COURSE OVERVIEW
This course is designed to provide you with an in-depth, critical overview of social media as a means of public communication. Together, we will analyse some of the cultural and communication effects of social media through critical examination of the underlying theoretical, practical and managerial foundations.

COURSE PRE-REQUISITES
Admission to the MA or MPR program and successful completion of all qualifying requirements if applicable, or permission of the instructor.

TEACHING & LEARNING PLATFORMS
Moodle and Blackboard Collaborate
Familiarity with the course management software Moodle is essential. If you’ve never worked in this platform before, please be certain to explore the online resources provided by the MSVU distance education department.

Each Tuesday (excepting May 14 and June 11), we will gather via Blackboard Collaborate at 11:30 a.m. Atlantic Time for informal discussion. You are not required to participate in these discussions, but you are very welcome to. There are helpful ‘how to’ instructions on our university website if you are new to Collaborate.

You will also require a microphone and speakers or a headset to participate in the Collaborate discussions. (You can purchase a headset for $7 (no tax) via the DLCE online bookstore.)

If you have any technical problems with Collaborate or Moodle, please contact DLCE at online@msvu.ca
COURSE GOALS & OBJECTIVES
FaceBook, Pintrest, Twitter and YouTube and a whole host of other social media platforms have become omnipresent in our working and private lives. While they might seem harmless, there are important cultural and communication implications in their use. It is my goal to expose you to some of the contemporary scholarly thought about social media. I want us to explore the various potentials and pitfalls of social media through critical analysis. And, in doing this, I also want you to experience the positive, negative (and the in between) of social media application.

At the end of this class, you should be able to
1. Critically analyse the evolution of social media as both a cultural and a communication phenomenon.
2. Discuss relevant theoretical foundations for the analysis and application of social media projects and programs.
3. Articulate the impact social media adoption has had on professional practice models in public relations.
4. Identify areas for scholarly study to further understand the communication and cultural implications of social media.
5. Evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of a variety of social media tools in terms of potential communication and relationship outcomes.
6. Analyse and discuss social media policy in organizations.
7. Analyse the impact that social media can have on the development and nurturing of long-term relationships between organizations and their important publics.
8. Discuss the ethical and legal implications of social media on a personal, organizational and societal level.
9. Critically examine current cases of social media programs and projects.
10. Apply your new knowledge and skills creatively for yourself or a client of your choice.

COURSE MATERIAL
This course requires you to complete extensive reading, viewing, contemplation and writing.

Various readings and supplementary digital material (including videos and podcasts) will be required, and will be available through our Moodle web page. Some readings will not be available on the Moodle page. You will need to find them yourself through our MSVU Library web page. The required material is indicated in each of the module outlines.

Additional required reading: MSVU Distance Learning Guide
## COURSE FORMAT

The course is divided into four “modules”:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topics</th>
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</table>
| Critical Perspectives | April 29-May 12 | - Cultural implications  
- Communication implications  
- State of scholarly inquiry |
| Practical Perspectives | May 13-26      | - Identification of major tools  
- Practical applications  
- Message dissemination and/or relationship building |
| Managerial Perspectives | May 27-June 9  | - Strategic considerations  
- Organisational policy development  
- Ethical and legal implications |
| Case Studies | June 10-16     | - ING  
- MITRE  
- Nestle  
- Donglegate  
- Another case of your choice |

## EVALUATION PLAN

**Assignments and Evaluation** (Negotiable until May 3)

These assignments are designed to measure your achievement in three domains: knowledge, attitudes and skills.

**Peer Engagement:** Course blog posts and responses & Moodle fora discussions (40%)

- You are expected to think analytically, creatively, and critically about the module’s topic, and the listening, reading, viewing material in the context of your daily lives.
- You will be evaluated on your participation in the forums that I’ve created for each module; use them to help each other. (Ten percent of your engagement mark is based on your participation in Moodle.) Be prepared to share quotes/questions/issues from the material. Identify and take note of at least one quote and one question, and highlight one issue from the material. These musings will both encourage discussion in our fora, and also serve as a basis for the blog discussions (outlined...
below). Please also feel free to create your own discussion topic. Note that Module Four, in particular, demands that we evaluate cases in Moodle. I will be evaluating your case study participation separately from your general class participation. Your posts should be:

1. written clearly
2. factually correct; cite assigned readings
3. illustrative of sound critical thinking and analysis
4. respectful
5. comments that contribute to the thread of, and encourage further, discussion

(based on Knowlton, 2003)

• We also have a course Twitter feed. Please feel free to use this to discuss anything that you think is relevant to the course. You can follow each other @gprl6202.

