New telecommunication media

Comm 4291

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office hours (253 Ford): TuTh 10-11:15a, W 10-11:30a, and by appointment

Course description

It has become something of a cliché to claim that our world has been revolutionized by "new" communication technologies such as 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 engage some -- though by no means all -- of the major social, cultural, and political issues raised by the growth and spread of digital media, and to do so with an appreciation for the nuances and complexities of these issues.

The full list of "new" media that we could try and cover in this course is extraordinarily long, and the semester is too short for us to do justice to all (or even most) of that list. As such, we will spend the next four months or so focusing our energies on _the smartphone_, which serves as an especially rich example of a technology that exists at the intersection of multiple other technologies: e.g., telephones, personal computers, portable music players, digital music formats, the internet, digital cameras, video and computer games, and so on. Thus, even as we narrow our focus considerably, we will still find ourselves discussing a fairly broad range of technologies and issues. While our readings will occasionally include brief bursts of technical information, this is _not_ a course about the smartphone as an engineering phenomenon -- e.g., how do touch screens work? what are the technical differences between 3G and 4G networks? what are the protocols for cloud computing? -- and your ability to succeed will _not_ depend on whether you have the sort of scientifically oriented mind that can master the intricacies of coding apps, building cell towers, or the like.

None of the major 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.

Readings

The following _required_ book is available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union:

•   Jennifer Daryl Slack and J. Macgregor Wise, _Culture and Technology: A Primer_

The other required readings (including the ones that you and your classmates will provide) will be made available on the course website. If you choose to acquire any of the required readings through alternate sources, you do so at your own risk.

If you intend to pursue a Senior Project in addition to the required course work, I _strongly_ encourage you to use the following _recommended_ book (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]

N.B.: Once we've reached the date in the semester for which any given reading is assigned, I will assume that you are familiar with the major facts and arguments contained in that reading -- and I will hold you accountable for such familiarity in grading your written work: e.g., if an essay you write in April makes me wonder whether you've actually read something that was on our required reading list in February, this will most likely have a negative impact on your grade. Please note that "being familiar with" a reading and "agreeing with" that reading are _not_ the same thing: i.e., you're not obligated to treat everything on our syllabus as if they were sacred texts with which no reasonable person could ever find fault . . . but you also don't get to pretend you've never been exposed to those readings at all.

Hackable syllabus

As some of you already know, previous versions of this course have involved what I call a "hackable syllabus": i.e., a set of course rules that allows (and even requires) students to change those rules. The syllabus for this version of the course is also hackable . . . but in very different ways than previous versions have been. In contrast to prior editions of this course, there are no "bad" rules for you to get rid of, and no voting mechanism by which the syllabus might be changed. Nonetheless, most of the major facets of the course remain up for grabs. In particular:

- At a _collective_ level, the class as a whole will be responsible for locating the majority of our required readings.
- At an _individual_ level, each of you will be responsible for selecting the particular array of assignments that you'll need to complete in order to earn your final course grade.

Course website

If you were on the official course roster as of 16 Jan, I've given you posting privileges for the course website. The principal uses for the website will be for:

- access to most of our required readings (i.e., everything besides the Slack and Wise book),
- course-related business announcements, and
- the course blog (which, as discussed below, is one of your options for graded assignments).

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

Senior project

If you hope to fulfill your Senior Project requirement in connection with this course, you will need to 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, it entails work above and beyond the regular requirements of the course.

There are several _mandatory_ intermediate due dates built into the process that should (a) prevent you from procrastinating too much, (b) allow me enough time to give you constructive feedback, and (c) give you ample time to act on that feedback. Those due dates are:

26 Jan	Inform me in writing that you intend to complete a Senior Project
9 Feb	Meet with me to discuss your project
16 Feb	Topic proposal / 10-item bibliography
29 Mar	Rough draft
11 May	Final paper and verification pages

Except for 11 May (when the deadline is 12:30p), all the deadlines above are 11:15a. They are also all "drop dead" deadlines: i.e., failing to meet _any_ of them (which includes failing to meet the minimum requirements for each) means that you are no longer eligible to fulfill your Senior Project requirement in this class. The _only_ exceptions to this rule will involve the sort of major life emergencies that would normally result in an "I" grade for a course.

