Comm 4291: New telecommunication media   Spring 2017

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office hours (Ford 284)   office hours (Ford 271)

TuTh 10-11a, Th 1:30-3:30p, and by appointment   Tu 1-2p, and by appointment

Course description and objectives

It has become commonplace to claim that our world has been revolutionized by "new" communication technologies such as the internet, laptop computers, DVRs, and the like. How true that claim really is, however, depends on which technologies one means, what part of the world one is talking about, and what counts as a "revolutionary" change. The actual relationship between technology and culture is rarely as simple as such clichés make it out to be. Our task this semester will be to engage with 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.

None of the big questions we'll address this semester have easy answers. How well you will do depends on (1) your ability to think _critically_ about technology, media, culture, and politics, and (2) your ability to _argue_ your positions on those issues persuasively, rather than your ability to memorize and repeat the "right" answers.

Readings

The _required_ book is
   •   Jennifer Daryl Slack and J. Macgregor Wise, _Culture and Technology: A Primer_ [second edition]
It is available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union, and on electronic reserve through the UMN Library http://www.umn.eblib.com.ezp1.lib.umn.edu/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=2011077   If you opt to acquire the book elsewhere, make sure to get the _second_ edition. Other required readings/videos will be made available via Moodle.

Students who choose to pursue a Senior Project are _strongly_ encouraged to use the _recommended_ book (also available at the University Bookstore) to help conceive, plan, research, and write their final papers:
   •   Wayne C. Booth _et al._, _The Craft of Research_ [fourth edition]

Moodle

If you're on the course roster, you should already have access to the course's Moodle site. Log in to the U's main Moodle page (https://ay16.moodle.umn.edu/) and select the "COMM4221_001S17" link from the "My Courses" menu in the "Navigation" box. We will use Moodle for several things this semester:
   •   a graded course blog where you will contribute posts and comments about the course material
   •   access to our required non-book readings/videos
   •   a repository for various media examples relevant to our required readings
   •   occasional business-related announcements about the course
More information on Moodle can be found at http://it.umn.edu/course-management-system-moodle-related/students

Grades and deadlines

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: "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:
- Attendance/participation: 25 points maximum
- Course blog: 25 points maximum
- Discussion questions: 20 points maximum
- Thought paper: 10 points
- Critical Essays (CEs): 10 points each

You are allowed to "pile on" multiple CEs to help cover shortfalls in other portions of your course grade.

Point totals at the end of the semester will translate to letter grades as follows:

A	93+	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

- There will be occasional opportunities to earn points via in-class quizzes and/or extra assignments. Such opportunities will be the exception, rather than the rule, and they will _not_ be offered on an individual basis.
- "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).

Grade disputes

By University rule, Ryo Kanno does not have the authority to change grades that I have assigned. I will only change grades that he has assigned if _all_ the following conditions apply:
- You must first make a good-faith effort to resolve the issue directly with Ryo.
- You need to provide me a copy of the graded assignment.
- You must email me a clear, detailed explanation for _why_ you believe you deserve a higher grade.

In the event of such disputes, I will regrade your work myself and the new grade -- regardless of whether it's higher, lower, or the same -- will be your final grade for that assignment.

Attendance/participation (A/P)

Our class meetings will be structured around discussions, and so you will need to:
- attend class regularly,
- do the required readings carefully, and
- come to class prepared to discuss those readings in thoughtful fashion.

I will do my best to make sure that everyone gets a chance to make meaningful contributions to our conversations. This may mean that I will call on you if you have been exceptionally quiet or, alternately, that I will ask you _not_ to speak for a while if you have been extra talkative and other students' voices have not been heard.

Days when you are "present in name only" (PINO) will result in a _1-point penalty_ to your A/P grade. As the name implies, PINO days happen when you are physically present for our scheduled class meetings, but you do not contribute to our discussions in a substantive fashion. This includes (but is not limited to) days when:
- you are present for less than half of a given class meeting,
- you have clearly not done the assigned reading, and/or
- you are primarily a passive spectator in our in-class activities.

Decisions about what counts as a PINO day will be based on my assessment of your in-class performance, and I will email you about any such decision within 24 hours of the class meeting in question.

There are no excused absences in this course. If you're not in class -- regardless of the reason -- then you can't contribute to our discussions, and so you can't earn A/P points for that day. Significantly late arrivals and/or early departures will result in lower A/P scores for the relevant class meetings.

There are 29 regular class meetings scheduled this semester, each of which allows you to earn up to 1 point toward your A/P grade. The maximum number of A/P points you can earn is 25.

