

COM 201 Ethics in Communication

SJU, Spring 2014
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& by appointment

Course Description

In 2006 Time named “You” as the person of the year. What at the time seemed like a clever ploy to sell extra magazines now appears to have accurately captured the zeitgeist, the sense that “you”—or “we”—now control the media. During the initial rapid growth of the internet, the dot com bubble of the 1990s, much ink was spilled and many pixels flickered to debate the cultural impact of the digital network, and for a short time after the bubble burst, those who saw the internet as a passing fad seemed to have their day. But what is now clear after the rise of the widely used internet changes things—and by “things,” I mean culture and society as a whole. The way we share, create, and disseminate knowledge has fundamentally changed. What the particular contours of this change are have yet to fully take shape. The focus of this class is in understanding this change, particularly the way that media has changed and is changing. Accordingly, this class will serve as an introduction for Communication Majors and Minors to the complicated cultural and social issues raised by the digital communication network, serving as a foundation for later coursework.

Required Texts

There are three required texts for this class:

- *Culture and Technology: A Primer*. Jennifer Daryl Slack & J MacGregor Wise. ISBN 0820450073
- *The Social Media Reader*. ed. Michael Mandiberg. ISBN 0814764053
- *Amusing Ourselves to Death* Neil Postman. ISBN 014303653X

In addition there will be readings online and several films you will need to watch throughout the course of the semester.

Course Expectations

First, let me say a bit about this class. This class will reflect one of the fundamental principles underlying the strength of the internet: None of us are smarter than all of us. Or, if you prefer a slightly different take: *Knowledge is a communal process even if we have been taught to treat it as an individual product.*

This means that in the class you will do a lot more than memorize information gleaned from a range of sources I throw at you; instead we are going to use the class time to discuss, learn, and create as a group. This class is about co-laboration, co-exploration, and co-learning. While I

certainly see my role as someone who is knowledgeable in digital media, I am by no means the final voice. I will try to be provocative, trace points of connection, provide historical background, and serve as a resource, but in this class I view my role as facilitator of your learning, not as lecturer. Indeed, I expect, I hope, that this class will be far more a learning community than a twice-a-week pursuit of credit hours. By taking this class, you are agreeing to participate in this community, *to become active learners rather than passive subjects*.

Many parts of this class are experiments in which I am going to ask you to participate (and in which I will participate with you). This means that at times things will succeed and at times they will fail, but that is just the point: failure can often teach us more than success. Over the course of the semester we will use a variety of online tools (some you are probably familiar with, others not so much). My hope is that through critical examination and experimental inquiry we will come to understand the strengths and limits of these mediums.

Class Goals

Given all the above, you might ask yourself: “What’s in it for me?” A fair question, since I am going to ask a great deal of you, not just because of the workload, but because I am requiring you to participate in a demanding style of learning. Let me begin by answering the question this way. . . I think we are approaching a critical cultural juncture, where literacy itself is changing. There will develop, perhaps already has developed, a significant divide between those who know how to use these emerging media, and those who uncritically consume them. My goal for the class is to help you move into that first category: to become active, critical producers in this new media landscape.

Concretely this means:

- Understand the complex role media plays in culture and society.
- Begin to analyze the significant changes that comes with the development of the digital network in its various forms.
- Critique and analyze the ethical and cultural issues that these changes require us to think about.
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Class Requirements

Given this class’s focus on collaborative learning, it might seem somewhat awkward to evaluate people with individual grades. Nevertheless, you will receive a grade for the course. Some of the grade will be based on work you individually produce, while some of it will be an evaluation of collaborative effort.

Class Knowledgebase (20%): To reflect the collaborative nature of this class a significant portion of the class will be spent working on a group wiki that will serve as a collective resource for the class. Throughout the course we will be focusing on a range of issues (technodeterminism, privacy, identity, copyright, etc.) and will develop a wiki that attempts to explain, summarize, and engage these issues. Each student will be required to contribute to the note taking process, the synthesis process, and the editing and polishing process. (Expect to spend 1-2 hours each week on this.)

Midterm (20%): An in class exam that draws upon the knowledgebase and the themes covered

in the first half of the semester will be given on March 6th.

Final (20%): A final covering the material from the entire course and drawing will be given during exam week.

