

Critical Surveillance Studies

Course Syllabus

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Comm 850 – Spring 2025

W: 5:45–8:35PM

Location: Bynum 336

Professor

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Office Hours: by appt.

Course Description

Surveillance is everywhere: in workplaces monitoring the performance of employees, social media sites tracking clicks and uploads, financial institutions logging transactions, advertisers amassing fine-grained data on customers, and security agencies siphoning up everyone's telecommunications activities. More than that, surveillance now shapes the way we see ourselves and the way we relate to others. The goal of this course is to develop expertise in critical surveillance studies and its connections to communication and other fields. Particular attention will be given to how surveillance impacts people differently based upon their racial, class, and gender identities. Working from an interdisciplinary perspective that will bring the social science based research of surveillance into conversation with humanities scholarship related to art, film, history, and literature, we will explore the politics and cultural logics of surveillance in society. Students will be encouraged to explore their own research interests through the lens of surveillance studies and to draft a publishable research article as the final course assignment.

Learning Outcomes

1. At the conclusion of the course, students should have a nuanced understanding of the transdisciplinary field of surveillance studies, its core concepts and theories, and its connection to adjacent scholarly fields.
2. Additionally, students should be able to mobilize the surveillance studies literature to advance their own research projects.

Grading*

Critical Reaction Essay #1	20%
Critical Reaction Essay #2	20%
Book Review	20%
Final Paper	30%
Participation	10%

Surveillance Studies Resources

Surveillance studies is an incredibly open, welcoming, and nurturing field. I encourage you to get involved by joining the Surveillance Studies Network, reading the journal *Surveillance & Society*, subscribing to the field's listserv, and following the relevant social media accounts. Here are a few links to get you started:

- Surveillance Studies Network: <https://surveillance-studies.net/>
- *Surveillance & Society*: <http://www.surveillance-and-society.org/>
- Surveillance studies listserv: <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/WA-JISC.exe?A0=SURVEILLANCE>
- Links to SSN social media sites: <https://publicsurveillance.com/network.html>

Course Expectations

Attendance: This class will be conducted as a seminar with a focus on in-class discussion. Because of this format, you are expected to attend all classes for the full scheduled time. Excessive tardiness will be counted as an absence. Provided you hand in all due materials on time, you can miss one class throughout the semester without penalty. Please let me know in advance if you are planning on missing a class.

- *COVID-19 Note:* If you have a positive COVID diagnosis, please do not come to class. If you don't have a positive diagnosis but are experiencing COVID symptoms, please consider donning a mask and practicing social distancing to the best of your ability.

Reading: Complete all readings (and other assignments) prior to the class meeting for which they are scheduled. Most of the readings will be drawn from the required texts for the course or articles posted to Canvas. You must bring readings (or copies of them) to class for the dates they are assigned. See the course outline below for details.

Participation: Through communication, ideas are formed, revised, borrowed, and developed. It is through argument, description, explanation, and improvisation – within a community – that individual learning flourishes. This course requires full participation (including active listening, facilitating, note-taking, and question-asking) to create an environment of open and shared learning. An effective participant is not someone who simply talks frequently, but someone who reliably offers thoughtful insights that help others to learn.

We will have weekly common readings around which we will focus our discussion. Each class meeting will begin with some contextual background provided by me and then proceed to a brief summary of the arguments made in the reading. Next, we will generate an in-depth critique of the arguments and then pursue questions sparked by the reading or discussion – as guided by the overarching course goals. Each student should prepare for these steps in advance of the seminar meeting.

Discussion Facilitation: Each student will be responsible for facilitating discussion for one week's reading, in partnership with other students. This will occur on one of the two weeks where we are reading excerpts from *Surveillance Studies: A Reader*. In addition to reading all the assigned excerpts for that week, facilitators will be expected to 1) explore one excerpt in further detail (e.g., read the article or chapter in full and/or read a newer piece on the subject), 2) present that additional reading to the class, and 3) pose reading-based questions to the rest of the seminar and guide the

discussion. Please keep the conversation focused on the texts and direct your colleagues toward critical insights about the strengths, tensions, and limitations of the work(s) in question. A sign-up sheet will be distributed during the first few weeks of the semester.

Technology: Laptop computers and other portable technologies should be used in class only as learning-facilitation tools. During class, it is not acceptable to play games, send email, surf the web, answer cell phones, text message, or engage in other non-class-related activities. Additionally, you should refrain from wearing headphones or earbuds unless you have permission to use them as part of an approved learning accommodation. Your participation grade will be penalized if you break these rules. Why? Not only do these practices negatively affect your learning and participation, but they also distract others and create an environment of disrespect.

