

New telecommunication media

Comm 4291

Prof. Gil Rodman

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office hours (253 Ford):

TuTh 10:00-11:15a, W 10:00-11:30p, and by appointment

Syllabus

Spring 2010

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office hours (275 Ford):

TuTh 10:00-11:00a

Course description

It has become something of a cliché to claim that the world has been “revolutionized” by the broad and eclectic range of “new” communication technologies that includes the Internet, laptop computers, TiVo, iPods, Blackberries, and the like. How true that cliché is, however, depends a great deal on which technologies one is talking about, where in the world one is trying to measure their impact, and precisely what counts as a “revolutionary” change. The actual relationship between technology and culture is rarely (if ever) as simple as such clichés make it out to be. Our task this semester will be to examine some -- though by no means all -- of the major social, cultural, and political issues raised by the growth and spread of digital media. While our readings will occasionally include brief technical discussions, this is *not* a course about the science of digital media (e.g., how does WiFi work? what are the acoustic limitations of satellite radio? etc.) and your ability to succeed will *not* depend on whether you can master the intricacies of software engineering, computer circuitry, or the like.

None of the questions we'll address this semester have easy or predictable answers. How well you do in this class will depend on (1) your ability to think *critically* about issues related to technology, media, culture, and politics, and (2) your ability to *argue* your position(s) on those issues persuasively, rather than your ability to memorize and repeat the “right” answers.

Permanent course rules

1-001. Applicability of rules. All rules listed in the original syllabus are in effect when the semester begins and remain in effect until and unless they are officially changed.

1-002. Rule types. There are three types of course rules:

(a) Permanent course rules. These rules can only be created, changed, amended, or repealed by the professor, who will only do so under emergency circumstances. They are numbered with a “1-” prefix.

(b) Major course rules. These rules require a supermajority vote (i.e., greater than 66.66% of eligible voters) to be created, changed, amended, or repealed. They are numbered with a “2-” prefix.

(c) Minor course rules. These rules require a majority vote (i.e., greater than 50% of eligible voters) to be created, changed, amended, or repealed. They are numbered with a “3-” prefix.

1-003. Hierarchy of rules. In the event of conflicts between two or more rules, major rules take precedent over minor rules, and permanent rules take precedent over both major and minor rules. If conflicting rules are in the same level of the hierarchy, the rule with the lowest number takes precedent (e.g., a rule numbered #3-152 would take precedence over a rule numbered #3-155).

1-004. Class participants. There are three categories of class participants:

(a) Professor. The professor (Gil Rodman) is the final arbiter and enforcer of all course rules, and the only person authorized to determine and/or assign final course grades. He is also authorized to determine and/or assign grades for individual assignments (or portions thereof).

(b) Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA). The GTA (Carolina Branson) is authorized to determine and/or assign grades for individual assignments (or portions thereof) as delegated to do so by the professor.

(c) Students. This category includes all individuals whom the University recognizes to be enrolled in the course and any other individuals whom the professor recognizes as a grade-earning member of the class.

1-005. Eligible voters. All students have the right to propose new rules and/or rule changes, and to vote on official ballots. In any voting situation, each student has exactly one vote. In the event of a tie vote, the GTA is empowered to cast the deciding vote. Should the GTA choose not to resolve the deadlock, the professor will cast the deciding vote. Otherwise, the professor and the GTA are non-voting participants.

1-006. Quorum. Any ballot that fails to achieve a quorum of at least 50% of all eligible voters will be null and void, regardless of the final outcome of the vote.

1-007. Passed ballot grade points. When a ballot passes, the student who formally proposed that ballot will have one (1) point added to their final course grade.

1-008. Timekeeping. For purposes of all course rules, a “course week” begins at 11:15:00 am CT every Tuesday and lasts until 11:14:59 am CT on the following Tuesday.

1-009. Grade queries. Questions about specific grades should be directed to the assignment’s original grader. In the event of a dispute over a GTA-assigned grade, the student in question must make every reasonable effort to resolve that dispute with the GTA before the professor will intervene. Should the professor intervene in such a dispute, he will regrade the assignment in question, and the resulting grade -- which may be higher than, the same as, or lower than the original grade -- will become the official grade of record for the assignment. The GTA is not empowered to change grades assigned by the professor.