• Feel free to create a FaceBook Group page for yourselves.

• ALL students are invited to engage with their peers during the Collaborate sessions.

• You will participate in an online blog that will be housed outside the course Moodle page: http://msvugprl6202.wordpress.com/. Here, you will make blog posts and respond to others. Each of you will be required at minimum to make one blog post for each of the modules and to respond to at least one post by others (guest bloggers, me or other students). (Thirty percent of your engagement mark will be based on your posts—20 percent on your post and 10 percent on your response.) The blog is meant to act as a learning log for you. This may be the most important element in the course. The posts are a record of what you have read, your reactions to the listening/readings/viewings, insights from discussions, and your everyday experiences.

  1. You should read http://en.support.wordpress.com/getting-started/ to familiarize yourself with blogging if it is new to you.

  2. **ONCE YOU HAVE REGISTERED ON WORDPRESS.COM, PLEASE SEND AN EMAIL TO ME AND I WILL ADD YOU TO THE CLASS BLOG AS AN AUTHOR. (CREATE AN ACCOUNT, NOT YOUR OWN BLOG—UNLESS, OF COURSE, YOU WANT YOUR OWN BLOG.)**

**Helpful hints for blog participation:**

• You are welcome to post anything related to social media, but remember that you have minimum requirements. Your posts should not be longer than 500 words.

• Use appropriate tags to describe each post. For example, use tags to identify the module of the blog post and whether it is an original post, a reaction to the class material, a response to a peer’s post, or an analysis of a communication event in your own life. Use tags that will be useful for your peers to determine the content of your post. For example, if you are responding to Hawthorne’s piece, use the word(s) “Hawthorne” or “Caroline Hawthorne” or “Communities” and/or “Internet studies”. This is part of my evaluation of your posts. Tagging is
a form of information categorization, and ultimately, a way of facilitating communication between ourselves and our readers.

- Be certain to categorize your post appropriately. I have created several categories for us, and you are welcome to create others. Categories are different from tags. Tags are user-generated, and categories are often, but not necessarily in the case of our course blog, produced only by the blog’s creator.
- Link to the sources you use in your post (if possible) & credit them (ALWAYS, and in APA or Chicago author-date style).
- Move beyond superficial and two-word type comments à la “great post”, “good job”, “I totally agree with you”, etc. If you agree/disagree, explain yourself. The goal is to add value to the original post and to deepen the conversation.
- Please, no intentional provocations/expletives/obscenities, etc. If you disagree with a post, do so politely. The idea is to start a civil, but also critical conversation. We don’t have to agree with one another, but we do have to respect one another.

Please note that you will not receive credit for:
- Posts that were added late (last day of the module). You need to blog early in the module so that we can engage with one another. We cannot have discussions if everyone posts only at the end of the module!
- Posts that contain inappropriate language. Remember, your blog reflects YOU and while it is not indexed by search engines, it is not marked as private Please talk to me if you have further questions about this.

Grading Criteria:
1. Post is substantive (thoroughly developed)
2. Post is well written (organization, grammar, and spelling)
3. Post demonstrates your understanding of the topic/issue
4. Post illustrates critical reflection of course readings and discussions

Research paper
(20%)

Due May 26 (no later than 11:55 pm)
(No late assignments accepted w/o prior approval)

This is a not-more-than 2000-word essay that will: 1) give you an opportunity to explore the scholarly literature covering social media; and, 2) give me an opportunity to evaluate your ability to analyse and synthesise academic research material, to create a strong argument and to write in a scholarly style.

As you work through the reading and material for Module 1, choose a topic for your paper. The following questions might help you frame your topic, and are meant to help you begin to theoretically connect social media with public relations as a practice and as an academic discipline.
• To what extent has social media changed the professional communication landscape?
• Have professional communicators adopted social media as just another “tactic”? If so, in what ways?
• What are the ethical considerations of using social media in planned communication programs?
• How can professional communicators balance “new media” with traditional approaches to communication and relationship building?
• How can communication scholars help professional communicators better understand social media?

Let your answer to one of these questions serve as your thesis statement. Include at least 10 scholarly sources in your paper, and not more than five non-academic sources. Use APA-style or Chicago author-date style referencing to explore your ideas. You may want to browse a journal called New Media & Society for other ideas if the questions posed above do not help you.