Course Assignments

1. Two “critical reaction” essays (1,300-1,500 words each) that analyze the reading for two or more weeks, aiming at comparison and integration across texts, leading to the development of a clear normative position on your part. The two essays are due no later than the following dates: (1) January 29; (2) February 26.

2. One book review of a surveillance studies book (800-1,200 words). The goal of book reviews is to provide readers with an overall sense of the book’s argument, contribution to the field, unique approach (methodological or theoretical), primary audiences, and limitations. Book reviews should be engaging and detailed, offering readers with an accurate sense of the subject matter covered and the tone of the book as a whole. Book reviews should also be *critical* so that readers can acquire insight into the work’s deficiencies and make educated decisions about whether to read or adopt the book for their courses. That said, book reviews should also be *fair*; they should assess the book that was written, not the book that the reviewer would have preferred the author to write instead.

Please follow the *Surveillance & Society* book review guidelines in drafting your review: http://publicsurveillance.com/SS/misc/SS_book_review_guidelines.pdf. With the exception of the assigned Reader in the course, you may select any of the assigned books or those listed on this website: <https://publicsurveillance.com/books.html>. If you would like to review a different book, please clear it with me in advance. *I recommend that you refrain from reading any other reviews of the book before writing your own, as they may unduly influence your interpretation and approach.* The book review is due no later than March 26.

3. One final paper (7,000-8,000 words) that draws upon the course concepts to analyze the surveillance dimensions of one of your research projects. You should meet with me early on in the semester to discuss ideas for your final project paper. This final assignment should be approached as an academic journal article, and it will be evaluated using comparable criteria; for instance, it should be roughly 7,000-8,000 words in length (including footnotes and references) and adhere to typical article genre conventions (e.g., include an abstract, literature review, presentation and analysis of examples, conclusion, references, etc.). Get an early start and maintain steady progress throughout the term in order to avoid the end-of-the-semester rush. The final paper is due April 30.

You may submit any of the writing assignments early if you'd like, but no late writing assignments will be accepted.

I reserve the right to distribute unannounced quizzes on the reading or lecture material. Any missed points on these quizzes will be deducted from your participation grade. Quizzes may not be made-up if you are absent.

Academic Honesty

In order to avoid plagiarism, your assignments must provide full citations for all references: direct quotes, summaries, or ideas. Make sure you put all quotes in quotation marks and include references. While you are encouraged to develop your thinking with your peers, you cannot use their material without citing it. Work from other courses will not be accepted. In this course, any unquoted or uncited use of Generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) text will also be considered a form of plagiarism and subject to the same disciplinary outcomes. Allowing your writing to be copied by another student is also considered cheating. Please review the Honor Code for complete guidelines on academic honesty: <http://studentconduct.unc.edu/>. If you have any questions about how to avoid plagiarism, do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

Gender-Fair Language

Language structures thought and action. Biases in language can (and do) naturalize inequalities. Imprecise language also signifies un-interrogated values and sloppy thinking. For all of these reasons, the use of gender-fair language is expected in this course. For example, do not use words like “mankind” or “men” when referring to people in general; alternate between “she” and “he” instead of always using “he,” or construct sentences in the plural instead of the singular so you can use “they” or “them” and avoid the problem altogether. Additionally, please communicate your preferred pronouns and respectfully refer to others using their preferred pronouns.

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

The Department of Communication is committed to social justice, equity, and inclusion. This course reflects these commitments by creating an environment that fosters critical thinking, represents diverse viewpoints and ideas, and invites thoughtful, respectful, analysis of the issues and ideas that are discussed in the course. Each of us has the right be recognized for who we are, referred to in the identities that we inhabit, and included and represented in the course. Acknowledging and mobilizing diversity is a powerful resource for learning and growth. At the same time, we must be respectful of any of our differences whether they are due to race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, nationality, religion, and/or culture. We all make mistakes in what we say or even what we do not say, and it's important to hold each other accountable in a respectful way that can ensure that the classroom space is one where everyone contributes—regardless of whether it is always comfortable or easy.

Counseling & Psychological Services

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more. (source: Student Safety and Wellness Proposal for EPC, Sep 2018)

Title IX Resources

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim – titleixcoordinator@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Accessibility Resources & Services

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu. (source: <https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff/syllabus-statement>)

Required Texts

- Asad, Asad L. 2023. *Engage and Evade: How Latino Immigrant Families Manage Surveillance in Everyday Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Brown, Stephanie J. 2025. *Watching Women: Militant Suffragists Write the British Surveillance State, 1905–1924*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Chiarello, Elizabeth. *Policing Patients: Treatment and Surveillance on the Frontlines of the Opioid Crisis*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2024.
- Ebeling, Mary F. E. 2022. *Afterlives of Data: Life and Debt under Capitalist Surveillance*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Guariglia, Matthew. 2023. *Police and the Empire City: Race and the Origins of Modern Policing in New York*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Harding, James M. 2018. *Performance, Transparency, and the Cultures of Surveillance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Johnston, Katherine D. 2023. *Profiles and Plotlines: Data Surveillance in Twenty-First Century Literature*. Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press.
- Levy, Karen. 2022. *Data Driven: Truckers, Technology, and the New Workplace Surveillance*. Princeton, NJ:

Princeton University Press.