1-010. Higher law. No course rules can be created, changed, or amended so as to violate (a) federal, state, or local law; (b) official UMN regulations; and/or (c) Communication Studies department policies.

Major course rules

2-001. Books. The following required books are available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union:

- James Boyle, *The Public Domain*
- Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube*
- Lawrence Lessig, *Code: Version 2.0*
- Eric S. Raymond, *The Cathedral and the Bazaar* [revised edition]
- Jennifer Daryl Slack and J. Macgregor Wise, *Culture and Technology: A Primer*

Please note that earlier editions exist for the Lessig and Raymond books. Additionally, both the Boyle and Lessig books are available online as free PDFs, while most of the essays that comprise the Raymond book are available online in HTML form. Students who choose to use any of these other editions do so at their own risk.

Students who choose to pursue a Senior Project in addition to the required course work (see #2-010 below) are *strongly* encouraged to use the following *recommended* book (which is also available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union) as a helpful guide for how to conceive, plan, research, and write their final papers:

- Wayne C. Booth *et al.*, *The Craft of Research* [third edition]

2-002. Course blog. All students on the official course roster as of 18 Jan have been given posting privileges for the course blog. The principal uses for the blog will be for:

- proposing and discussing all changes to the official course rules,
- submitting Thought Papers and Critical Response Papers (see rules #2-008 and #2-010 below),
- providing peer evaluations of other students' written work,
- ongoing discussions of issues raised by the assigned readings and/or in class, and
- course-related business announcements.

Further details on how to access the blog are available on a separate handout.

2-003. Yoga mat. All students are required to locate and purchase a molded rubber yoga mat (in UMN maroon and/or gold only; minimum length of 120 inches) that they will bring to *every* class meeting from 16 Feb until the end of the semester. Students who fail to bring their yoga mats to class will have their course grade docked one (1) point for each and every such infraction.

2-004. Grades. The grading criteria for all work in this course follows the University's published standards for A-F grading:

- A: "achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements"
- B: "achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements"
- C: "achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect"
- D: "achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements"
- F: "represents failure . . . and signifies that the work was . . . completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit."

Final course grades will be calculated using the following schedule:

Thought paper	20%
Reading responses	20%
Critical response papers (three @ 20% each)	60%

Final grade point totals will translate to letter grades as follows:

A	93-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	60-66
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72	F	0-59

- "S/N" grades will only be given to students who have registered for the course on an S/N basis.
- "I" grades will only be given under *extraordinary* circumstances (i.e., major life emergencies).

2-005. Attendance/participation. Class meetings will be structured around discussions rather than lectures. The professor will assume that all students present on any given day are suitably prepared to contribute to those discussions: i.e., they will have done the assigned reading carefully enough to offer productive comments and questions about it. In this context, "being prepared" does *not* require a full mastery of the assigned readings. It *does*, however, require the sort of good faith effort that can be demonstrated with a thoughtful question and/or a clear explanation of at least some meaningful portion of the reading. Vague, superficial, and/or generic contributions (e.g., "I just didn't get it," "I liked this essay," "What does [word found in the reading] mean?") will *not* count as evidence of adequate preparation.

This is not a course where passive spectators are likely to do well, and every student will be expected to (1) attend class regularly, (2) do the required reading, and (3) come to class prepared to discuss those readings. Consistently lackluster discussions will result in reading quizzes as a regular part of class meetings. Should the professor decide that such quizzes are necessary, final grades will be calculated on a revised schedule:

Thought paper	10%
Reading responses	10%
Reading quizzes	20%
Critical response papers (three @ 20% each)	60%

2-006. March Madness. All students are required to predict the winners of both the men's and women's 2009 NCAA Division I Basketball Tournaments, and to submit their predictions to the professor in writing by the start of class on 11 Mar. Students who fail to submit such predictions or who fail to predict both tournament winners correctly will have three (3) points deducted from their final course grade.

