

LEADERSHIP IN THE DIGITAL AGE: SOCIAL MEDIA, AI, AND BEYOND

LDST 390 – SPRING 2026

Course Time:	Mon, Wed 1:30-2:45
Course Location:	Jepson Hall 102
Course Website:	https://blackboard.richmond.edu
Instructor:	Bo Yun Park
Email:	bpark@richmond.edu
Office:	Jepson Hall 236
Office Hours:	Wed 2:45-4:00 pm

Course Description

This course examines how different forms of leadership—including but not limited to political and corporate leadership—evolve in the digital age. Digital platforms and data-driven technologies have reconfigured how people communicate, coordinate, and exercise power. Algorithmic systems and Artificial Intelligence (AI) now mediate social interaction at scale, reshaping the conditions under which leadership and followership are enacted, recognized, and contested across political, organizational, and social domains. How do digital platforms restructure leader-follower relationships? How do social media ecosystems affect political polarization and the circulation of misinformation? How do big data and data science alter how leaders perceive, evaluate, and govern followers? What forms of power, authority, and accountability emerge from algorithm-based governance? Drawing on interdisciplinary social science research, the course integrates leadership studies with contemporary analyses of social media, big data, algorithms, and AI to shed light on how digital infrastructures are redefining both leadership and followership in the algorithmic era.

Course Objectives

This course will equip you with the theoretical and methodological tools needed to analyze and conduct empirical research on leadership in digitally mediated contexts. The course will emphasize the use of digital platforms as both objects of study and sites of empirical observation, fostering comparative and globally informed perspectives on leadership and power. You will be encouraged to explore a wide array of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including interviews, digital ethnography, computational text analysis, or experiments. You will also have the opportunity to use digital platforms in creative ways and integrate empirical observations into your analysis of the social world.

Specifically, this course aims to enable you to:

1. Map and evaluate major theoretical traditions and contemporary approaches to the study of leadership and followership in digitally mediated environments.

2. Analyze and apply key concepts from leadership studies, political communication, and organizational research to empirical cases involving social media, big data
3. Critically assess social and political phenomena associated with digital leadership, including populism, polarization, misinformation, algorithmic governance, etc.
4. Integrate theoretical arguments with empirical evidence, through exposure to qualitative, quantitative, and computational methods,
5. Communicate research findings effectively through collaborative oral presentations, developing the ability to engage diverse audiences and perspectives.

Course Prerequisites

This course has been designed as an elective that aims to delve deeper into the study of leadership from a social science perspective. Intellectual curiosity about the social and political effects of new technologies, including but not limited to social media, artificial intelligence (AI), generative AI, etc. is all that is needed for the successful completion of this course.

Reading Requirements

You will not be required to purchase any textbooks for this course. All readings will be made available for download on Blackboard. You will be expected to bring a printed or electronic copy of each reading to class to engage in a lively discussion about the material with your fellow classmates. All assigned readings, as listed on the course schedule, will have to be done prior to coming to class.

Course Assignments

Attendance and Participation (15 percent). You are expected to attend every class having done the readings assigned for the day. You are permitted one unexcused absence throughout the semester, but any additional absences must be notified in advance. In class, you will be asked to participate actively in discussions and activities in light of what you have read. On top of your in-class participation, your participation grade will also take into account the following: you are expected to submit an excerpt that caught your attention (whether it be a sentence, a paragraph, or a longer section) from each of the assigned readings prior to the beginning of class time. All submissions should be sent via email to the instructor and will receive either a check, check + or check – depending on its quality.

Oral Presentation (20 percent). You will serve as the discussant leader for one of the weeks listed on the course schedule. As discussant leaders, you will be expected to present the main ideas of the readings and engage in a thoughtful analysis of the main themes. Your presentation should be 15 minutes-long and should incorporate discussion points and analytical questions to be shared with your peers. You may choose to draw on a PowerPoint presentation or bring handouts to be distributed in class.