Molnar, Petra. 2024. *The Walls Have Eyes: Surviving Migration in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. New York: The New Press.

Monahan, Torin. *Crisis Vision: Race and the Cultural Production of Surveillance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022.

Monahan, Torin, and David Murakami Wood, eds. 2018. *Surveillance Studies: A Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Woods, Heather Suzanne. 2024. *Threshold: How Smart Homes Change Us Inside and Out*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Course Schedule (subject to revision)

Week One: Introductions

January 8: Introductory Discussion

Readings:

- Monahan, Torin, and David Murakami Wood, eds. 2018. Introduction: Surveillance Studies as a Transdisciplinary Endeavor. In *Surveillance Studies: A Reader*, xix-xxxiv. [Read first 8 pages closely. Skim the rest.]
- Monahan, Torin, and David Murakami Wood, eds. 2018. Openings and Definitions. In *Surveillance Studies: A Reader*, 1-3.
- Lyon, David. 2018. Surveillance Studies: An Overview. In *Surveillance Studies: A Reader*, 18-21.

Week Two: Workplace Surveillance

January 15:

Readings:

- Levy, Karen. 2022. Data Driven: Truckers, Technology, and the New Workplace Surveillance. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Week Three: Health, Debt, and Sorting

January 22:

Readings:

- Ebeling, Mary F. E. 2022. *Afterlives of Data: Life and Debt under Capitalist Surveillance*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Week Four: Urban Policing Lineages

January 29:

Readings:

- Guariglia, Matthew. 2023. *Police and the Empire City: Race and the Origins of Modern Policing in New York*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Due: Critical Reaction Essay #1.

Week Five: Healthcare Providers as Surveillance Agents

February 5:

Readings:

- Chiarello, Elizabeth. *Policing Patients: Treatment and Surveillance on the Frontlines of the Opioid Crisis*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2024.

Week Six: Selections

February 12:

Readings:

- *Surveillance Studies: A Reader*. [selections]

Week Seven: Immigrant Vulnerability and Agency

February 19:

Readings:

- Asad, Asad L. 2023. *Engage and Evade: How Latino Immigrant Families Manage Surveillance in Everyday Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. [Author will join us via Zoom at 7pm]

Week Eight: Smart Homes

February 26:

Readings:

- Woods, Heather Suzanne. 2024. *Threshold: How Smart Homes Change Us Inside and Out*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Due: Critical Reaction Essay #2.

Week Nine: Selections

March 5:

- *Surveillance Studies: A Reader*. [selections].

Week Ten: SPRING BREAK

March 12:

- No class

Week Eleven: State Surveillance against Women Activists

March 19:

Readings:

- Brown, Stephanie J. 2025. *Watching Women: Militant Suffragists Write the British Surveillance State, 1905–1924*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Week Twelve: Border Systems

March 26:

Readings:

- Molnar, Petra. 2024. *The Walls Have Eyes: Surviving Migration in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. New York: The New Press.

Due: Book Review.

Week Thirteen: Performance Studies Interventions

April 2:

Readings:

- Harding, James M. 2018. *Performance, Transparency, and the Cultures of Surveillance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Recommended:

- Lyon, David. 2018. God's Eye: A Reason for Hope. *Surveillance & Society* 16 (4):546-553. <https://ojs.library.queensu.ca/index.php/surveillance-and-society/article/view/12858/8432>
- Harding, James M. 2018. Picking the Speck and Missing the Beam in the Eye of Surveillance: On the Failure to See Eye to Eye with David Lyon. *Surveillance & Society* 16 (4):554-567. <https://ojs.library.queensu.ca/index.php/surveillance-and-society/article/view/13122/8433>

Week Fourteen: Surveillance in Literature

April 9:

Readings:

- Johnston, Katherine D. 2023. *Profiles and Plotlines: Data Surveillance in Twenty-First Century Literature*. Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press.

Week Fifteen: Disrupting Racializing Surveillance

April 16:

Readings:

- Monahan, Torin. *Crisis Vision: Race and the Cultural Production of Surveillance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022.

Week Sixteen: Workshopping

April 23:

Workshopping final papers.**Readings:**

- No readings.

Final Papers Due: April 30.