2-007. Written assignments -- general rules.

(a) Where/how to submit assignments. Reading responses must be submitted via email as inline messages (e.g., no file attachments). Thought papers, critical response papers, and peer evaluations of those assignments must be submitted to the course blog. Printed versions of any of these assignments will not be accepted or graded.

(b) When to submit assignments. Reading responses are due by 5:00 pm the day before any given reading is assigned. No late reading responses will be accepted. All other assignments are due by 11:15 am on the given due date. Late penalties will apply to all assignments that do not meet these deadlines, and will be assessed in direct proportion to the assignment's lateness. The minimum penalty in all such cases will be the equivalent of one full letter grade on the assignment in question.

(c) Grammar/spelling/etc. Grades for written assignments will be based primarily on content (rather than form): e.g., insightful, smartly argued essays that contain a few spelling errors will almost always receive higher grades than grammatically flawless papers that have weak arguments. Nonetheless, grammar, spelling, and style still matter to the effective presentation of a strong argument, and assignments suffering from significant "form" problems will be penalized accordingly.

(d) Accepted languages. All written assignments submitted after 9 Feb must be submitted in one (or more) of the following languages:

Bottle-nosed Dolphin	Klingon	Navajo
Esperanto	Mandarin Chinese	Proto-Indo-European
Flemish	Mayan	Wolof

Written work submitted in any other languages -- including English -- will be penalized a full letter grade.

2-008. Thought paper. All students must write and submit a short (1000-1250 words) paper by 11:15 am on 26 Jan, and then submit a revised version of the same paper by 11:15 am on 16 Feb. Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout. That handout constitutes a legally binding extension of this course rule.

2-009. Reading responses. For each class meeting from 26 Jan through 6 May, students can write and submit short reading responses, each of which will consist of a brief critical response to one of our assigned readings. Each reading response must be emailed to rodman@umn.edu no later than 5:00 pm the day before the class period for which the reading in question is assigned. Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout. That handout constitutes a legally binding extension of this course rule.

2-010. Critical response papers. All students are required to write and submit at least three (3) essays of 1000+ words, each of which should be a critical (i.e., thoughtful and analytical) response to a particular range of the assigned readings. Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout. That handout constitutes a legally binding extension of this course rule.

2-011. Senior project. Students who intend to use this course to fulfill their Senior Project requirement must research and write an argumentative paper (~2500-5000 words) on a topic appropriate to the course's central theme. Because this project results in a separate grade for an extra credit hour, (a) it entails work above and beyond the regular requirements of the course, and (b) the project's rules and requirements are *not* subject to change through the ordinary proposal/ballot process. Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout.

2-012. Super Bowl counter-ad assignment. All students will write and produce a broadcast-quality 30-second TV advertisement that critiques the glorification of consumerism and militaristic nationalism that pervades the Super Bowl broadcast. Each ad must contain recognizable game footage from the official televised broadcast of Super Bowl XLIV (7 Feb on CBS). Finished ads are due on 11 Feb and must be submitted in DVD format. These ads will *not* be graded, but any student who fails to complete this assignment will have three (3) points deducted from her/his final course grade.

2-013. Academic dishonesty. The following is a *partial* list of major examples of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism in any of its forms,
- copying assignments (in whole or in part) produced by other students,
- having someone else research and/or write substantial portions of any graded assignment, and
- knowingly assisting someone else in their efforts to engage in any of the above practices.

The minimum penalty for academic dishonesty is a *zero* for the assignment in question.

Further information about the University's official policies with respect to academic dishonesty -- including more detailed explanations of what constitutes "plagiarism" and "cheating" -- can be found online at <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/plagiarism/>

2-014. Recordings and course notes. Students may make audio recordings of our class meetings for their personal use, provided they can do so without disrupting the ordinary flow of the class. The purchase and/or sale of either written notes or audio recordings of our class meetings is strictly prohibited.