Midterm Exam (30 percent). The midterm assessment will take the form of an oral exam. This exam will evaluate your understanding of key social science theories on leadership in the digital age and your ability to apply those theories to contemporary social issues. You will analyze a newspaper article using the course materials covered from Weeks 1-7. This exam will be conducted in small

groups, with each student responding individually. The emphasis is on conceptual clarity, theoretical application, and analytical reasoning rather than memorization. Detailed instructions and the grading rubric will be distributed in advance of the exam.

Final Exam (35 percent). The final assessment will take the form of an oral exam as well. This exam will evaluate your understanding of key social science theories and your ability to apply course materials from across the semester (Weeks 1 – 14) to analyze leadership, power, and social processes in contemporary social life. As in the midterm, the exam will be conducted in small groups, with each student responding individually. The emphasis is on conceptual clarity, theoretical application, and analytical reasoning rather than memorization. Detailed instructions and the grading rubric are provided below.

Grading

Your final course grade will be calculated by converting each of your assignment letter grades according to the standardized numeric scale (A = 4.0, A- = 3.7, B+ = 3.3, B = 3.0, B- = 2.7, C+ = 2.3, C = 2.00, C- = 1.7, D = 1.0, F = 0.9) and weighting. The weights are below:

1. Attendance and participation (15 percent of your grade)
2. Oral Presentation (20 percent of your grade)
3. Midterm, (30 percent of your grade)
4. Final, (35 percent of your grade)

Your written work will be evaluated based on:

1. Mastery of topic
2. Focus; cogency of argumentation
3. Use of appropriate logic and evidence
4. Clarity and organization in reasoning
5. Originality

Resources

Speech Center (speech.richmond.edu or 289-6409): Assists with preparation and practice in the pursuit of excellence in public expression. Recording, playback, coaching and critique sessions offered by teams of student consultants trained to assist in developing ideas, arranging key points for more effective organization, improving style and delivery, and handling multimedia aids for individual and group presentations. Remote practice sessions can be arranged; we look forward to meeting your public speaking needs.

- You can make individual appointments with a consultant at the Speech Center online: <https://speech.richmond.edu/appointments/index.html>
- You will also find helpful resources about speaking on the Speech Center's website: <https://speech.richmond.edu/services/index.html>.

Writing Center (writing.richmond.edu or 289-8263): Assists writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Students can schedule appointments with trained writing consultants who offer friendly critiques of written work.

- You can make appointments with a consultant at the Writing Center online: <https://writing.richmond.edu/appointments/index.html>.
- You will also find helpful resources for writing on the Writing Center's website: <https://writing.richmond.edu/writing-resources/index.html>.

Academic Skills Center (asc.richmond.edu): Academic coaches assist students in assessing and developing their academic and life-skills (e.g., critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, test preparation, time management, stress management, etc.). Peer tutors offer assistance in specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.) and will be available for appointments in-person and virtually. Peer tutors are listed on the ASC website. Email [Roger Mancastropa](mailto:Rmancast@richmond.edu) ([rmancast@richmond.edu](mailto:Rmancast@richmond.edu)) and [Hope Walton](mailto:Hwalton@richmond.edu) ([hwalton@richmond.edu](mailto:Hwalton@richmond.edu)) for coaching appointments in academic and life skills.

Boatwright Library Research Librarians (library.richmond.edu/help/ask/ or 289-8876): Research librarians help students with all steps of their research, from identifying or narrowing a topic, to locating, accessing, evaluating, and citing information resources. Librarians support students in their classes across the curriculum and provide individual appointments, class library instruction, tutorials, and [research guides](http://libguides.richmond.edu) (libguides.richmond.edu). Students can [contact an individual librarian](http://library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html) (library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html) or ASK a librarian for help via email (library@richmond.edu), text (804-277-9ASK), or [chat](http://library.richmond.edu/chat.html) (library.richmond.edu/chat.html).

Career Services (careerservices.richmond.edu or 289-8547): Can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major or course of study, connecting with internships and jobs, and investigating graduate and professional school options. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor early in your time at UR.

