

# Surveillance Cultures

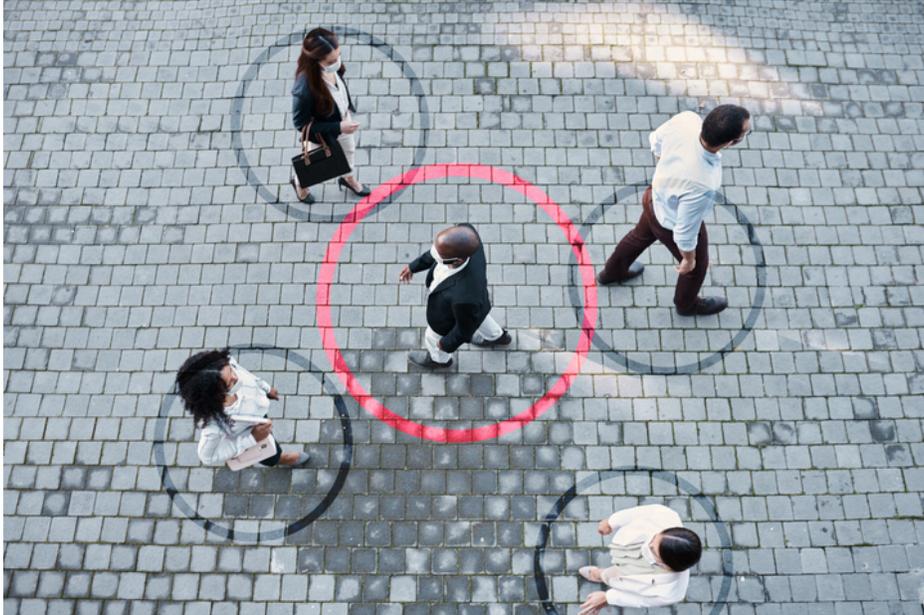
## Course Syllabus

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Comm 658 – Spring 2025

T/TH: 2:00 – 3:15pm

Location: Greenlaw 0301



### **Professor**

Torin Monahan, Ph.D.

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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. As a part of our everyday lives, surveillance now shapes the way we see ourselves and the way we relate to others. Many individuals eagerly generate data on their exercise routines and eating habits; they rate the films they watch and tag the photos they like; they track the activities of their romantic partners and the movement of their loved ones. In combination, these practices form pervasive surveillance cultures that govern almost all aspects of modern life.

### **Learning Outcomes**

The goal of this course is to develop a critical awareness of surveillance cultures and their implications for society. Students will learn how theoretical understandings of surveillance connect with empirical practices with a particular emphasis on how surveillance impacts people differently based upon their racial, class, and gender identities. To meet these objectives, the course will provide an advanced introduction to the transdisciplinary field of surveillance studies.

## **Texts**

1. Monahan, Torin, and David Murakami Wood, eds. 2018. *Surveillance Studies: A Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press.
2. Readings on Canvas or webpages

## **Grading**

Current Event Analyses	20%
Student Presentations	10%
Book Review	20%
Final Term Paper	40%
Participation	10%

[Grading Scale: A =93-100, A- =90-92, B+ =87-89, B =83-86, B- =80-82, C+ =77-79, C =73-76, C- =70-72, D+ =67-69, D =63-66]

## **Course Expectations**

*Attendance:* This class will be conducted with a focus on in-class discussions and activities. Because of this format, you are expected to attend all classes for the full scheduled time. Excessive tardiness will be counted as an absence. You can miss up to 2 classes throughout the semester without penalty, but you must turn in assignments ahead of time and arrange to get notes from a colleague. Your final grade will go down by 3 points (out of 100) for each additional class missed above these 2. Finally, if you fail to show up for a scheduled meeting with the instructor without canceling 24 hours in advance, your participation grade will be docked 3 points.

- *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 textbook, websites, or articles posted to Canvas. You must bring readings (or copies of them) to class for the dates they are assigned. In some cases, I may distribute photocopied readings to you in class. 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. The rubric for participation grades is as follows:

- Initiate (1-3 pts): you are present in class but seldom speak.
- Apprentice (4-5 pts): you actively listen and speak occasionally, but you don't explicitly connect your comments to the reading.
- Journeyperson (6-7 pts): you actively listen, contribute somewhat reliably, and usually connect your comments to the reading.
- Adept (8-9 pts): you actively listen, contribute regularly, and always make explicit connections to the reading.
- Expert (10 pts): you actively listen, contribute regularly, and always make explicit connections to the reading, often identifying themes *across* weeks too. Additionally, you

*quickly* zero in on correct answers, allowing plenty of space for others to expand on your points or make their own contributions.