Write a 200-word abstract of your paper, and post it to our class blog. I will deduct 10% if you fail to do this. These abstracts should act as invitations to share our work. If you are interested in someone’s research, I suggest that you ask them for a copy. If you get a request for your own paper, I hope you will share it!

Submit your essay via Moodle with the following file name: Research Paper. Your Last Name. Your first name. Submit only Word documents. E.g. Research Paper.Rehberg Sedo.D.

Please Note: if students are interested, I will arrange for a Collaborate session with one of our fabulous librarians. Please, let me know. In the meantime, check out http://forms.msvu.ca/library/tutorial/pr/pr.htm There are also other tutorials created by other university libraries that are available for use. This one on the literature review might be useful: http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/tutorials/lit-review/

GRADUATE GRADING FRAMEWORK FOR YOUR RESEARCH PAPER

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<tr>
<th>GRADE A:</th>
<th>OUTSTANDING</th>
<th>VERY GOOD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>80-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of ideas</td>
<td>Fluidly expressed original thought showing a high degree of conceptual integration and synthesis accompanied by critical evaluation of the theoretical context in which the material is presented.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>Mastery of a wide range of relevant literature and support materials.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>Sophisticated and articulate development of coherently structured ideas.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Form</td>
<td>Excellent adaptation to the genre. Flexibility in sentence structure and paragraph development in a manner appropriate to the theme.</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRADE B: GOOD</td>
<td>ACCEPTABLE</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<td>77-79</td>
<td>70-72</td>
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**Presentation of ideas**
Competently expressed ideas, showing a substantial knowledge of the information and theoretical concepts associated with the subject, accompanied by analysis, some synthesis, and some application.

**Foundation**
Mastery of a substantial body of relevant literature and support materials.

**Argument**
Clearly organised, well-introduced, well-structured ideas.

**Form**
Presented in an appropriate format. Basic competence in sentence structure, paragraph development, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling.

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<tr>
<th>GRADE C: MINIMALLY ACCEPTABLE</th>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
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<td>69-60</td>
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**Presentation of ideas**
Logically organised ideas demonstrating an acceptable grasp of the material, some analysis, and basic comprehension of application.

**Foundation**
Mastery of an adequate body of relevant literature and support materials.

**Argument**
Adequately organised and coherent argument.

**Form**
Presentation shows an awareness of the format required. Readable writing, showing an effort to follow instructions.

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<th>GRADE F: FAILURE</th>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
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<td>50-59</td>
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</table>

**Presentation of ideas**
Indication of knowledge of basic concepts, little application, analysis, or integration.

**Foundation**
Evidence of the bare minimum of relevant literature.

**Argument**
Basically comprehensible.

**Form**
Sentence structure, vocabulary, and usage minimally acceptable.
Your final evaluation in this course is either a team project or an individual research paper.

Team Project  
(40%)  

Due June 16 (no later than 11:55 pm)  
(No late assignments accepted)

Working in teams of two or three, you will choose a client for whom you will work. You will prepare a creative communication plan that utilizes social media for your client. The plan will bring together all that you have learned during the course, and will be presented as a pre-recorded pitch. You will provide one hard copy to your client, and submit one electronic version to me via Moodle.

The clients:  
Your choice (it can be your place of work, but it must be a new plan). [I have identified several clients for whom you might be interested in helping. Please discuss this with me.]

The challenge:  
To utilize at least two social media tools as part of a strategic approach to relationship building and maintenance.

The submission:  
Each team will submit a complete written pitch consisting of the following elements:

- Background, including a summary of the client, its current communication practices, and the quality of its relevant relationships.

- The strategy, including one overall strategic goal.

- Detailed rationale, including reasons for choosing the specific tools to achieve the goal.

- Measurable objectives for what the tools will accomplish.
 A description of the tools and a presentation of the actual tools as developed by the team.

 A detailed description of the recommended evaluation process.

 A discussion of the future applications or extensions of the tools.

The plan must be client-ready.

**Peer reviews:** Each student must submit individual evaluations of each team member. This is your opportunity to evaluate the contributions of your peers to your team. Give each member of your team (excluding yourself) a rating out of ten. Remember that a 9 or 10 means that the member has given 90% to 100% contribution; a 5 means 50% or “passable”; less than 5 means that the person failed to participate adequately. You should decide on a mark according to the following criteria:

- Attendance in group meetings
- Effort made to participate
- Willingness to consider others’ ideas
- Preparedness
- *The quality* of the contribution
- *ANYTHING else that is important to you, and that was set out in your group contract (I suggest doing this right away after your team is formed.)*

*Please note that this evaluation may influence your individual mark.*

**The presentation:** Each team will pitch the plan to all of us. This can be done in a variety of creative ways (e.g. wiki, SlideShare, podcast, video, Twitter stream). A forum for posting links to your project will be provided. The presentation is due June 16 before 11:55 pm, as is the written plan. We will meet on June 18 in Collaborate to “celebrate” each others’ successes.

