

New telecommunication media

Comm 4291

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

Syllabus

Fall 2010

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 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 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 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 These rules can only be created, changed, amended, or repealed by the professor, who will only do so under emergency circumstances.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 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rules require a supermajority vote (i.e., greater than 66.66% of eligible voters) to be created, changed, amended, or repealed.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. For purposes of rule changes, portions of major rules contained within angle brackets {such as this phrase} are equivalent to permanent rules.

(c) Minor 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. Conflicting rules/ballots. 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 hierarchy level, the rule with the lowest number takes precedent (e.g., a rule numbered #3-152 would take precedent over a rule numbered #3-155). In the event of conflicts between two or more simultaneous ballots, the ballot with the highest number of Yes votes shall take precedent. In the event that such conflicting ballots have passed with the same number of Yes votes, the professor will cast a single Yes vote for one of those ballots in order to resolve the conflict.

1-004. 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 grades related to the course.

1-005. Students. For purposes of the course rules, students are (a) individuals whom the University recognizes to be officially enrolled in the course and/or (b) individuals whom the professor recognizes to be grade-earning participants in the course.

1-006. 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 professor will cast the deciding vote. Otherwise, the professor is a non-voting participant.

1-007. 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.

1-008. 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.

1-009. 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.

1-010. 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, it entails work above and beyond the regular requirements of the course. Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout.

1-011. 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 rules

2-001. 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 (see #2-015 below) will be made available in class. Students who choose to acquire any of the required readings through alternate sources do so at their own risk.

Students who choose to pursue a Senior Project in addition to the required course work (see #1-010 above) are strongly encouraged 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]

2-002. Course blog. All students on the official course roster as of 6 Sep have been given posting privileges for the course blog. The principal uses for the blog will be for:

- proposing and discussing changes to the official course rules,
- graded discussions of issues raised by the assigned readings and/or in class (see #2-008 below), 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 2 Oct 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. 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."

Pending the results of the "first week" ballots (see #3-012 below), final course grades will be calculated using the following schedule:

Quizzes	10%
Blog participation	10%
Critical response papers	10%
Take-home final	10%

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 typically 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 reading, and (3) come to class prepared to discuss those readings in a productive and substantive fashion.

2-006. NFL prediction. All students are required to predict the winners of all 16 games played in week 11 of the National Football League's current season (18-22 Nov), and to submit their predictions to the professor in writing by the start of class on 12 Oct. Students who fail to submit such predictions or who fail to predict the winners of at least 13 games correctly will have three (3) points deducted from their final course grade.

2-007. Quizzes. A portion of the overall course grade will be based on quizzes about the required reading. {Each quiz will be based on the required reading assigned for the day on which the quiz is given. Each quiz will last for 10 minutes at the start of the class period and is worth up to 2 points towards the overall course grade. Quiz dates will not be announced in advance, and no makeup quizzes will be given.} This is a "pile it on" assignment: i.e., students can continue to accrue grade points all semester long up to the maximum number possible for quizzes according to rule #2-004.

2-008. Blog participation. A portion of the overall course grade will be based on students' contributions to the course blog. {Blog grades will be calculated every course week. In order to receive credit for any given course week, students must post at least 200 words of thoughtful commentary about the required readings during that week. Each course week of blog posts/comments is worth up to 2 points towards the overall course grade.} This is a "pile it on" assignment: i.e., students can continue to accrue grade points all semester long up to the maximum number possible for blog participation according to rule #2-004. Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout. That handout constitutes a legally binding extension of this course rule.

2-009. Critical response papers. A portion of the overall course grade will be based on essays that provide a critical (i.e., thoughtful and analytical) response to one or more of the assigned readings. {Each critical response paper should be ~1000-1250 words in length, and is worth up to 10 points towards the overall course grade.} Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout. That handout constitutes a legally binding extension of this course rule.

2-010. Take-home final. A portion of the overall course grade will be based on a take-home final exam. {The exam will be cumulative. Each question on the exam will require students to write an essay of ~1000-1250 words, and is worth up to 10 points towards the overall course grade. The exam is due no later than 10:30a on 17 Dec.}

2-011. 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
- attempting to cheat, defraud, rig, and/or subvert the voting process
- 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 (including detailed explanations of what constitutes "plagiarism" and "cheating") can be found at <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/plagiarism/>

2-012. Recordings and course notes. Students may make audio and/or video recordings of 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 recordings of class meetings is strictly prohibited.

2-013. Etiquette. 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.

2-014. Polka pledge. From 28 Sep onward, all 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 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.

2-015. 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.

