

Writing and Research in New Media

EMAC 2321

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TR 2:30-3:45 ATEC 1.104

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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 “Web 2.0” is that the internet changes things—and by “things,” I mean everything. The way we share, create, and disseminate knowledge has fundamentally changed. What the particular contours of this change are have yet to be revealed, but I think it is clear that the next moment in our culture will be remarkably different from the prior. 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 Emerging Media and Communications majors and serve as a building block for the rest of your coursework.

Required Texts:

The internet.

Seriously: the internet itself will be our “textbook.” All of the readings will be available online, in digital format. This does not mean that we will not be dealing with paper, though. Indeed, on occasion I will ask you to print out articles and bring them to class. (Consider the cost of printing and the purchase of an internet connection at your home your “textbook” cost for this class.)

Course Expectations:

First, let me say a bit about this class. Expect this class to be unlike any other classroom experience you have had. Okay, that might not be entirely true or fair, but better to start out with that expectation. One of my central suppositions (or ideas of this class) is that the existence of the digital network fundamentally changes culture, in particular the way we communicate and create knowledge. Thus, at least in part, we are going to try and mimic those changes here within the walls of the classroom (and throughout the semester even question those very walls themselves). To characterize in broad strokes (which are not entirely precise, but will suit our purposes here), education is often conceived of as a process of expert dissemination—knowledge as a product which I have and give to you. That is, you

come to class, I tell you what is crucial to know and interpret the meaning for you; you take notes and soak up all the knowledge, and then I ask you to perform some task that shows you have acquired the information conveyed during the class (often in the form of a multiple choice test). This class will not use this learning model. Instead it takes lessons learned from the rise of network culture as its basic building blocks.

In particular, 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-llaboration, co-exploration, and co-learning. While I certainly see my role as someone who is knowledgeable in social media, I am by no means the final voice. Instead I have structured some of the class and provided a basic outline, but along with you I will develop the remainder of the syllabus. 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: in this new emerging media environment we do not yet know what works, we just know the old ways no longer will. Over the course of the semester we will use blogs, wikis, online discussion forums, video aggregators (like YouTube), microblogging services (like Twitter), and a variety of other online tools. My hope is that through critical examination and experimental inquiry we will come to understand the strengths and limits of these mediums.

So, more specifically, you will notice this class has two distinct sections. The first half of the class looks more or less like a traditional syllabus, with readings and assignments provided. During this half of the class we will look at some of the central issues, debates, and conversations that are taking place around emerging media. Here I have pre-selected most of the readings. Think of this half of the class as “building critical literacy,” learning what the existing conversation is so that you can join it. The second half of the class will mark a shift. During this half of the class, we will turn our critical literacy onto specific objects of study and examine them using the lenses we have developed. At this point, you will become responsible for providing the readings, framing the discussion, and determining the course of our inquiry.

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, probably more than any other class you are taking this semester, not just because of the workload, but because I am requiring you to participate in a whole new 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:

- Develop collaborative learning skills
- Become familiar with social media and how they operate
- Understand the larger issues and debates shaping the transformation of media

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.

Attendance & Participation (20%): This is a crucial part of class. Students are expected to come to class on time, prepared, having completed the assigned reading and writing, and ready to contribute their thoughts 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. 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.). Missing more than three classes will affect your grade. More than five absences can result in failing the course. If you need to miss class for religious reasons, please speak to me ahead of time. Absences for religious purposes do not count against the permitted number (as long as prior notification is given). Lateness is also unacceptable; if you arrive late to class you will be marked as absent. Leaving early also counts as an absence. Your primary responsibility is to be in class and fully present. (Expect to spend 3 hours a week in class and roughly 2-3 hours a week doing reading for the class.)

Individual Blogs(25%): Each student will be required to develop his/her own online “presence,” the center of which will be a blog. This will serve as a place for weekly thoughts and writings about the material covered in class, about emerging media, and about our learning group in general. At times I will give you specific writing assignments; at others your assignment will be more open. (Expect to spend 1 hour each week on this.)

Social Media (15%): In addition to the individual blogs, we will be using more “collaborative” or social media tools, including but not limited to Twitter, social bookmarking, and wikis. (This is really hard to define in terms of time commitment.)

Collaborative Teaching (20%): Students will be divided into groups and be responsible for developing and focusing our inquiry during weeks nine through sixteen. You will not be lecturing for two days, but instead providing the basis for class. Each group will be responsible for one week and will meet with me prior to the assigned class to focus your effort. More on this after the first week of class. (Expect to spend 8-10 hours over the course of the semester on this.)

Final Project (20%): Each student will be responsible for producing a final project that reflects upon, builds upon, and engages one of the issues surrounding emerging media which we have covered in class. These can take a variety of forms, and does not need to be a traditional “academic paper” (videos, podcasts, websites are all acceptable). You will be allowed to work in groups or individually on these (but you will have to supply a rationale as to why you chose to work the way you did). More on this after the midpoint of class. (Expect to spend 10 hours over the final weeks of class on this.)