Counseling and Psychological Services (caps.richmond.edu or 289-8119): Assists currently enrolled, full-time, degree-seeking students in improving their mental health and well-being, and in handling challenges that may impede their growth and development. Services include brief consultations, short-term counseling and psychotherapy, skills-building classes, crisis intervention, psychiatric consultation, and related services.

Disability Services (disability.richmond.edu) The University of Richmond's office of Disability Services strives to ensure that students with disabilities and/or temporary conditions (i.e., concussions & injuries) are provided opportunity for full participation and equal access. Students who are approved for academic accommodations must complete the following steps to implement their accommodations in each class:

- 1) Submit their Disability Accommodation Notice (DAN) to each of their professors via the Disability Services Student Portal available at this link: sl.richmond.edu/be.
- 2) Request a meeting with each professor to create an accommodation implementation plan. Disability Services is available to assist, as needed.

It is important to complete these steps as soon as possible because accommodations are never retroactive, and professors are permitted a reasonable amount of time for implementation. Students who are experiencing a barrier to access due to a disability and/or temporary condition are encouraged to apply for accommodations by visiting disability.richmond.edu. Disability Services can be reached at disability@richmond.edu or 804-662-5001.



The Weinstein Learning Center is your go-to destination for academic support. Our services are tailored to help you achieve your academic goals throughout your time at the University of Richmond. To learn more and view service schedules and appointment times, visit wlc.richmond.edu. Available services are outlined below.

Academic Coaching

Meet with a professional staff member who will collaborate with you to assess and develop your academic and life skills (e.g., critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, test preparation, time management, stress management, and more).

Content Tutoring

Peer consultants offer assistance in specific courses and subject areas. They are available for appointments (in person and virtual) and drop-in sessions. See schedules at wlc.richmond.edu for supported courses and drop-in times.

English Language and Intercultural Learning

Attend one-on-one or group consultations, workshops, and other services focused on English, academic, and intercultural skills.

Quantitative and Programming Resources

Peer consultants and professional staff offer workshops or one-on-one appointments to build quantitative and programming skills and provide statistical support for research projects.

Speech

Prepare and practice for academic presentations, speaking engagements, and other occasions of public expression. Peer consultants offer recording, playback, and coaching for both individual and group presentations. Students can expect recommendations regarding clarity, organization, style, and delivery.

Technology Studio

Visit our student lab dedicated to supporting digital media projects. Services include camera checkout, video/audio recording assistance, use of virtual reality equipment, poster printing, 3D printing and modeling, and consultation services on a variety of software.

Writing

Assists student writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Meet with peer consultants who can offer feedback on written work and suggest pre-writing, drafting, and revision strategies.

Course Policies

Academic Integrity and Collaboration

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are vital for any intellectual community. For the oral or written assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics or seek advice from your peers. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit is the result of your own research and writing. You should also adhere to standard citation practices in the discipline by properly citing any written works that you reference in your assignments. You will be expected to pursue your academic studies with integrity and must follow the Honor Code. The shortened version of the honor pledge is the following: “I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”

All assignments are expected to be the student’s original work. The Jepson School follows the provisions of the Honor System as outlined by the School of Arts and Sciences. This means that no student is to use, rely on or turn in work that was paid-for, copied, excessively summarized without citation, created in collaboration (without permission), produced by AI, or is otherwise not the original work of the student for the specific assignment (without explicit permission).

The Honor Code prohibits the use of any unauthorized assistance. For this course, the use of text-generating artificial intelligence tools (such as but not limited to ChatGPT) is considered unauthorized assistance, and using it in connection with any assignment that you submit to me will be considered an Honor Code violation. This includes the use of generative AI for any stage of the work from conception to completion.