Course blog participation

The blog is an interactive online forum where the class will engage in semi-formal discussions about the major issues raised by the course readings and our in-class conversations. Blog contributions will typically be shorter and less formal than the major writing assignments, but they should still stake out a clear position on a major issue related to the course content, and they should still present persuasive arguments in support of your position.

You can access the blog by clicking on the "Course blog" link on the main page of the course Moodle site. From there, you can start a new thread by clicking on the "Add a new topic" button. You can comment on an existing thread by clicking on the "Discuss this topic" link at the bottom right corner of the box for that thread.

Your blog contributions need to engage -- clearly, directly, and significantly -- with the _major_ issues raised by our required readings and/or our in-class discussions. Posts/comments that (1) are primarily summaries of those readings/discussions, (2) veer off on lengthy tangents about minor facets of the material in question, (3) focus heavily on issues outside of the course content, and/or (4) offer nothing more than statements of simple agreement/disagreement will _not_ count towards your grade.

Your blog contributions will be measured every course week: i.e., the seven-day cycle that begins each Tuesday at 11:15 am. (N.B.: For grading purposes, the _last_ course week of the semester begins at 11:15 am on 2 May and ends at _1:30 pm on 9 May_.) During any given course week, there are two ways to earn points:
   • You create a post of _at least 300 words_ of thoughtful commentary about the assigned readings and/or our in-class discussions/exercises. You can earn a maximum of 1 point each course week for such posts.
   • You create a comment of _at least 300 words_ of thoughtful response to one of your classmates' posts or comments. You can earn a maximum of 1 point each course week for such comments.
For grading purposes, only your own words count: e.g., quoting 300 words from other people alongside 75 words of your own counts as 75 words, rather than 375. Similarly, if your posts/comments include large amounts of filler prose, only the substantive words will count toward your grade. Any given comment must be substantially different from both your own posts and your other comments: i.e., you don't earn bonus points for rephrasing claims and arguments you've made elsewhere on the blog. Posts/comments shorter than 300 words will _not_ earn points.

There are 16 course weeks in the semester, each of which allows you to earn 0-2 points toward your Course Blog grade. The maximum number of Course Blog points you can earn overall is 25.

Tips
   • Do _not_ forget to blog during weeks when we don't meet in person, since you can still earn blog points then.
   • There are no reading-related deadlines for the blog: i.e., you can still earn points for "late" posts/comments on "old" readings, as long as you're still adding something new to our overall conversation.
   • Your comments should be respectful and constructive -- _especially_ if you are disagreeing with something one of your classmates has written.

Discussion questions (DQs)

DQs are intended to help insure that you have done the required reading _in advance_ of our class meetings _and_ that you are prepared to participate in a thoughtful and productive conversation about that reading.

Any given DQ must focus on the assigned reading for the appropriate course date. A good DQ should clearly demonstrate that you've done the relevant reading, and it will be suitable for use as a conversation starter for a thoughtful class discussion about the major issues in that reading. You should *avoid* the following:
- simple "yes" or "no" questions
- factual or definitional questions
- contextual or background questions requiring knowledge that most (or all) of the class won't have
- questions that can be answered simply by quoting or summarizing the reading
- questions that don't relate to the reading in any clear or direct fashion
- questions that engage with the reading only superficially or tangentially
- "questions" that aren't actually questions

In some cases, you may need to preface your actual question with a brief statement that sets your question up.

All DQs *must* be submitted via email to rodman@umn.edu, and they *must* have a subject line that *clearly* indicates that the email in question is a DQ. You should submit DQs as regular email messages. Do *not* submit your DQs as file attachments or in printed form. DQs are due by 11:15 am on *the day before* the relevant reading is scheduled to be discussed in class. *No* late DQs will be accepted.

DQs will be graded on a √+/√/√- basis (√+ = 1.0 points, √ = 0.75 points, √- = 0.5 points). DQs that fail to meet the basic terms of the assignment will earn a zero (0). You are only allowed to submit one DQ per class period

There are 28 days where we have assigned reading, each of which allows you to earn up to 1 point toward your DQ grade. The maximum number of DQ points you can earn overall is 25.

Thought paper

In a well-crafted and thoughtful essay of *at least 1000 words*, address *both* of the following questions:
- Pick *one* form of new telecommunication media/technology that you feel is clearly beneficial to society as a whole and, in as *persuasive* a fashion as you can, explain *why* the phenomenon in question is valuable.
- Pick *one* form of new telecommunication media/technology that you feel is clearly harmful to society as a whole and, in as *persuasive* a fashion as you can, explain *why* the phenomenon in question is dangerous.