Digital Media Projects (20%): Beside the class wiki we will be using other digital media tools, experimenting and testing out various uses.

Class Preparation & Reading Notes (20%): While I don't include participation as an assessment category, your performance in preparing for class and in completing informal classroom projects will be evaluated. For example, you will—through Evernote (or a similar service)—share with me your reading notes and class prep materials. I will check these, and the thoroughness of your preparation will contribute to this grade category. I also use these as a way to orient class discussions around your questions and engagement with the days reading. During the first week of class we will discuss the specifics of this evaluation method. (Expect to spend 3-4 hours a week on class readings, and another half hour to an hour making and submitting notes.)

Attendance, Attention, & Participation

As this course is highly interactive and practice/discussion-driven, your success is absolutely tethered to your presence and participation. The course will move quickly, and each successive meeting will build upon the concepts of the previous. Missing a class puts you at a serious disadvantage in terms of the larger semester & ultimately in engaging the material.

Please come to class on time, prepared, having completed the assigned reading and writing, and ready to contribute to class discussions, to listen seriously and respectfully to the thoughts of others, and to participate in all in-class activities. Lateness is also unacceptable; if you arrive late to class or leave early, you can be marked as absent. Only three absences are permitted, and these should be used for illness or emergencies (i.e. this does not mean three absences plus absences for illness etc.). Each absence after your third will result in a .25 deduction from your final grade—making, for example, a 3.25 a 3.0. After the sixth absence, you will fail the class (a grade of FA). Your primary responsibility is to be in class and fully present.

Beyond mere presence, however, a successful course requires student participation. Students are expected to come to class on time, prepared, having completed the assigned reading and writing, and ready to contribute to class discussions, to listen seriously and respectfully to the thoughts of others, and to participate in all in-class activities. I strongly urge you to attend every class, as most of the work done in class is necessary for successful completion of the course.

Course Website

The course website for this class can be found at www.outsidethetext.com/classes. You should get in the habit of checking this regularly as I will post suggestions and thoughts about the readings here, as well as links to other things that might interest the class. The syllabus can be found here as well, and any changes to the syllabus will be posted here. Please note: The syllabus might change throughout the course of the semester, indeed it probably will as we adjust to meet the needs of the class, so please develop a habit of checking the class website. If you forget the web address you can always find it from www.outsidethetext.com a much easier url to

remember.

A Note on Technology

Because at its core this class is about how technology changes our culture, we will necessarily engage with a range of computer tools and web based applications. You do not need any prior skill, however; you merely need a willingness to engage and learn. A majority of the tools we will be using in class are web-based, thus you will not need any special software.

One further note about technology. As much as technology makes life easier, at times it can also be difficult (computer crashes, deleted work, slow internet connection, etc.) Plan accordingly: "the computer ate my homework" or "the internet was down" are not reasons to forgo doing the assigned work. It is in your best interest to leave extra time, especially at first to ensure that technology does not get in the way of your work.

Digital Etiquette

Many of the assignments throughout the semester will require participation in online spaces. Students should work to preserve the same atmosphere of respect and consideration that occurs in the classroom. Disagreements may arise and consensus is not always possible (indeed disagreements are productive). However, name calling, harassing, flaming, trolling etc. is antithetical to the goals of this course.

How to Reach me

The best way to reach me is by email dparry@sju.edu or you can find me online at www.outsidethetext.com. I check email frequently throughout the day. If you email me and do not receive a response within 48 hours please feel free to email me again (I might not have received your first one) and give me a reminder. I promise not to consider this harassing. Don't call my office phone, though; voice mail is annoying and I tend to check it far less frequently than email.

My office hours are TR 2:00-3:00. My office is Merion Hall 173.

University Policies

Academic Honesty: Please familiarize yourself with the [University's Academic Honesty Policy](#).

Disability Support: In accordance with state and federal laws, the University will make reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. For those who have or think that you may have a disability requiring an accommodation (learning, physical, psychological) should contact Services for Students with Disabilities, Room G10, Bellarmine, 610-660-1774 (voice) or 610-660-1620 (TTY) as early as possible in the semester for additional information and so that an accommodation, if appropriate, can be made in a timely manner. You will be required to provide current (within 3 years) documentation of the disability.