Honors System

The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: “I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.” <https://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/index.html>

Awarding of Credit

To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities. registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html

Religious Observance

Students should notify their instructors within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance. registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html

Disability Accommodations

Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact their instructors as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams. disability.richmond.edu/

Addressing Microaggressions on Campus

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.¹ Recent research has found that, when professors do not address microaggressions in class, microaggressions foster alienation of marginalized groups.² Furthermore, both students and faculty that are exposed to microaggressions more often are more likely to have depressive symptoms and negative affect (a negative view of the world).³ A comfortable and productive environment where meaningful learning happens can be collectively created through actions, words, or environmental cues that promote the inclusion and success of marginalized members, recognizing their embodied identity, validating their realities, resisting sexism, ableism, and racism.⁴

The University of Richmond is committed to building an inclusive community. To this end, the Student Center for Equity and Inclusion (SCEI) was created in 2021 and offers ongoing support and assistance for a diverse student body.⁵ With this in mind, as a community member at the University of Richmond, I pledge to address microaggressions in the classroom by holding myself, other students, and faculty accountable for what is said and being receptive to criticism when perpetuating these slights, snubs, or insults.

¹Sue, S., Zane, N., Nagayama Hall, G. C., & Berger, L. K. (2009). The Case for Cultural Competency in Psychotherapeutic Interventions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60(1), 525–548.

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163651>

²Bergom, I., Wright, M.C., Brown, M.K. and Brooks, M. (2011), Promoting college student development through collaborative learning: A case study of *hevruta*. *About Campus*, 15: 19-25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.20044>

³Nadal, K. L., Griffin, K. E., Wong, Y., Hamit, S., & Rasmus, M. (2014). The Impact of Racial Microaggressions on Mental Health: Counseling Implications for Clients of Color. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92(1), 57–66. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00130.x>

⁴Rolón-Dow, R. (2019). Stories of Microaggressions and Microaffirmation: A Framework for Understanding Campus Racial Climate. *NCID Currents*, 1(1).

⁵ <https://inclusion.richmond.edu/>

Course Schedule

Week 1 – Introduction and Overview

- *January 12:* Willson III, Ernest J. “Leadership in the Digital Age.” in *The Encyclopedia of Leadership*. Ed. Goethals, George R., Georgia J. Sorenson, and James MacGregor Burns. 2004. *Encyclopedia of Leadership*. SAGE Publications
- *January 14:* Schlozman, Kay Lehman, Henry E. Brady, and Sidney Verba. 2018. “Do Digital Technologies Make a Difference?” Pp. 112–28 in *Unequal and Unrepresented, Political Inequality and the People’s Voice in the New Gilded Age*. Princeton University Press.

Week 2 – Leadership and the Internet

- *January 19:* No Class. (MLK)
- *January 21:* Zhuravskaya, Ekaterina, Maria Petrova, and Ruben Enikolopov. 2020. “Political Effects of the Internet and Social Media.” *Annual Review of Economics* 12(1):415–38.

Week 3 – Leadership and Social Media

- *January 26:* Tucker, Joshua A., Andrew Guess, Pablo Barbera, Cristian Vaccari, Alexandra Siegel, Sergey Sanovich, Denis Stukal, and Brendan Nyhan. 2018. “Social Media, Political

Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature.” Pp. 1-29. in *SSRN Scholarly Paper*. ID 3144139. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network.

- *January 28*: Behrend, Tara S., Daniel M. Ravid, and Stuti Thapa. 2024. “Implications of Social Media for a Changing Work Landscape.” *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 11(Volume 11, 2024):337–61.

Week 4 – Leadership and Big Data

- *February 2*: Lazer, David, and Jason Radford. 2017. “Data Ex Machina: Introduction to Big Data.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 43(Volume 43, 2017):19–39.
- *February 4*: Brady, Henry E. 2019. “The Challenge of Big Data and Data Science.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 22(Volume 22, 2019):297–323.

Week 5 – Leadership and Algorithms

- *February 9*: Christin, Angèle. 2018. “Counting Clicks: Quantification and Variation in Web Journalism in the United States and France.” *American Journal of Sociology* 123(5):1382–1415.
- *February 11*: Burrell, Jenna, and Marion Fourcade. 2021. “The Society of Algorithms.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 47(1).