Further details about the Senior Project are available on a separate handout.

Attendance/participation

Our class meetings will be structured around discussions rather than lectures. 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 readings, and (3) come to class prepared to discuss those readings in a _productive and substantive_ fashion. While there is no direct grade connected to either attendance or in-class participation, it will be _extraordinarily_ difficult for you to pass this course if you do not show up and participate consistently.

Take-home final

By default, your final course grade will be based _entirely_ on a take-home final exam. The exam will be cumulative, it will consist entirely of essay questions, it will require you to write at least 10,000 words (i.e., 100 words for every percentage point that the exam is worth), it will be available to you no later than 27 Apr, and it will be due by 12:30 pm on 11 May.

At your individual discretion, over the course of the semester, each of you can complete any (or all) of three other types of assignments (each of which is described in more detail below) that will reduce (1) your required total word-count for the take-home final and (2) the percentage of your final grade that depends on the take-home final.

Blog participation

You have the option to contribute to the discussions on the course blog (located on the course website) in order to earn points towards your final grade. Blog grades will be calculated every course week (i.e., the seven-day cycle that begins each Tuesday at 11:15 am). In order to earn blog-related grade points for any given course week, you must contribute _at least 250 words_ of thoughtful, course-related commentary to the blog during that week. Gradeworthy contributions can include either new posts or comments on existing posts, and they can be spread over multiple posts/comments.

Any given week's worth of blog contributions will be graded on a √+ / √ / √- basis. Weekly blog contributions totaling 250-499 words can earn up to 1 point towards your final grade. Weekly blog contributions totaling 500+ words can earn up to 2 points towards your final grade (which is also the maximum number of points you can earn for the blog in any single course week). For grading purposes, _only_ your own words count: e.g., quoting 250 words from one of the readings and following it up with 75 words of your own counts as 75 words, rather than 325.

Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout.

Critical essays

You have the option to write essays (minimum length: 1000 words) that offer your critical (i.e., thoughtful and analytical) reflections on significant course-related issues in order to earn points towards your final course grade.

Critical essays will be graded on an A/B/C/D/F basis, and will earn up to 1 point towards your final grade for every 100 words: e.g., a 1200-word essay is potentially worth 12 grade points. (N.B.: In calculating point values, I will not use fractions, nor will I round up. So a 1472-word essay is potentially worth 14 grade points, rather than 15.)

There are no specific due dates for any given critical essay (at least not until the semester ends). That said, it may be counter-productive for you to write a critical essay (or two, or three) in order to ease the burden of your take-home final if you're simply writing that essay (or those essays) alongside the take-home final in early May.

Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout.

Student-provided readings

You have the option to locate and provide readings that will potentially become part of the required readings for the entire class. For each such reading that you provide, you _must_ provide an annotation (minimum length: 300 words) that includes two things: (1) a brief summary of the reading's major claims/arguments, and (2) a brief, persuasive argument for why the reading in question is worth making the whole class read.

Your suggested readings and your annotations will each be graded on a √+ / √ / √- basis, and each will be worth up to 1 point towards your final grade.

Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout.

Paperless (mostly) assignments

With one potential exception, everything you'll submit for a grade this semester must be submitted digitally. Blog posts and comments can only happen online. Critical essays, annotations for student-provided readings, and take-home finals must be submitted as file attachments via email to rodman@umn.edu. Acceptable formats are LibreOffice/OpenOffice (.odt), Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx), and Rich Text Format (.rtf). Assignments submitted in other formats (including PDFs and paper) will _not_ be accepted.

The one potential exception to this requirement involves the copy of any suggested reading you're submitting. _If and only if_ a given reading is not readily available in digital format (e.g., it's not a website, or it's not already available online as a PDF), you can (and should) submit a clean, complete photocopy of the reading in question.

Grading

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 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).

For individual assignments, letter grades will be converted to the low end of the ranges above: e.g., an A is worth 93% of the relevant point total, a B is worth 83%, and so on. √+, √, and √- grades are worth 100%, 80%, and 60% of the relevant point total, respectively.