For a more detailed explanation of the University's accommodation process, as well as the programs and services offered to students with disabilities, please see the [Student Resources Page](#). If you have any difficulty accessing the information on-line, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities at the telephone numbers above.

A Final Note

Should any aspect of class confuse/concern/trouble you, or if you have questions about any of this, please see me.

Schedule of Readings

Week One

- January 16th
 - Introduction to the Class

Week Two

- January 21
 - Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message"
 - *Blown to Bits* [Chapter 1](#)
- January 23
 - *Culture and Technology* Chapters 3,4,8 & 9

Week Three

- January 28
 - *Culture and Technology* Chapters 10-12
- January 30
 - Hyde, et al. "What is Collaboration Anyway." *The Social Media Reader*
 - Jaron Lanier, "[Digital Maoism: The Hazards of New Online Collectivism.](#)"

Week Four

- February 4
 - Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*
- February 6
 - Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

Week Five

- February 11
 - Miles Townes, "The Spread of TCP/IP and the Political Origins of the Internet"
 - *Blown to Bits* [Appendix](#) (Starts on Page 296)
 - "[There and Back Again](#)" (video)
- February 13
 - Tim Wu, "[The Radicalism of the Internet](#)"
 - "[History of the Internet](#)" (Video)
 - *Blown to Bits* [Chapter 3](#)

Week Six

- February 18
 - *Culture and Technolgoy* Chapters 13 & 14
 - danah boyd, "Participating in the Always on Lifestyle" *The Social Media Reader*

- February 20
 - Zeynep Tufekci, "[Social Media's Small, Positive Role in Human Relationships.](#)"
 - Ellison et al., "[How Social Network Sites Affect Social Capital Processes.](#)"

Week Seven

- February 25
 - Lisa Nakamura, "[Race and Identity in Digital Media](#)"
 - Xeni Jardin, "[Men Invented the Internet](#)"
 - Tasneem Raja, "[Silicon Valley's Programmer Problem](#)"
 - Catherine Bracy, "[What Techies Need to Know About Politics](#)"
- February 27
 - Yochai Benkler, "Sharing Nicely: On Shareable Goods and the Emergence of Sharing as a Modality of Economic Production" *The Social Media Reader*
 - Siva Vaidhyanathan, "Open Source as Culture/Culture as Open Source" *The Social Media Reader*

Week Eight

- March 4
 - [Rip: A Remix Manifesto](#)
 - "[About](#)" page of Creative Commons (Also read [History](#), and [Case Studies](#))
- March 6
 - **Midterm**

Spring Break

Week Nine

- March 18
 - *Culture of Connectivity* (Intro)
- March 20
 - *Culture of Connectivity* Case Studies

Week Ten

- March 25
 - Michel Foucault, "[Discipline and Punish](#)"
 - Howard Rheingold, "[Always on Panopticon or Cooperation Amplifier](#)"
- March 27
 - [Terms and Conditions May Apply](#)
 - "[Big Brother is Watching You](#)"

Week Eleven

- April 1
 - [We Live in Public](#) by Odni Timoner
- April 3
 - "[The NSA Files: Decoded.](#)"
 - Evgeny Morozov, "[The Price of Hypocrisy](#)"
 - Quinn Norton, "[Seen by the State](#)"

Week Twelve

- April 8
 - ["Me and My Shadow"](#) Tactical Tech
 - ["Security in a Box"](#) Tactical Tech
 - ["Alternatives"](#) Tactical Tech
- April 10
 - ["We Are Legion"](#) Documentary

Week Thirteen

- April 15
 - ["Unmasking Reddit's Violentacrez"](#) Gawker
 - ["Gawker.com and affiliate sites are no longer allowed"](#) Reddit
 - ["Reddit's Biggest Troll Fired From His Real World Job"](#) Gawker
- April 17
 - Clay Shirky, ["The Political Power of Social Media"](#)
 - Evgeny Morozov, ["The Internet in Society: Empowering or Censoring Citizens"](#)

Week Fourteen

- April 22
 - ["The Internet Must Go"](#)
 - Rebecca MacKinnon, ["Consent of the Networked"](#)
- April 24
 - Johnathan Zittrain, ["The Future of the Internet and How to Stop It."](#)

Week Fifteen

- April 29
 - 3D Printing
- May 1
 - Final Class

Final Exam