*Technology:* Laptop computers, tablets, and mobile phones should be used in class only as learning-facilitation tools. During class, it is not acceptable to wear headphones, play games, send email, surf the web, answer mobile phones, text message, tweet, or engage in other non-class-related activities. You are also not permitted to record any portion of class meetings without explicit permission from the instructor. Your participation grade will be penalized if you break this rule. 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. Current Event Analyses:

You will be responsible to turn in **two** current event analyses throughout the semester (*Do not write current event papers during film weeks*). For these assignments, you must find a popular media story that connects in some obvious way to readings for the week. Stories should have been published within the past month. Track down and use the full original story if you found a reference to it on a blog or secondary site. Please do not conduct more than one analysis per class session.

Each analysis should be a 500-word essay that identifies the story and explains how it illustrates, complicates, or extends some of the ideas covered in the reading for the week. The goal is to show how the readings in the course help you to understand current events, so you will have to explain yourself thoroughly and provide sufficient detail to demonstrate the connections you are trying to make. Papers will be due at the start of class. Please include a bibliography for your papers. Because we will use the stories to initiate our conversation for the day, be prepared to present your analysis at the beginning of class and answer questions about the story.

### 2. Student Presentations:

Students will participate in one group presentation that builds on and expands the course material assigned for a given week. For this assignment, you will be expected to research, prepare, and deliver a 15-minute presentation. The primary goals of this assignment are to connect the readings to current events and to spark discussion that gets at the complexity and nuance of the topic being covered. Group presentations may be supported with Powerpoint slides, handouts, video clips, poster presentations, or other media. You are encouraged to be experimental and creative! Grades will be assigned collectively. Groups will be formed early in the semester.

### 3. Book Review:

You will be expected to write one 5-page book review of a surveillance studies book ([due February 13](#)). With the exception of the assigned Reader in the course, you may select any of the books listed on this website: <https://publicsurveillance.com/books.html>. Please do not read any other reviews of the book before writing your own, as they may unduly influence your interpretation and approach.

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.

I recommend that you include the following elements:

- What is the book's main argument? How is it substantiated and developed across the text? What makes it novel or important? Do you find the argument persuasive? Why or why not?
- Who is the intended audience?
- How does the book fit within or extend current conversations in the field?
- How would you characterize the author's methodological approach? What materials do they draw upon? What examples are particularly compelling?
- What are the book's concepts? How do they support the book's argument?
- Given the author's stated (or implied) goals, how well do they succeed in meeting them? Where do they excel? Where do they fall short, if at all?
- Is the book's format unique in any way (e.g., does it reprint images, maps, offer discussion questions for classes)?
- What is your overall appraisal of the book?

#### 4. Final Term Paper:

A final term paper of 10-12 page will be required in this course. The paper ([due May 1](#)) should respond to one of the following prompts:

- What is the role of surveillance in shaping identities and subjectivities today? How has that relationship changed over time?
- "If you're not doing anything wrong, you should have nothing to hide." Unpack this rhetoric and explain its inaccuracies and limitations.
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic been exploited to increase surveillance throughout society? In what ways is such surveillance experienced unequally?
- What are the potentials of surveillance to empower people? What are some critiques of those forms of empowerment?
- How has our understanding of privacy and its relationship to surveillance been altered by social media?
- Make an argument for how surveillance is racializing and/or leads to racial violence.
- In your estimation, what are the most effective ways to resist surveillance? How is your perspective informed by the many resistance efforts of others (e.g., activists, civil society organizations)?
- You may also propose a different subject, provided that it is cleared by me at least two weeks before the paper is due.

You will be expected to demonstrate familiarity with the social theories and empirical research covered in the course as a whole. The grading rubric will include assessment of these elements: *Argument* (clear argument supported by evidence); *Concepts and Theories* (accurate, appropriate, and thorough use of course concepts and theories); *Analysis / Development* (thorough examination of issues, integrated sections); and *Writing* (grammar, structure, organization, style, citation practices, length).

*Note:* Graduate students enrolled in the course will be expected to read beyond the assigned readings each week by exploring some of the original source materials or other works cited in the assigned excerpts. The final project for graduate students 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.). Please meet with the professor early in the semester to map out a plan for producing this paper.

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.

### **Writing Guidelines**

Please use 12-point Times New Roman font, 1" margins, double-spaced lines, and one line space between paragraphs. Do not use cover pages or folders of any kind unless necessary to preserve your presentation (e.g., sketches or photographs). All papers must be stapled or they will not be accepted. No late or emailed papers will be accepted.