2-015. Code-your-own software assignment. All students will design and code a major piece of software from scratch. Allowable types of software for this assignment are limited to the following:

email client	ogg-vorbis music player	spreadsheet
instant messaging client	photo editor	web browser
MMORPG engine	RSS feedreader	word processor

Finished software is due on 25 Feb and must be submitted in DVD format. This assignment will *not* be graded, but students who fail to complete it will have three (3) points deducted from their course grades.

2-016. Etiquette. Significant disruptions of the normal flow of course-related business -- e.g., using cell phones in class, excessive side chatter, engaging in premature leave-taking behavior -- will result in grade penalties for the student(s) involved.

2-017. Polka pledge. From 4 Feb onward, all of our class meetings will begin with a mandatory group recitation of the “Polka Pledge.” The pledge’s full text (which all students must memorize) is as follows:

Polka! Polka! Polka!
It’s the only music for me!
Polka! Polka! Polka!
It sets your spirits free!

Hip-hop just hurts my head.
Jazz makes my ears hurt.
Country makes me wish I were dead.
Rock sounds like nothing but dirt.

Polka! Polka! Polka!
It’s the only music for me!
Polka! Polka! Polka!
It sets your spirits free! Boo-YAH!

Students who fail to memorize the Pledge completely and accurately, to participate in our in-class recitations of the Pledge, and/or to abide by the noble ideals expressed in the Pledge will have their final course grade penalized one (1) point for each such infraction.

2-018. Reading/assignment schedule. The schedule below lists reading assignments and due dates for major assignments. Readings should be completed in advance of the dates listed.

19 Jan	no readings
21 Jan	course syllabus and assignment handouts
26 Jan	Thought paper due Slack and Wise, pp. 1-40
28 Jan	Slack and Wise, pp. 41-82
2 Feb	Slack and Wise, pp. 83-124
4 Feb	Polka pledge requirement begins Slack and Wise, pp. 125-162
9 Feb	Language requirement begins Slack and Wise, pp. 163-196
11 Feb	Revised thought paper due Super Bowl counter-ad due Lessig, pp. ix-37
16 Feb	Yoga mat requirement begins Lessig, pp. 38-82
18 Feb	Email timing requirement begins Lessig, pp. 83-119

- 23 Feb** **Gopher spirit requirement begins**
Lessig, pp. 120-168
- 25 Feb** **Code-your-own software due**
Lessig, pp. 169-199
- 2 Mar** **Critical response paper #1 due**
Facebook profile requirement begins
Lessig, pp. 200-232
- 4 Mar** Lessig, pp. 233-275
- 9 Mar** **Peer evaluations of critical response paper #1 due**
Lessig, pp. 276-312
- 11 Mar** **March Madness picks due**
Lessig, pp. 313-339
- 16 Mar** **NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK**
- 18 Mar** **NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK**
- 23 Mar** **Revised critical response paper #1 due**
Major change deadline
Raymond, pp. ix-64
- 25 Mar** Raymond, pp. 65-112
- 30 Mar** Raymond, pp. 113-166
- 1 Apr** Raymond, pp. 167-192
- 6 Apr** **Critical response paper #2 due**
Boyle, pp. xi-41
- 8 Apr** Boyle, pp. 42-82
- 13 Apr** **Peer evaluations of critical response paper #2 due**
Boyle, pp. 83-121
- 15 Apr** Boyle, pp. 122-159
- 20 Apr** **Revised critical response paper #2 due**
Boyle, pp. 160-204
- 22 Apr** Boyle, pp. 205-248
- 27 Apr** **Critical response paper #3 due**
Burgess and Green, pp. vii-37
- 29 Apr** Burgess and Green, pp. 38-74

- 4 May** **Peer evaluations of critical response paper #3 due**
Burgess and Green, pp. 75-108
- 6 May** Burgess and Green, pp. 109-142
- 11 May** **NO CLASS**
Critical response paper #4 due
Revised critical response paper #3 due

Minor course rules

3-001. Facebook profile photo. By the start of class on 2 Mar, all students must change their primary profile picture on their Facebook page to the official logo of one of the following:

- Eastern Airlines
- McDonald's
- University of Wisconsin/Madison
- Viagra
- Walmart
- World Trade Organization

All students must keep their chosen logo as their primary Facebook profile picture until the end of class on 6 May. Students who do not already have a Facebook page will be required to set up a Facebook account in order to comply with this requirement. Students who fail to meet this requirement fully will have their final course grade docked by five (5) points.

