

# **Geography 515 - Fall 2016**

## **Contemporary Dilemmas in International Development**

**This semester's theme:**  
***Digital Media and Development Dilemmas***

**8:35 am – 11:25 am Tuesday**  
**Room 429 Burnside**

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Office hours: By appointment

### **Course Description**

This is a 500 level seminar course on issues pertaining to contemporary dilemmas in international development. For this class we take 'dilemmas' to mean 'no easy answer'. The course is intended to facilitate critical thinking and writing along the thesis, dissertation, and career interests of the individuals in the class. Within the overall theme of the semester, students are expected to select topics, lead discussions, robustly participate in discussions and other activities, make presentations and write term papers.

This semester's theme is, 'digital media and development dilemmas'. This theme addresses the reality that digital media (particularly social media) is unleashing civilian agency in new and transformative ways, and is in the process of transforming significant aspects of international development. There are great opportunities to harnessing this new civilian agency and engaging in more effective forms of development, particularly in engaging international development dilemmas--war and other forms of conflict, managing refugee flows and livelihoods, humanitarian assistance, dealing with natural disasters, the repercussions of environmental change, etc.

But there are also problems in the application of digital media to international development dilemmas. This transformation of development is largely being driven by civil society, and not by the international development organizations and their policies, programs and projects. This presents a problem in that development and humanitarian assistance organizations are not keeping up with this transformation in the way they conduct their operations, but most importantly in their relationship to those they intend to assist. These organizations by and large are not accustomed to their beneficiaries having such increased agency, and instead continue to operate in a mode that 'delivers' pre-set and established forms of assistance, solutions and priorities to those in need. Where is this headed? What will be the new opportunities? What will

be the new problems? What are the implications regarding expectations of civilian populations versus the current priority of development organizations to 'not raise expectations' beyond what they are sure they can deliver? What are the downsides of digital media in international development; who owns the truth? Who controls representation? Does social media have the ability to transform fundamental concepts like civilian or refugee, combatant or terrorist? What does this potential blurring of lines lead to? What are the intersections between use of digital media in development, versus its use in warfare (ISIL) given that the same populations are involved in both.

Following initial presentations and discussions led by the instructor, the interests of the students in the seminar will govern which specific examples of 'digital media and development dilemmas' will be addressed. To facilitate the pursuit of student interests, each student will have an opportunity to select a topic and lead class discussion. Discussion leaders will distribute to the class one week prior to their discussion, a minimum of two academic papers, book chapters, documents from the grey literature, or websites; along with a digital media example. These readings and example will provide background to the rest of the class regarding the specific topic to be discussed the following week. Students are responsible for providing copies of their reading material to all other members of the class. This is most easily done by using MyCourses or email. The rest of the class will then need to do the readings prior to coming to class and be ready to discuss them.

Each discussion will begin with the student whose turn it is to lead discussion, briefing the class as to what particular aspects of the digital media and international development the student would like class discussion to focus on. Discussions should elicit from the class, thoughts, opinions, and critiques on the readings and the specifics of the issue(s). If you would like to explore an idea on which little or nothing has been published (and this is encouraged), please provide papers that describe the components, aspects or background that contribute to the idea. Through these discussions, this class is the place to try out novel, new, innovative, untried, and provocative ideas, and talk about the different prospects and possibilities for how the world works, or could work. Discussions are held in an informal, cordial, and respectful manner.

Each class session is three hours long. Two students will present/lead discussion in each class--1.5 hrs each. Between discussions, there will be a 10 min break.

Apart from reading selected papers and discussion, students will also be responsible for presentations and a term paper, and the topics of the presentation and the term paper should be the same. The presentations will take place toward the end of the course and will need to be approximately 20 minutes in length, with 10 minutes for questions (along the lines of presentations in an academic conference). Feel free to use media in your presentations. The term paper will need to be approximately 15-20 pages in length, double spaced, 12 point font--excluding references.

### **Class Material**

Readings are provided by the instructor and students who are leading discussion in the following week. Discussion leaders are responsible for providing the readings to the the

rest of class. This is in place of any textbooks.

### **Class Grading**

Leading class discussion: 10 percent; Class participation in discussions: 35 percent; Presentation: 15 percent; Term paper: 40 percent.

### **Class Policies**

Attendance Students are expected to attend class. Class discussion is worth a significant part of the final grade.

Term papers are due by 5 pm on the last day of finals week, but can be handed in earlier. These should be emailed to the instructor as a pdf.

Accommodation for religious observances are dealt with according to McGill policy.

"McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).(approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)

"L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/))."

"In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded." (approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and evaluation.)

"Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue)."

For information on university and department policies for student assessment, please go to <http://www.mcgill.ca/geography/studentassessment>