major Momentum for Criminal Justice System Reform”
    - <http://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2015/05/14/406768355/after-baltimore-and-ferguson-major-momentum-for-criminal-justice-system-reform>
  - Read Workneh, “#SayHerName: Why we should declare that black women and girls matter, too”
    - [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/21/black-women-matter\\_n\\_7363064.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/21/black-women-matter_n_7363064.html)
- Blog post due – C bloggers

Sat, Nov 21

- Blog responses due – A & B bloggers

#### Nov 23 - 27: Fall Break

#### Week Fourteen: Viral Entertainment

Tue, Dec 1

- Before Class
  - Watch iamamiwhoami playlist
    - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL756F5DEF8352AD43>

- Read Knight, “The Work of the Viral Structure in the Age of Networked Transmission” in *The Projector* (Winter 2015).
  - <http://kimknight.com/?p=2244>
- Watch The Misadventures of Awkward Blackgirl, Season 1
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIVa9lxkbus&list=PL854514FC0EBDCD8E>
- Watch The Guild, Season 1
  - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=ELsUoi5Pu-0R0>

### **Week Fifteen: Presentations**

Tue, Dec 8

- Before Class
  - Media project reflection papers due in the wiki
- In-class
  - Media Project presentations

**Tue, Dec 15: Research paper uploaded to the course wiki no later than 11:59pm**