3-002. Changing course rules. With the sole exception of rule changes proposed in class on 21 Jan (see #3-013 below), all changes/additions/amendments to the course rules must adhere to the four step process described in rules #3-004 through #3-007.

3-003. Email timing. From 18 Feb onward, all course-related email sent by any student to either the professor or the GTA must have a timestamp indicating that it was sent between 3:24:00 am and 3:32:17 am CT. At the sole discretion of the recipient, any email messages sent outside that obligatory time period will either (a) be ignored completely or (b) result in a one (1) point penalty assessed against the sender's final course grade.

3-004. Proposing rule changes. All potential rule changes must first be proposed on the course blog. An official proposal will consist of a post to the course blog in which:

- the subject line takes the form "PROPOSAL #mm-dd-name" -- where "mm-dd" are numbers representing the date on which the proposal is made and where "name" consists of the first initial and last name of the proposal's author. [Example: a properly formatted subject line for a proposal made by Chris Thompson on 8 Feb would be "PROPOSAL #02-08-CThompson"]
- the body contains the precise text -- and only the precise text -- of the proposal that will be put to a formal vote.
- the post is formally marked as belonging to the "rule changes" category.

Proposal names are not case-sensitive (e.g., "PROPOSAL #04-11-DSmith" is functionally equivalent to "proposal #04-11-dsmith"). Spacing, punctuation, and leading zeros, however, do matter (e.g., "PROPOSAL #03-06-TJones" is a valid proposal name, but "PROPOSAL #3-6-TJones," "PROPOSAL 03 06 TJones," and "PROPOSAL #0306TJones" are all invalid). Blog posts that fail to follow the requirements listed above precisely will not be considered to be legitimate proposals. Votes cast on any illegitimate proposals will be null and void.

Proposed rule changes must relate to official course business in a clear and explicit fashion, and must be enforceable within the existing structure of the course. The outcome of any and all ballots must be fully decidable by means of a simple Yes/No vote.

Any individual student is allowed to put forward a maximum of one (1) legitimate proposal during any given course week. In the event that a student puts forward more than one legitimate proposal in a single course week, only the first such proposal will be considered to be legitimate.

3-005. Discussion of proposed rule changes. The successful posting of a legally formatted proposal will automatically start a 72-hour period for open discussion of the proposal in question. The discussion period is intended to give proposal authors the opportunity to assess the potential effects and/or viability of their proposals -- and, if they so desire, to make revisions to their proposals prior to any formal vote. During the discussion period, any and all course participants are welcome to use the course blog to offer questions, suggestions, objections, and/or other commentary on the proposal in question.

3-006. Revision or withdrawal of proposed rule changes. After the discussion period ends, the original proposal author has three options:

(a) To post an official revision to the proposal. Such a revision must be placed on the course blog as a new post that contained the final revised version of the proposal in question. That post must follow the same format described in #3-004 above except that the word "PROPOSAL" must be replaced by the word "BALLOT." Once the discussion period has ended and a legally formatted revision has been posted, no further revisions are permitted, and the voting period (see #3-007 below) begins immediately.

(b) To withdraw the proposal completely. For a withdrawal to be official, the original proposal author must post a new message to the course blog that clearly, unambiguously, and unconditionally states her/his desire to withdraw the proposal. Once formally withdrawn, a proposal is not eligible for an official vote unless it is subsequently put forward as a new proposal following the rules described above.

(c) To do nothing. If 24 hours passes after the discussion period and neither (a) nor (b) above has happened, then the original proposal automatically becomes a "live" ballot.