(Adapted from a similar project designed by Patty Parsons.)
Your project & pitch will be evaluated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTRIBUTE</th>
<th>EMERGING</th>
<th>COMPETENT</th>
<th>EXEMPLARY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH &amp; INNOVATION</td>
<td>Little research applied to build plan; limited knowledge shown; traditional approach applied.</td>
<td>Issue explored with curiosity; adequate knowledge from variety of sources displayed; strategies reflect innovation and creativity.</td>
<td>Knowledge base displays scope, thoroughness, and quality. Research applied in the identification of key stakeholders, communication objective development and strategic advice; innovation and creative thinking evident in plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANALYSIS &amp; CRITICAL THINKING</td>
<td>Limited analysis; tool(s) not appropriate; weak rationale; no evaluation strategy.</td>
<td>Identifies potential issues; uses an issues management approach; tool(s) appropriate; wise rationale; suitable evaluation strategy.</td>
<td>Uses critical thinking to pose and respond to questions; constructs plan that considers a multitude of perspectives; identifies potential issues and mitigation strategies; excellent rationale for specific tool(s); tool(s) ready for implementation; thorough and appropriate evaluation strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNICATE WITH CLARITY</td>
<td>Ideas are not well-articulated; lack of strategic direction provided.</td>
<td>Strategic direction clear; communication objectives clear but may be challenging to measure; suitable visuals; engaging.</td>
<td>Strategic direction and advice is clear and based upon best practices; communication objectives are clear, concise and measurable; exemplary use of visuals; commendable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>A+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C-</td>
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<td>A-</td>
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(Adapted from: http://www4.nau.edu/assessment/main/degree/plans/PubRel_BS_04_06.pdf)

Final Paper
(40%)

Due June 16 (no later than 11:55 pm)
(No late assignments accepted)

The purpose of the paper is to give you further opportunity to investigate your earlier research topic in greater depth. It should reflect your interest and intended research or applied project. In 6,000-8,000 words, APA or Chicago author-date style, write a paper that you could send to a scholarly
journal (identify the journal in a foot note). Include at least 20 scholarly sources in your paper, and not more than ten non-academic sources. Use APA-style or Chicago-style referencing and style to explore your ideas.


I will use the previously noted rubric to evaluate your work.

COURSE POLICIES (NEGOTIABLE UNTIL MAY 3)

Academic Integrity. (NON-Negotiable). I expect you to be honest and responsible in fulfilling the course requirements and objectives. Any act of dishonesty, including, but not limited to, plagiarism, using someone else’s work as your own, using the same paper or a significantly similar paper for more than one class will be handled according to the MSVU regulations on Plagiarism and Cheating. Do not do it. You will fail this course if you do. MSVU regulations including applicable procedures and penalties are detailed in the University Calendar on the website at www.msvu.ca on the Current Students’s page under Academic Offenses.

Communication technologies. While I encourage you to share your passion and interests in new gadgets and software, I ask that while we are participating in our Collaborate sessions that you give full, deserved attention to me and to your peers. Turn off all PDAs and please stay focused on the learning software. You deserve it, your peers deserve it, and I deserve it.

Course Syllabus. The syllabus is a guide for our class structure. While it is a collaborative document drafted by me and negotiated by you, it is our course “memorandum of understanding” after May 3.

Grading/marking. Graded assignments should be discussed one on one between you and me. Please make an appointment. Grading concerns should be addressed within one week after the assignment is returned.

Personal Issues. If you are experiencing any kind of personal issue that prohibits you from completing tasks by the due date, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to create a mutually-desirable compromise. I will be able to do little to help you if you wait until the due date or the final weeks of the term.

Special Accommodations. If you are a student who needs special accommodation, please notify me as soon as possible. I cannot provide special accommodation retrospectively.

Session Cancellations. I will be out of the country, and in a conference, during our June 11 Collaborate session. Please feel free to log on and speak with one another. If power is cut, or something else strange happens, I will notify you of my absence via our Twitter feed and our Moodle page.