1. Course description

Why is it so hard to find a compatible date online? When and why does an online friendship become something more? (How) Can I use social media to start (or end) a relationship? All these questions relate to online intimacy. Intimacy is one of the deepest and most meaningful aspects of our social existence. Our intimate experiences range from the mundane to the aesthetic, representing a specific sort of knowing, loving, and caring for a person. The convergence of computing technologies and our social world has brought a new dimension to intimacy; Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) now mediate intimate relationships and even participates in its creation. Intimacy and computing transcend and (re)shape each other in novel ways that reveal much about us and our relationships with each other and with ICTs.

This course focuses on the relationships between intimacy and computing, including how people find emotional fulfillment in online social spaces. We will address the emotional aspects of interaction within emerging social, cultural and technological contexts as we approach the notion of online intimacy from various perspectives. We will consider the formation of contemporary ideas about intimacy, the transition of intimacy from offline to online, new intimate experiences mediated by different digital environments and platforms (e.g., mobile apps, SNSs, online dating sites, virtual worlds, multiplayer online games), intimacy in HCI design, social issues with online intimacy, and methodological/ethical issues to study online intimacy.

2. Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

• understand contemporary ideas on the nature of intimacy and how computing technologies (re)shape the way we experience intimacy;
• discuss a variety of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives and viewpoints on online intimacy in relation to understandings of love, sex, gender, sexuality, and sociality;
• reflect critically upon the significance of how intimacy and intimate relationships are represented and mediated in different electronic environments/platforms; and
• describe various ways that understandings of intimate experience can contribute to the design of social computing or ubiquitous computing

In addition, students will develop their written, oral, and critical skills in these ways:
• actively participating in both online and in-class discussion
• leading at least two in-class discussions
• summarizing and synthesizing concepts from published scholarship
• creating an ICT report to review an intimacy-related ICT product or digital environment/platform

3. Course Requirements
The final grade will be based on attendance, in-class and online discussion, leading two in-class discussions, and an ICT review report (with a presentation). Undergraduates will also have a take-home exam and graduate students will complete a final project and presentation.

Attendance
You are expected to be physically present and alert during class meetings. You will also be required to participate in an online discussion platform (Oncourse - Forums). The use of laptops and digital devices during class time is limited to activities that relate directly to the course. Surfing the web for other purposes, reading or replying to email, text messages, or Facebook, and other non-class-related use of digital media is not permitted during either face-to-face or online class meetings. If you must miss a class session for a legitimate reason, contact me in advance for suggestions of what you can do to make up your participation. NOTE: If you only attend a part of the class (e.g., never come back after break) without reasonable explanations, your attendance for this given session will NOT be made.

In-class and online discussion
You are expected to read the assigned readings before class. Undergraduates are required to read at least three readings assigned for each session. Graduate students are required to read all assigned readings for each session. You are also expected to participate in online (Oncourse - Forums) and in-class discussions about them. Every student is required to lead at least two in-class discussions (sign up at: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1gtH_5KzHF1ZA6JW06rb7-cIIa6XcJpSHkSVZHvDQvs/edit#gid=0).

Students who volunteer to lead more than two in-class discussions will receive extra credit. Every in-class discussion will be led by two or three students. You will select a topic from the syllabus in which you have interest. When this topic is covered in class, you will have the lead role in preparing and leading the discussion with one or two classmates. If more than three students select a same topic, I will make arrangements.
When your partner(s) and you lead the discussion, you will post a summary (2-3 paragraphs, briefly encapsulating each article's main claims) on the online platform for each assigned reading before the class (you can split the readings with your partner), and everyone else will post one or more comments on the summaries. Good comments will engage specifically and thoughtfully with the content of the readings. You will also prepare at least three questions that emerge from the readings and you want to discuss in class. When we meet in class, your partner and you will talk about the topic and the readings, raising the questions that will serve as the basis for our discussion.

A VERY IMPORTANT NOTE FOR ALL STUDENTS: In all in-class and online discussions, all students MUST be respectful of other students' opinions and not impose personal sexual preferences or experiences. All participants should approach the material in the spirit of academic inquiry. Intimacy is not just about SEX (which is a very common misunderstanding), online intimacy is not about online pornography, and intimacy-related ICTs are not sexual devices.

You are expected to check the online platform and your email at least once a day, including the evening before class for last-minute announcements and reminders. Posting and commenting in the online platform is strongly encouraged.

ICT review report and presentation
You will select an intimacy-related ICT product or digital environment/platform, and prepare a report on its features, advantages, and potential issues. For example, you might choose to review a mobile app designed for long distance couples, an online dating site, a website that people can share secrets anonymously, a mobile, computer or video game that friends or lovers can play together, or a dancing pub in Second Life where avatars can chat and dance with each other. Every student should clear the topic with the instructor before beginning work.

The purpose of an ICT review report is to provide your readers with an introduction to ICT product or digital environment/platform, a sense of features of this ICT product or digital environment/platform, and your informed opinion about the advantages and potential issues. Therefore, in your report, be sure to cover the following:

Describe it and, if possible, include a picture. What are its main features?
What is it intended to do? How does it work?
In which way does it create, mediate or promote intimacy? What are its potential user groups? What is the specific intimate experience(s) that users can have by using it? How well is it doing in terms of creating or mediating intimate experience?
How usable is it?
How is it being marketed? Does it come in different configurations? How much does it cost?
What are the benefits if people use it? What are the risks/issues if people use it?
For the potential risks/issues, explain why we should be concerned about them
Describe your opinions to mitigate or alleviate the risks/issues
Provide your best estimates of the current and future costs of the risks/issues

No matter which intimacy-related ICT product or digital environment/platform you choose, you should explain its current impact on people's intimate experience.