3-007. Voting. The official voting period for all ballots will last for 72 hours. Votes on any given ballot must conform to the following rules:

- Votes must be sent via email to rodman@umn.edu during the official voting period.
- The subject line must contain the precise identifying portion (i.e., the "#mm-dd-name" portion) of the ballot in question.
- Ballots must originate from an email address that clearly and recognizably belongs to an eligible voter: e.g., a student's official UMN email address or a non-UMN email address that the professor can reliably and accurately associate with an eligible voter.
- The body of the emailed ballot must contain one and only one of the following three words: Yes, No, Abstain. This word will be recorded as part of the official vote tally for the ballot in question.

Votes on separate ballots must be submitted in separate emails. Votes that are unclear, ambiguous, and/or conditional will be null and void. Once cast, legal votes cannot be changed or retracted. Votes that fail to follow these requirements precisely will not be considered to be legal votes, either for deciding the outcome of a ballot or for constituting a quorum.

3-008. Gopher spirit. From 23 Feb onwards, all students must wear T-shirts to class honoring two great Minnesota sports teams of the past. On Tuesdays, students must wear maroon T-shirts displaying a team photo of the 1962 Rose Bowl champion Gophers. On Thursdays, students must wear gold T-shirts displaying a reproduction of the *Minnesota Daily* story describing the women's basketball team's appearance in the 2004 Final Four. Students who fail to wear the appropriate T-shirts on the appropriate days will have their final course grade docked one (1) point for each infraction.

3-009. Changed rules. Changes to existing rules are considered to have passed if and only if:

- they have been proposed in accordance with the official course rules,
- they have been voted on in accordance with the official course rules,
- they have been judged by the professor not to be “illegal” rule changes, and
- they have received the number of Yes votes necessary to change the rule(s) in question, as determined by their hierarchical type.

3-010. New rules. New rules are considered to have passed if and only if:

- they have been proposed in accordance with the official course rules,
- they have been voted on in accordance with the official course rules, and
- they have been judged by the professor not to be “illegal” rule changes.

New rules will be assigned to a hierarchy based on the percentage of Yes votes received: i.e., a new rule receiving at least a supermajority Yes vote will be implemented as a major course rule, whereas a new rule receiving only a simple majority Yes vote will be implemented as a minor course rule. The text of any new rule will be added to the end of the appropriate hierarchy and assigned the next unused number in that hierarchy.

3-011. Effective date of rule changes. Any rule change(s) resulting from a passed ballot shall take effect at the start of the first class meeting following the completion of the voting period. No ballot may have retroactive application, even if its wording explicitly states otherwise.

3-012. Formal record of rule changes. In the event of any rule changes resulting from passed ballots, the professor will edit the version of the official course rules maintained on the course blog to reflect such changes.

3-013. “First week” ballots. During our class meeting on 21 Jan, students will have the opportunity to meet in small groups for the purposes of proposing changes to the course rules. After that review process, each group will be allowed to propose one (1) official ballot in class. Any such ballots must be submitted to the professor by the end of class on that day, using the official form provided for this purpose. The discussion and revision periods for these ballots will be waived, and the 72-hour voting period will begin immediately after the professor posts the ballots to the course blog. For purposes of rule #1-007, grade points for any “first week” ballot that is officially approved will be awarded to all listed members of the group that originally authored the ballot.

This rule does not infringe on the right of any individual student to propose a separate ballot during the first course week in accordance with the procedures described above.

N.B.: There are no fewer than ten (10) deliberately flawed rules in the original syllabus. Students are strongly encouraged to locate these, to propose rule changes that would repeal and/or modify them, and to vote these rule changes into effect. Otherwise, by rule #1-001, even these flawed rules will remain in effect until and unless they are officially changed.

3-014. Change your major. By the start of class on 23 March, all undergraduate students must have officially and permanently changed their major, and must provide suitable documentation demonstrating that this change has been filed with the University. Students who begin the semester as Communication Studies majors must change to one of the following majors: Aerospace Engineering and Mechanics, Dental Hygiene, Radiation Therapy, or Urban and Community Forestry. All other students must change their major to Communication Studies. Students who fail to provide documentation of their major change will be assigned a course grade of “F.”