Week 6 – Leadership and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- *February 16*: Lei, Ya-Wen, and Rachel Kim. 2024. “Automation and Augmentation: Artificial Intelligence, Robots, and Work.” *Annual Review of Sociology*. Online First.
- *February 18*: Gallego, Aina, and Thomas Kurer. 2022. “Automation, Digitalization, and Artificial Intelligence in the Workplace: Implications for Political Behavior.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 25(Volume 25, 2022):463–84.

Week 7 – Leadership and AI Governance

- *February 23*: Stanger, Allison, Jakub Kraus, Woojin Lim, Georgia Millman-Perlah, and Mitchell Schroeder. 2024. “Terra Incognita: The Governance of Artificial Intelligence in Global Perspective.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 27.
- *February 25*: Veale, Michael, Kira Matus, and Robert Gorwa. 2023. “AI and Global Governance: Modalities, Rationales, Tensions.” *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 19(Volume 19, 2023):255–75.

Week 8 – Midterm Exam

- *March 2*: In-Class Oral Exam

- *March 4*: In-Class Oral Exam

SPRING BREAK

Week 9 – Changes in What We See

- *March 16*: Guest Lecturer – Electrical SME (Subject Matter Expert) @ Meta Data Center
- *March 18*: Ridgeway, Greg. 2018. “Policing in the Era of Big Data.” *Annual Review of Criminology* 1(Volume 1, 2018):401–19.

Week 10 – Changes in What We Know

- *March 23*: Guess, Andrew M., and Benjamin A. Lyons. 2020. “Misinformation, Disinformation, and Online Propaganda.” Pp. 10–33 in *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform, SSRC Anxieties of Democracy*, edited by J. A. Tucker and N. Persily. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- *March 25*: Anspach, Nicolas M., and Taylor N. Carlson. 2020. “What to Believe? Social Media Commentary and Belief in Misinformation.” *Political Behavior* 42(3):697–718.

Week 11 – Changes in How We Feel

- *March 30*: Park, Bo Yun, Adrien Abecassis, and Manon Revel. 2021. “Varieties of Resonance: The Subjective Interpretations and Utilizations of Media Output in France.” *Poetics* 101597.
- *April 1*: Bavel, Jay J. Van, Claire E. Robertson, Kareena del Rosario, Jesper Rasmussen, and Steve Rathje. 2024. “Social Media and Morality.” *Annual Review of Psychology* 75(Volume 75, 2024):311–40.

Week 12 – Changes in How We Communicate

- *April 6*: Enke, Nadja, and Nils S. Borchers. 2019. “Social Media Influencers in Strategic Communication: A Conceptual Framework for Strategic Social Media Influencer Communication.” *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 13(4):261–77.
- *April 8*: Poell, Thomas, Rasha Abdulla, Bernhard Rieder, Robbert Woltering, and Liesbeth Zack. 2016. “Protest Leadership in the Age of Social Media.” *Information, Communication & Society* 19(7):994–1014.

Week 13 – Changes in How We Lead

- *April 13*: Lord, Robert G., Olga Epitropaki, Roseanne J. Foti, and Tiffany Keller Hansbrough. 2020. “Implicit Leadership Theories, Implicit Followership Theories, and Dynamic Processing of Leadership Information.” *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 7(Volume 7, 2020):49–74.

- *April 15*: Mumford, Michael D., Mark Fichtel, Samantha England, and Tanner R. Newbold. 2023. “Leader Thinking, Follower Thinking: Leader Impacts on Follower Creative Performance.” *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 10(Volume 10, 2023):413–40.

Week 14 – Changes in How We Follow

- *April 20*: Hudders, Liselot, Steffi De Jans, and Marijke De Veirman. 2021. “The Commercialization of Social Media Stars: A Literature Review and Conceptual Framework on the Strategic Use of Social Media Influencers.” in *Social Media Influencers in Strategic Communication*. Routledge.
- *April 22*: Final Exam Prep Workshop

FINAL ORAL EXAMS ON MAY 1, 2026