# English 582: Digital Case Study Research

Instructor: John R. Gallagher
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Class meeting: Mondays, 1-4 pm. Synchronous online.
One-to-one support: 1-3 pm on Wednesdays via Zoom. I am available by appointment too! You can also get in touch with me over email and twitter (@meresophistry). When warm, I will try to be available for meeting in a Champaign park so you can meet me in person if you wish. I will wear a face shield and observe social distancing.

**About Me:** I received my PhD from UMass Amherst in 2014. I research how internet writers, well, write. Consequently, I study internet culture. I do so by using big data analysis of audience participation. I couple computational analysis with qualitative approaches, such as interviews. I'm a dad of two awesome and exhausting children and husband to a brilliant mechanical engineer. I like to skateboard, read history (primarily about the US), and play video games. In another life, I was an all-American water polo and swimmer. I'm currently working on a novel, tentatively titled *Falling Words*.

**Statement on COVID pandemic:** It's okay to feel overwhelmed. The entire world, including myself, has been thrown into chaos. I want you to enjoy this course as much as possible. It is meant to expand your intellectual horizons and challenge perceived limitations of human expression. If you get overwhelmed, know that I will help make accommodations.

**Course Description**: What is a case study? How can we define and describe case study research, particularly in an era wherein networked technologies create porous boundaries? This course wrestles with these questions by drawing on various fields, including education (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2017; Dyson and Genishi, 2005; Stake, 1995), social science (Yin, 2009), political science (Gerring, 2017), and sociology (Ragin, 1992). Together, we will learn to craft case studies that can effectively account for networked technologies and other contexts that diffuse phenomena across boundaries and borders (e.g., computational models, algorithms, social media networks, mobile devices, etc.). The course will involve several hands-on activities and culminate in an in-depth case study investigation.

**Course Objectives:**
- To describe and contextually define (by theorist and discipline) the concept of a case study as well as the individual terms "digital," "case", and "study"
- To identify different case study traditions in various disciplines while applying those traditions to digital research
- To engage in a multiweek study of a digital case study
- To learn technical skills related to conducting empirical digital case study

**Readings:**
All readings are available on Moodle or by hyperlink

**Assignments:**

1) Final project (40%). This will be an in-depth case study consisting of original research driven your own questions, the course texts, and guidance from me.
2) Mid-term (30%). This will be a short-answer written exam due during the week of October 12<sup>th</sup>. More details later in the semester.
3) Participation (20%).
4) Reading notebook designed for habitualizing note-taking (10%). These will be developed on a one-by-one basis and will be used for your future research.

**Buddy system and community building:**
During the second week of class, we will *intentionally* build our online community. Please feel free to share what you would like about yourself, which can include: why are you enrolled in this course, your hobbies, your goals for the course, excitements and anxieties about this course or online learning generally, and anything else you feel comfortable with.

**Classroom Community Policy:**
1) You are expected to submit all assignments, readings, and writings by the announced due date. Late assignments and lack of preparation will be marked down. This includes bringing any texts to class if we are using them. You are responsible for printing them out.
2) Cell-phone use is allowed in class. Just please keep it on silent.
3) If you are called on, I expect you to answer to the best of your ability. It is perfectly acceptable to be unsure of your answer—that is the goal of higher education: to take risks. I reward risk-taking. I encourage you to think and venture an answer.
4) Everyone in class has different levels of comfort, especially online! 😊 I expect all members of our community to respect one another. For those individuals who are more comfortable talking, I expect you to ask your fellow classmates questions to encourage them to add to our discussion. For those less comfortable, I expect you to make an attempt to add your thoughts to the discussion, even if it is a brief statement. Further, for those less comfortable talking in class, there will be other types of participation, which includes emailing me ideas to bring up in class, peer review, group work, and so forth. I expect everyone to listen actively to another. In this way, participation includes more than talking; it also includes listening, posing questions, and completing all in-class assignments to the best of your ability. Respect means listening, taking notes, and joining/enhancing conversations that challenge each other and your instructor using respectful language and tone.
5) We all come from different lives and have different journeys, so we should expect and embrace vibrant disagreement and productive dissent. A democratic society cannot thrive otherwise. Therefore, I expect us to continually strive for a spirit of grace, compassion, and respect in our learning journeys (both in agreements and disagreements) for the short time we are together in this course. If at any time you feel that these expectations are not being met, please let me know as soon as possible.

**Time spent on the course:**
I expect you to spend about 7 hours a week on this course, although you will likely spend more on the case study project during the last 4 weeks of the semester (8-10 hours a week). I do NOT expect you to work on the weekends or during the holiday break.