### **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. We will also provide our preferred personal pronouns at the beginning of the course. It is important to respect and use correctly everyone’s 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](mailto:titleixcoordinator@unc.edu)), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators ([gvsc@unc.edu](mailto:gvsc@unc.edu); confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](http://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](mailto:ars@unc.edu). (source: <https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff/syllabus-statement>)

### **Course Schedule (subject to revision)**

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#### **Week One: Introductions**

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Thursday, January 9:

**No Readings.**

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#### **Week Two: Surveillance Studies & Subjectivity**

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Tuesday, January 14:

##### **Readings:**

- Carissa Véliz. 2021. *Privacy Is Power: Why and How You Should Take Back Control of Your Data*. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House. (Cht.1, pp.7-26) [Canvas]
- David Lyon, Surveillance Studies: An Overview (SS 18-21)
- Issac Bailey. 2024. Secretly Recording a Professor at UNC? That's Underhanded and Chilling. <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/opinion/article289424056.html>

Thursday, January 16:

**Readings:**

- Society & Subjectivity (SS 27-30)
- Jeremy Bentham, The Panopticon (SS 31-35)
- Michel Foucault. "The Eye of Power." *CTRL [SPACE]*: pp.94-102 [Canvas]

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**Week Three: Crime & Policing**

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Tuesday, January 21:

**Readings:**

- Sarah Lageson, Juan Sandoval, and Elizabeth Webster. 2021. How the Criminal Justice System Deploys Mass Surveillance on Innocent People. *Vice*, April 5. Available from <https://www.vice.com/en/article/xgzc7z/how-the-criminal-justice-system-deploys-mass-surveillance-ons-innocent-people>.
- Rahim Kurwa. 2019. Building the Digitally Gated Community: The Case of Nextdoor. *Surveillance & Society* 17 (1/2):111-117. <https://ojs.library.queensu.ca/index.php/surveillance-and-society/article/view/12927/8483>
- Lauren Bridges. 2021. Amazon's Ring is the largest civilian surveillance network the US has ever seen. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/18/amazon-ring-largest-civilian-surveillance-network-us>

Thursday, January 23:

**Readings:**

- Crime & Policing (SS 173-177)
- Sarah Brayne. 2021. *Predict and Surveil: Data, Discretion, and the Future of Policing*. New York: Oxford University Press, 37-55, 60-73. [Canvas]
- Paul Mozur, Muyi Xiao, and John Liu. 2022. An Invisible Cage': How China Is Policing the Future: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/25/technology/china-surveillance-police.html> [+ on Canvas]

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**Week Four: Intelligence & Security**

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Tuesday, January 28:

**Readings:**

- Intelligence & Security (SS 147-151)
- James Bamford, The Puzzle Palace (SS 153-156)
- Glenn Greenwald, No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State. (SS 166-171)

Thursday, January 30:

**Readings:**

- Adrian Horton. 2024. Ronan Farrow on Surveillance Spyware: 'It Threatens Democracy and Freedom' <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2024/nov/23/ronan-farrow-surveilled-documentary>
- Surveillance Watch: <https://www.surveillancewatch.io/> [review this website]
- In-class Video Screening: *Surveilled* (2024)

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**Week Five: Borders & the State**

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Tuesday, February 4:

**Readings:**

- Borders & Mobilities (SS 121-123)
- Louise Amoore, Biometric Borders: Governing Mobilities in the War on Terror (SS 125-128)
- Mark B. Salter, Passports, Mobility, and Security: How Smart Can the Border Be? (SS 129-132)
- Didier Bigo, Security, Exception, Ban and Surveillance (SS 143-146)

Thursday, February 6:

**Readings:**

- State & Authority (SS 63-66)
- Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences (SS 75-78)
- Anna Funder, Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall (SS 83-87)

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**Week Six: *The Lives of Others***

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Tuesday, February 11:

**Film Screening (no readings)**

Thursday, February 13:

**Film Screening (no readings)**

**Book Review due at start of class.**

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**Week Seven: Discrimination and “Care”**

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Tuesday, February 18:

**Readings:**

- Identity and Identification (SS 93-95)
- Allan Sekula, The Body and the Archive (SS 105-110)
- Shoshana Amielle Magnet, When Biometrics Fail: Gender, Race, and the Technology of Identity (SS 116-119)

Thursday, February 20:

**Readings:**

- David Lyon. 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>
- James M. Harding. 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>

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**Week Eight: Participation & Social Media**

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Tuesday, February 25:

**Readings:**

- Participation & Social Media (SS 307-308)
- Mark Andrejevic, The Work of Being Watched: Interactive Media and the Exploitation of Self-disclosure (SS 309-312)
- Hille Koskela, Webcams, TV Shows and Mobile Phones: Empowering Exhibitionism (SS 313-316)
- Anders Albrechtslund, Online Social Networking as Participatory Surveillance (SS 317-320)