You begin the semester with 100% of your final course grade allotted to a 10,000-word take-home final. Earning grade points for blog participation, critical essays, and/or student-provided readings will reduce both the word-count requirement for your take-home final and the percentage of your final course grade that the take-home final is worth. For example:

Student Q posts 500 grade-worthy words to the course blog for each of 10 different weeks, writes 2 critical essays that are each 1275 words long, and submits 8 different readings for inclusion on the syllabus. Her final course grade will thus be based on the following schedule:

                Blog participation   20% (10 weeks at 2% each)
                Critical essays   24% (2 essays at 12% each)
                Student-provided readings   16% (8 reading/annotations at 2% each)
                Take-home final exam   40% (minimum of 4000 words)

Student X posts 250 grade-worthy words to the course blog for each of 5 different weeks, writes 4 critical essays that are each 1150 words long, and submits 3 different readings for inclusion on the syllabus. His final course grade will thus be based on the following schedule:

                Blog participation   5% (5 weeks at 1% each)
                Critical essays   44% (4 essays at 11% each)
                Student-provided readings   6% (3 reading/annotations at 2% each)
                Take-home final exam   45% (minimum of 4500 words)

Miscellaneous

* 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
    ○ 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 policies on academic dishonesty can be found at http://www.oscai.umn.edu/integrity/student/index.html
* If you wish to, you may make audio recordings of our class meetings, provided you 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, however, is strictly prohibited.
* Significant disruptions of the normal flow of course-related business during class sessions -- e.g., using cell phones, excessive side chatter, engaging in premature leave-taking behavior -- will result in grade penalties for the student(s) involved.
* I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students' needs relating to religious holidays and/or documented disabilities. By University policy, you must provide me with written notice (for religious holidays) and/or official documentation (for disabilities), and you must do so with enough lead time for such accommodations to be arranged.

Schedule
[Readings should be completed in advance of the dates listed.]

17-19 Jan   introduction
Jason Jenkins, "iPhone History Animated in Our Infographic Video"
William Major, "Thoreau's Cellphone Experiment"

24-26 Jan   theory (part 1)
Jennifer Daryl Slack and J. Macgregor Wise, *Culture and Technology: A Primer*, pp. 1-89

31 Jan-2 Feb   theory (part 2)
Jennifer Daryl Slack and J. Macgregor Wise, *Culture and Technology: A Primer*, pp. 90-196

7-9 Feb   the telephone
Carolyn Marvin, "Community and Class Order: Progress Close to Home"
William Wresch, "Information Exiles"
Collette Snowden, "Reporting by Phone"
Gerard Goggin, "Making Voice Portable: The Early History of the Cell Phone"

14-16 Feb   the personal computer
Stephen Johnson, "Windows"
Neal Stephenson, *In the Beginning . . . Was the Command Line* [selections]
Thomas Streeter, "Missing the Net: The 1980s, Microcomputers, and the Rise of Neoliberalism"

21-23 Feb   the internet
Gilbert B. Rodman, "The Net Effect: The Public's Fear and the Public Sphere"
additional readings to be determined

28 Feb-1 Mar   the walkman
Paul du Gay *et al.*, "Consuming the Walkman"
additional readings to be determined

6-8 Mar   digital music
Gilbert B. Rodman and Cheyanne Vanderdonckt, "Music for Nothing or, I Want My MP3"
additional readings to be determined

13-15 Mar   NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK

20-22 Mar   utopia / dystopia
Cara Wallis, "Mobile Phones Without Guarantees: The Promises of Technology and the Contingencies of Culture"
additional readings to be determined

27-29 Mar   manufacturing / labor
Sonja Mönkedieck, "The iPhone 4$^{CF\ (Conflict\ Free)}$: The Yes Men Address the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of
        Congo"
additional readings to be determined

3-5 Apr   mobility / portability
Miriam Simun, "My Music, My World"
additional readings to be determined

10-12 Apr   surveillance / privacy
Charles Ess, "Privacy in the Electronic Global Metropolis?"
additional readings to be determined

17-19 Apr   intimacy / identity
Kate Crawford, "These Foolish Things"
additional readings to be determined

24-26 Apr   connectivity / productivity
Melissa Gregg, "Work's Intimacy: Performing Professionalism Online and on the Job"
additional readings to be determined

1-3 May   class's choice
all readings to be determined

11 May   NO CLASS -- Take-home final due (12:30 pm)