Course Website:

The course website for this class can be found at <http://emac2321.pbworks.com/>. 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. If you forget the web address you can always find it from <http://www.outsidethetext.com>, an 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. I am more than willing to take extra time: all you need to do is ask.

A majority of the tools we will be using in class are web-based, thus you will not need any special software. You do need an up-to-date version of Firefox (a free web browser) as well as current versions of various plugins (for example Flash, and a video player). Don't worry, though, as we will cover this in class. You will need an internet connection at your residence, or easy access to one (you will be spending a great deal of time “jacked in.”)

One further note about technology. As much as technology makes life easier, at times it can also be difficult (computer crashes, deleted work, unavailable internet connections, 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.

How to Reach Me:

The best way to reach me though is by email <dparry@utdallas.edu> or you can find me online at <<http://www.outsidethetext.com>>. I check email frequently throughout the day. If you email me and do not receive a response within 48 hours (usually I will get back to you within a day), 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 less frequently than email.

My office hours are Tuesday 3:45-4:45 and Thursday 1:30-2:30. My office is ATEC 1.502.

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 Classes

Week One

August 20

Class Introduction

The Central Debate: Evolution, Revolution, or De-evolution?

Week Two

August 25

Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message"

Tim O' Reilly, "What is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation"

<http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>

Lev Grossman, "Time's Person of the Year: You."

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1569514,00.html>

"History of the Internet" (video)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hIQjrMHTv4>

August 27

Nicholas Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid"

<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200807/google>

Jamais Cascio, "Get Smarter"

<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200907/intelligence>

Week Three

September 1

Andrew Keen, "The Great Seduction" from *The Cult of the Amateur*

Nicholas Carr, "The amorality of Web 2.0"

http://www.rougtype.com/archives/2005/10/the_amorality_o.php

"The Good, the Bad, and the Web 2.0" *Wall Street Journal Online*

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118461274162567845.html>

September 3

David Weinberger, "The New Order of Order" & "The Work of Knowledge" from *Everything is Miscellaneous*

"Social Bookmarking in Plain English" *The Common Craft Show*

<http://www.commoncraft.com/bookmarking-plain-english>

Changing Networks and Community

Week Four

September 8

Manuel Castellas, "Why Networks Matter"

<http://www.demos.co.uk/files/File/networklogic17castells.pdf>

Douglas Watts, "Six Degrees"

September 10

Howard Rheingold, "Network Literacy" (Two Videos)

<http://blip.tv/file/1803355>

<http://blip.tv/file/1823777>

Schedule of Classes

Week Five

September 15

Garrett Hardin, "Tragedy of the Commons"

<http://dieoff.org/page95.htm>

Howard Rheingold, TED talk on Collaboration

http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/howard_rheingold_on_collaboration.html

Clay Shirky "How Social Media Can Make History," Web 2.0 Expo Keynote

<http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/>

[clay_shirky_how_cellphones_twitter_facebook_can_make_history.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/clay_shirky_how_cellphones_twitter_facebook_can_make_history.html)

<http://blip.tv/file/855937>

September 17

Pieter Boeder, "Habermas Heritage: the future of the Public Sphere in the Networked Society"

http://131.193.153.231/www/issues/issue10_9/boeder/index.html

Evgeny Morozov, "Texting Toward Utopia"

<http://bostonreview.net/BR34.2/morozov.php>

Changing Ethics

Week Six

September 22

Howard Rheingold, "Always on Panopticon or Cooperation Amplifier" from *Smart Mobs*

September 24

"Understanding Net Neutrality"

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JP_3WnJ42kw

Johnathan Zittrain, "The Future of the Internet and How to Stop It"

<http://www.isoc-ny.org/?p=195>

Week Seven

September 29

Remix

<http://www.ripremix.com/>

Mark Helprin, "A Great Idea Lives Forever. Shouldn't its Copyright?"

[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/opinion/20helprin.html?](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/opinion/20helprin.html?ex=1337313600&en=3571064d77055f41&ei=5124&partner=permalink&exprod=permalink)

[ex=1337313600&en=3571064d77055f41&ei=5124&partner=permalink&exprod=permalink](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/opinion/20helprin.html?ex=1337313600&en=3571064d77055f41&ei=5124&partner=permalink&exprod=permalink)

October 1

Chris Anderson, "Free! Why \$0.00 is the Future of Business"

http://www.wired.com/techbiz/it/magazine/16-03/ff_free

Malcom Gladwell, "Priced to Sell. Is free the future?"

http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2009/07/06/090706crbo_books_gladwell

Changing Art

Week Eight

October 6

Bolter & Grusin, "Remediation"

October 8

KateModern

<http://www.bebo.com/katemodern>

Schedule of Classes

The Object(s) of Analysis

Note: Readings for these weeks are yet to be determined.

Week Nine: YouTube

October 13

October 15

Week Ten: Facebook

October 20

October 22

Week Eleven: Wikipedia

October 27

October 29

Week Twelve: Twitter

November 3

November 5

Week Thirteen: The Cloud

November 10

November 12

Week Fourteen: Journalism

November 17

November 19

Week Fifteen: Entertainment

November 24

Week Sixteen: Mobile

December 1

December 3

Final Projects Due December 11th.