You may use relevant class readings as a basis for your investigation, but you should also make use of other sources (digital or otherwise) that help you understand the technology or digital environment/platform you are studying. Be sure to cite all of the sources that you use. Be sure to use APA citation style. Your report should be about 5 pages (~1,250 words) excluding references. You should submit your report (as WORD) via Oncourse by midnight on 10/22.

You (both graduate students and undergraduates) will present your ICT review report in class on 10/23 (15 minutes). Specific guidelines for your presentation will be provided. Using slides is highly recommended.

**Final project or take-home final exam**

**For graduate students:** You will conduct a project that investigates issues or controversies surrounding ICT-mediated intimacy. The topic may be one that we have covered in class or one of your own choosing. It can be the topic that you investigated in your ICT review report, but you have to elaborate it and conduct a much deeper analysis. You can choose to do one of the three:

- Conduct an in-depth literature review on a problem, issue, controversy, or domain that relates to intimacy and ICTs (e.g., a literature review on the differences between computer-mediated relationships and face-to-face relationships)
- Conduct a small scale original research study investigating ICT-mediated intimacy and its impacts on human lives (e.g., a small case study on how long-distance couples use social media to maintain their relationships)
- Investigate design strategies for a ICT product or digital environment/platform to create, mediate or promote intimacy

You must discuss potential topics with the instructor early in the term. Papers should be 4000-5000 words. Be sure to use APA citation style. I expect "conference paper quality." Make connections to the course readings. You will submit your paper via Oncourse (due by 6 pm on 12/18) and do an oral presentation (discuss with the instructor about date/time). Specific guidelines for your presentation will be provided. Using slides is highly recommended.

**For undergraduates:**

You will finish a take-home final exam consisting of not more than five (5) essay questions. Questions are related to topics that we cover in class. You should respond as fully as possible to each question. Your submission should be double-spaced, max. 10 pages or 2500 words. You should also use the same stylistic care that you would in preparing a term paper. You may draw on class notes, required readings or any other materials at your disposal. However, when using these materials, you must credit sources

wherever and whenever appropriate. You will submit your responses via Oncourse (due by 6 pm on 12/18). There is no final presentation for undergraduates.

4. Grading
Your grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

**Graduate students:**

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<td>Online participation</td>
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<td>Leading in-class discussions</td>
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<td>ICT review report</td>
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<td>ICT report presentation</td>
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**Undergraduates:**

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**Grading policy:**

- Late online comments on the readings will be accepted *once* during the semester, no questions asked, provided they are posted **within two days** after the class meeting in which the readings were discussed. I reserve the right to subtract one-third of a letter grade (from A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for each day one of the two written assignments (i.e., the technology review report and the final project/exam) is late beyond the due date.

- Class participation, reading summaries, and online discussions will be graded with a check mark for each class meeting, to indicate that the requirement was met. Class participation means being willing and prepared to speak intelligently in class about the topics under discussion. (Note: this does not necessarily mean speaking a lot—you may be penalized if you habitually dominate class discussions.)

- The technology review report, the leadership of in-class discussions, the final paper/exam, and the two presentations (only one for undergraduates) will be assigned letter grades (A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, etc.).
Note: Learning is a collaborative enterprise. However, plagiarism, copyright infringement, and other types of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. To help you recognize plagiarism, the IU Writing Center has prepared a short guide: *Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It*. Please read this guide and refer to it when you produce your written assignments for this course.

**Tentative Schedule of Readings and Discussions**
(All readings are available on the Internet or on Oncourse. Subject to change with advance notice)

Notes: Readings are listed as the order that they should be read. Undergraduates are required to read at least three readings assigned for each session. Graduate students are required to read all assigned readings for each session.

**Session 1 – 8/28**
1. Introduction.
2. Sign up for leading at least two in-class discussions (sign up at: [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1gtH_5KzHF1ZAdJWO6rb7- cIIa6XcJpSHkSVZVvDQvs/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1gtH_5KzHF1ZAdJWO6rb7-cIIa6XcJpSHkSVZVvDQvs/edit#gid=0)).

**Session 2 – 9/4**
**Topic: All you need is love: What is intimacy?**


**Session 3 – 9/11**
**Topic: Does online intimacy exist?: ICT-mediated intimacy**


**Session 4 -- 9/18**

**Topic: Smart phone, smart relationships?: Mobile technology and intimacy**


**Session 5 -- 9/25**

**Topic: First networking, then intimacy: Social networking sites and intimacy**


**Session 6 -- 10/2**
**Topic: Let my profile picture do the talking: Online dating sites and intimacy**


**Guest Lecture: Doug Zytko, "Online dating systems: The new normal for love"**

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**Session 7 -- 10/9**

**Topic: Come to meet my second self: Virtual worlds and intimacy**


**Guest Lecture: Yvette Wohn, "Second life - Fake Identities, Real Emotions"**

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**Session 8 -- 10/16**

**Topic: Play for love: Multiplayer Online Games and Intimacy**


Session 9 -- 10/23
Topic: ICT report presentations (submit your report via Oncourse by midnight on 10/22)

Session 10 -- 10/30
Topic: Intimacy in Human-Computer Interaction design


11/6-- No class – Instructor will be attending the ASIST annual meeting

Session 11 -- 11/13
Topic: Potential issues: Online deception and infidelity


Session 12 -- 11/20
**Topic: Potential issues: Online intimacy and adolescents**


**11/27 – No class (Thanksgiving)**

**Session 13 -- 12/4**

**Topic: Methodological and ethical challenges for studying online intimacy**


**12/18 Final paper/exam due by 6 pm**