This assignment will be *ungraded*. Assuming you turn the paper in, you should receive full credit (10 points) for doing so -- though I reserve the right to assign lower grades (including zeros) to papers that fail to meet the assignment's requirements. This paper is due by *11:15 am on 24 January*. No late papers will be accepted.

Tips
- This essay is more than just a chance to state your opinions. Simply sharing an opinion doesn't require much thought, especially in the absence of a rationale for why you believe what you do. You should approach this essay as an opportunity to *change* your audience's opinion about the technology in question.
- I won't be finicky about the "newness" of your chosen technologies, especially in situations where the line between what counts as "new" and what counts as "old" is fuzzy. That said, if a technology you're discussing was *commonplace* in US culture when you were born, it's probably not new enough to count.
- Think carefully about how your answers to the two pieces of this assignment relate to each other. If I can swap your two technologies with your two rationales and find your argument to be just as persuasive, then your arguments aren't as strong as they should be.

Critical essays (CEs)

Any given CE must (1) be *at least 1000 words* long, (2) consist of a *persuasive argument* that doesn't duplicate your other written work for this course, and (3) engage in substantial fashion with our required readings.

There are three possible types of CEs:
- Replacement Reading (RR)
- Most Valuable Reading (MVR)
- Least Valuable Reading (LVR)

You are *not* obligated to submit CEs from all three categories. You are free to submit as many RRs as you like, but only one each for the other two options. Exactly how many CEs you should submit will vary but, as a rough guide, most students will need to submit *at least* 3 CEs in order to pass the course.

Each CE is worth a maximum of 10 points. CEs that earn grades of D or F will be worth a fixed number of points on a sliding scale: the first such CE you submit will earn 5 points, the second will earn 4 points, and so on. Otherwise CEs will be worth points on a scale proportionate to the grading schedule on page 2 of the syllabus: e.g., a C- paper is worth 7 points, a C paper is worth 7.3 points, and so on.

The final deadline for all CEs is *1:30 pm on 9 May*. Because that deadline coincides with the official final exam date/time for the course, it is firm and non-negotiable. The only *potential* exceptions to this rule involve situations where you have a *documented* major life emergency of some sort.

Replacement Reading (RR)
Find a reading (N.B.: for purposes of this CE, audios and videos count as "readings") to add to a future version of this syllabus that *replaces* one of our current readings. Your essay needs to make a persuasive argument for how/why your chosen reading significantly improves the course in comparison the one you would like to see replaced. N.B.: this argument needs to be more substantial than simply explaining that you don't like the existing reading, or that your suggested reading covers topics that aren't present on the existing syllabus.

Any replacement reading you submit must:
- have a clear and direct connection to the course theme,
- be at least 1000 words long (for printed sources) or 5 minutes long (for audio/video sources),
- *not* be written/created by an author who's already on our syllabus, and
- *not* appear on syllabi from previous versions of this course (see http://www.gilrodman.com/syllabi)

Along with your essay, you *must* submit a complete copy of the relevant replacement reading. If your reading is freely available online (e.g., it's not behind a paywall), you simply need to provide the URL. If you are able to send a PDF copy via email, that works as well. In some cases, however, you will need to provide a photocopy of your reading. Copies (digital or otherwise) that are missing pages or illegible will *not* be accepted.

Some helpful advice for RRs:
- Think about your argument in relational terms. How does your new reading fit into the rest of the syllabus? What does it add to the course that is an improvement over the reading you want to replace? Why should your new reading replace the current reading you've chosen better than it does some other reading? Etc.
- A course with a theme as broad as this one will *never* be able to include all the major topics/issues that fit that theme. As such, any argument you make in favor of a new reading needs to do more than simply point out that there's nothing about topic A on the current syllabus, and that your chosen reading fixes that problem. In such cases, you will want/need to make a persuasive case for *why* topic A deserves to be on the syllabus in place of topic B (i.e., the topic of the reading you'd like to see replaced).
- New readings should match the size/scope of the readings you would like to replace. You'll have a hard time making a convincing argument that (for instance) a 1200-word personality profile from a celebrity gossip magazine will work well to replace a 5000-word historical analysis from an academic journal.

Most Valuable Reading (MVR) / Least Valuable Reading (LVR)
[N.B.: Except for the difference between "most" and "least," the basic requirements for these options are identical.]