Thursday, February 27:

**Readings:**

- Brooke Erin Duffy, and Ngai Keung Chan. 2019. "You Never Really Know Who's Looking": Imagined Surveillance across Social Media Platforms. *New Media & Society* 21 (1): 119-38. [Canvas]

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**Week Nine: Ubiquitous Surveillance & Artificial Intelligence**

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Tuesday, March 4:

**Readings:**

- Ubiquitous Surveillance (SS 239-242)
- Dana Cuff, Immanent Domain: Pervasive Computing and the Public Realm (SS 248-252)
- Mark Andrejevic, Surveillance in the Big Data Era (SS 257-260)
- Wall Street Journal. 2021. How TikTok's Algorithm Figures You Out. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfczi2cI6Cs>

Thursday, March 6:

**Readings:**

- In-class Video Screening: *Black Mirror*, "The Entire History of You" (2011)

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**Week Ten: SPRING BREAK**

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Tuesday, March 11:

**No Readings.**

Thursday, March 12:

**No Readings.**

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**Week Eleven: Marginality & Difference**

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Tuesday, March 18:

**Readings:**

- Marginality & Difference (SS 357-359)
- Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., Coming to Terms with Chance: Engaging Rational Discrimination and Cumulative Disadvantage (SS 361-364)
- Simone Browne, Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness (SS 373-376)

Thursday, March 20:

**Readings:**

- Corinne Mason and Shoshana Magnet, Surveillance Studies and Violence Against Women (SS 369-372)
- Karen Levy. 2021. You Had Me at ‘Has Never Filed for Bankruptcy’. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/31/opinion/tinder-match-background-check.html> [+ on Canvas]

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**Week Twelve: Coded Bias**

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Tuesday, March 25:

**Film Screening (no readings)**

Thursday, March 27:

**Film Screening (no readings)**

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**Week Thirteen: Work and Organization**

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Tuesday, April 1:

**Readings:**

- Work & Organization (SS 261-263)
- John Gilliom, and Torin Monahan. 2013. Watching you work. In *SuperVision: An Introduction to the Surveillance Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Cht.5, pp.89-107)

Thursday, April 3:

**Readings:**

- Karen Levy, and Solon Barocas. 2018. Refractive Surveillance: Monitoring Customers to Manage Workers. *International Journal of Communication* 12: 1166-1188. [Canvas]
- Coming face to face with Rite Aid’s allegedly unfair use of facial recognition technology. <https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/blog/2023/12/coming-face-face-rite-aids-allegedly-unfair-use-facial-recognition-technology>

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**Week Fourteen: Resistance & Opposition**

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Tuesday, April 8:

**Readings:**

- Resistance & Opposition (SS 331-333)
- Colin J. Bennett, The Privacy Advocates: Resisting the Spread of Surveillance (SS 335-338)
- Laura Huey, Kevin Walby, and Aaron Doyle, Cop Watching in the Downtown Eastside: Exploring the Use of (Counter)Surveillance as a Tool of Resistance (SS 339-342)
- Monahan, Torin. 2025. On the Impossibility of Ethical Surveillance. In *The Handbook of Communication Ethics*, edited by A. Pinchevski, P. M. Buzzanell and J. Hannan. New York: Routledge, 320-331. [Canvas]

Thursday, April 10:

**Readings:**

- Harris Kornstein. 2019. Under Her Eye: Digital Drag as Obfuscation and Countersurveillance. *Surveillance & Society* 17 (5):681-698. <https://ojs.library.queensu.ca/index.php/surveillance-and-society/article/view/12957/9109>

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**Week Fifteen: Art & Culture**

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Tuesday, April 15:

**Readings:**

- Art & Culture (SS 377-379)
- John E. McGrath, Loving Big Brother: Performance, Privacy and Surveillance Space (SS 381-384)
- Andrea Mubi Brighenti, Artveillance: At the Crossroads of Art and Surveillance (SS 389-293)

Thursday, April 17:

- **Wellbeing Day**

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**Week Sixteen: Paper Developing and Drafting**

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Tuesday, April 22:

- Scheduled 1-on-1 meetings with professor
- No Readings

Thursday, April 24:

- Scheduled 1-on-1 meetings with professor
- No Readings

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**Final Exam Period: Will be spent sharing final papers**

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**Final Papers Due: Tuesday, May 1 @ 12:00pm**

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Credits:

Inspiration for elements of this syllabus came from my former students and from my longtime collaborator David Murakami Wood, who also teaches fabulous courses on surveillance studies.