7 Sep	no readings
9 Sep	course syllabus and assignment handouts
14 Sep	Slack and Wise, pp. 1-40
16 Sep	Slack and Wise, pp. 41-82
21 Sep	Slack and Wise, pp. 83-124

- 23 Sep Slack and Wise, pp. 125-162
- 28 Sep **Polka pledge requirement begins**
Slack and Wise, pp. 163-196
James W. Carey, "Historical Pragmatism and the Internet"
- 30 Sep Jonathan Sterne, "Thinking the Internet"
Gilbert B. Rodman, "The Net Effect"
- 5 Oct **Yoga mat requirement begins**
Lawrence Lessig, *Code 2.0* [selections]
- 7 Oct Tim Jordan, "The Hack"
Neal Stephenson, *In the Beginning . . . Was the Command Line* [selections]
- 12 Oct **NFL prediction due**
Eric S. Raymond, "The Cathedral and the Bazaar"
- 14 Oct Paul Levinson, "Wikipedia"
- 19 Oct **Gopher spirit requirement begins**
Allucquère Rosanne Stone, "In Novel Conditions"
- 21 Oct Shayla Thiel Stern, *Instant Identity* [selections]
Ann Werner, "Girls Consuming Music at Home"
- 26 Oct **Facebook profile requirement begins**
John Varley, "Press Enter _"
- 28 Oct Charles Ess, "Privacy in the Electronic Global Metropolis?"
- 2 Nov Ronald J. Deibert, "Black Code Redux"
- 4 Nov Amanda D. Lotz, "Understanding Television at the Beginning of the Post-Network Era"
- 9 Nov Mark Andrejevic, "The Kinder, Gentler Gaze of Big Brother"
Mark Andrejevic, "Exploiting YouTube"
- 11 Nov Lucas Hilderbrand, "YouTube"
Matt Carlson, "Tapping Into TiVo"
- 16 Nov Ted Striphas, "E-Books and the Digital Future"
- 18 Nov **NO CLASS**
- 23 Nov Alexander Halavais, *Search Engine Society* [selections]
- 25 Nov **NO CLASS**
- 30 Nov Lawrence Lessig, *Remix* [selections]
- 2 Dec Sara Grimes, "Online Multiplayer Games"
Greg Kot, "Girl Talk's Illegal Art"
- 7 Dec Gerald Goggin, *Cell Phone Culture* [selections]
Miriam Simun, "My Music, My World"
- 9 Dec Lawrence Lessig, "Piracy"
- 14 Dec Gilbert B. Rodman and Cheyanne Vanderdonckt, "Music for Nothing or, I Want My MP3"
Laikwan Pang, "Copying *Kill Bill*"
- 17 Dec **NO CLASS**
Take-home final exam due (10:30a)

Minor rules

3-001. Facebook profile photo. By the start of class on 26 Oct, all students must change their primary profile picture on their Facebook page to the official logo of one of the following:

- BP
- Eastern Airlines
- Halliburton
- 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 9 Sep (see #3-012 below), all changes/additions/amendments to the course rules must adhere to the four step process described in rules #3-003 through #3-006.

3-003. 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 eligible for voting.

3-004. 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.

3-005. 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 contains the final revised version of the proposal in question. That post must follow the same format described in #3-003 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 #3-006 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 ends and neither (a) nor (b) above has happened, then the original proposal automatically becomes a “live” ballot.

3-006. 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 to the professor via email 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.

3-007. Gopher spirit. From 19 Oct 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.

3-008. Changed rules. Changes to existing rules are considered to have passed if and only if:

- they have been proposed in accordance with the course rules,
- they have been voted on in accordance with the course rules,
- they have been judged by the professor not to be “illegal” rule changes,
- a quorum (see #1-007 above) exists, and
- they have received the number of Yes votes necessary to change the rule(s) in question, as determined by their hierarchical type.

3-009. New rules. New rules are considered to have passed if and only if:

- they have been proposed in accordance with the course rules,
- they have been voted on in accordance with the course rules,
- they have been judged by the professor not to be “illegal” rule changes, and
- a quorum (see #1-007 above) exists, and
- more than 50% of the legal votes on the ballot in question are Yes.

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.

3-010. 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.

3-011. 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.

3-012. “First week” ballots. During class on 9 Sep, students will have the opportunity to meet in small groups for the purposes of proposing changes to the course rules. At the end of that process, each group will be allowed to propose two (2) official ballots in class: one (and only one) of which *must* propose a correction to the grading schedule in rule #2-004 such that the total of the percentages listed on that schedule is exactly 100%. All “first week” ballots must be submitted to the professor by the end of class on 9 Sep, 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 #1-008, 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 three (3) *deliberately* unfair 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 unfair rules will remain in effect until and unless they are officially changed.