**Online netiquette:**
1) Use punctuation and capitalization appropriately and contextually. No yelling (all caps).
2) Grammar for chatting is loose and spelling mistakes are acceptable! 😊 When we are live chatting and texting, no worries about spelling errors or other grammar issues.
3) Be sincere. Sarcasm is lost in many online settings. Avoid the word "actually"
4) Practice kindness and professionalism
5) Treat your classmates as you would like to be treated

**Plagiarism/Academic Integrity (http://admin.illinois.edu/policy/code/article1_part4_1-401.html):**
The University of Illinois has high standards of academic integrity set out in Article 1, Part 4 of the University Student Code (copied below), which I uphold.
(1) Policy Statement. The University has the responsibility for maintaining academic integrity so as to protect the quality of education and research on our campus and to protect those who depend upon our integrity.
(2) Expectations of Students. It is the responsibility of each student to refrain from infractions of academic integrity, from conduct that may lead to suspicion of such infractions, and from conduct that aids others in such infractions. Students have been given notice of this Part by virtue of its publication. Regardless of whether a student has actually read this Part, a student is charged with knowledge of it. Ignorance is not a defense.
(3) Expectations of Instructors. It is the responsibility of each Instructor to establish and maintain an environment that supports academic integrity. An essential part of each Instructor's responsibility is the enforcement of existing standards of academic integrity. If Instructors do not discourage and act upon violations of which they become aware, respect for those standards is undermined. Instructors should provide their students with a clear statement of their expectations concerning academic integrity. Students Requiring Accommodations: If you have a disability that requires accommodation in order for you to be successful in this class, please let me know immediately. If you haven't already, you should contact the Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) for accommodation support. Their website is http://www.disability.illinois.edu/

**Emergency Response Recommendations:**
In an emergency in this building, we'll have three choices: **RUN** (get out), **HIDE** (find a safe place to stay inside), or **FIGHT** (with anything available to increase our odds for survival). Take time to familiarize yourself with the University's emergency response recommendations at http://police.illinois.edu/emergencyplanning/general/

FERPA statement (hyperlink)

I am a mandatory reporting in terms of reporting sexual misconduct. Please read this link here.

## Course schedule

### Part I: Definitions and descriptions

August 24          Yin (chapters 1-2)
                   Flyvbjerg's "Five Misunderstandings"
                   Jocher's "The case method in social research" (read loosely)

August 31          Bartlett and Vavrus (chapters 1-2)
                   Gerring's "What is a case study and what is it good for?"
                   Burawoy's "The extended case method" (read loosely)

September 7        NO CLASS (Labor day)

### Part II: Integrating digital elements in case study research

September 14       Gallagher's "A Framework for Internet Case Study Methodology in
                         Writing Studies"
                   Peters "Digital"
                   Shmargad & Klar's "Sorting the News"

September 21       Gillespie's *Custodians of the Internet*
                   Burke's "Occluded Algorithms"

September 28        Weltevrede's *Repurposing Digital Methods*
                   Focus on the cases:          p. 46-50
                                                p. 64-70
                                                p. 118-130
                                                p. 140-150
                                                p. 153-174

October 5          10-15 min presentations on midterms (due during the week of October
                   12th; schedule with John)
                   John provides lecture on digital elements.
                   **NO READING**

### Part III: Data collection

October 12         Digital data collection techniques including:
                   Web-scraping workshop
                   Screen-captures and recordings
                   Filing systems and temporal concerns
                   Hughes' "The Evolution of Large Technological Systems"

October 19         Digital data collection techniques including:
                   Web-scraping workshop

> Screen-captures and recordings
> Filing systems and temporal concerns
> Kearns and Roth' *The Ethical Algorithm*

## Part IV: Interviewing

October 26          Interviewing via digital tools (video interview, chat interviewing, and
                        audio interviewing)
                    Raymond Opdenakker's "Advantages and Disadvantages of Four
                        Interview Techniques in Qualitative Research"
                    Jaton's "We get the algorithms of our ground truths: Designing
                    referential databases in digital image processing"

November 2          Odell, Herrington, and Goswami's "The discourse-based interview: A
                    procedure for exploring tacit knowledge of writers in non-academic
                    settings"
                    Revisit Jaton's article

## Part V: Coding

November 9          Geisler and Swartz's Coding Streams of Language (Chapters 1-3)

November 16         Geisler and Swartz's Coding Streams of Language (Chapters 4-6)

FALL BREAK

November 30         Presentations on case study projects

December 7          Meetings with John and with group members (peer review)


**Schedule finals with John for individual due dates—when it's convenient for you!**