Pick the *one* required reading from the syllabus that you found to be the *most/least* valuable, and write an essay that explains, in persuasive detail, why your chosen reading is the most/least important one in the course. You can only submit *one* MVR and *one* LVR, and each of those must select *only one* reading as the most/least valuable. (For these CEs, each of the page ranges assigned from *Culture and Technology* count as separate readings.)

Some helpful advice for MVRs and LVRs:
- As with the RR option, think about your argument in relational terms: i.e., don't just discuss the particular strengths/weaknesses of a given reading, but make a case for how well it worked (or didn't) in the context of the course as a whole and/or in relation to the rest of the readings on the syllabus.
- Do _not_ base your argument primarily on questions of personal taste. The fact that you found a given reading to be especially easy, difficult, funny, boring, etc. doesn't necessarily affect how valuable it was to the course as a whole.
- Similarly, this is not a popularity contest. The reading that generated the liveliest in-class discussion isn't necessarily the most valuable, and the reading that prompted the least classroom engagement isn't necessarily the least valuable.

General CE advice
- There is no single "right" answer that I look for when I grade CEs. The overall quality of the argument you make in any given CE matters more than the specific position you take. That said, some positions are much harder to defend successfully than others. Whatever position you take should be well supported by (a) the available facts and (b) a persuasive, well-constructed argument.
- Remember that your goal isn't simply to demonstrate that you have an opinion: it's to persuade your reader _why_ your position on the issue at hand is the best one (or, at the very least, a better one than most others). CEs that merely assert a position without arguing it will _not_ meet the requirements of this assignment, and the _highest_ grade they will earn is a D. That same grade ceiling also applies to CEs that focus on extended summary and/or paraphrasing of readings/sources, rather than on making an argument of your own.
- Focus on the _main_ argument(s) in the readings/sources in question. A CE built around a single paragraph from a 20-page article (for instance) will only work well if that paragraph is absolutely central to the article as a whole. If it's a side issue, or if the author's main argument still holds up without that paragraph, then it's not important enough for you to put it at the center of a CE.

Senior project

If you want to fulfill the Senior Project requirement in connection with this course, you must write a well-researched, argumentative essay of 2500+ words on a topic that fits the course's main theme. Because this project results in a separate grade and earns you an extra credit hour, it involves work _above and beyond_ the course requirements.

There are several _mandatory_ deadlines built into the project that should (1) prevent you from procrastinating too much, (2) allow me time to give you constructive feedback, and (3) give you time to act on that feedback:

31 Jan	Register for Comm 3995W-002
7 Feb	Meet with me to discuss your project
14 Feb	Topic proposal / 10-item bibliography
28 Feb	Thesis paragraph draft
28 Mar	Rough draft
9 May	Final paper and verification pages

Except for 9 May (when the deadline is 1:30 pm), all the deadlines above are at 11:15 am. They are also all "drop dead" deadlines: i.e., failing to meet _any_ of them (which includes failing to meet their minimum requirements) means that you are no longer eligible to fulfill your Senior Project requirement in this class. Further details about the Senior Project are available on a separate handout.

Paperless (mostly) assignments

With two exceptions, _everything_ you'll submit for a grade this semester _must_ be submitted digitally. Obviously, contributions to the course blog can only happen online. All other written assignments should be submitted _via email_ to rodman@umn.edu. DQs must be submitted as plaintext emails (i.e., _not_ as file attachments), while all other assignments should be submitted as attachments in one of the following file formats: LibreOffice/OpenOffice (.odt), Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx), and Rich Text Format (.rtf). Except as noted below, assignments submitted in other formats (including PDFs and paper) will _not_ be accepted.

Exception #1 involves the copy of any reading you submit in connection to an "Replacement Reading" CE:
- Readings that only exist online should be submitted by including their URLs in your annotations.
- Readings that are readily available as PDFs should be submitted as PDFs.
- All other readings should be submitted as clean, complete photocopies.

Exception #2 involves Senior Project verification pages, which _must_ be submitted in hard copy format.

Academic dishonesty
The following is a _partial_ list of examples of academic dishonesty:
- plagiarism in any of its forms
- copying assignments (in whole or in part) produced by other students
- "double-dipping" (i.e., using the same work to earn more than one grade -- including attempts to reuse work that you have submitted for a grade in some other course)
- having someone else research and/or write substantial portions of any graded assignment for you
- deleting and/or re-editing blog posts/comments after they've been placed on the course Moodle site
- 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. Put bluntly, the risks are high (most plagiarism cases are very easy to identify), the penalties are higher (as severe as expulsion from the University), and the potential benefits are usually trivial (e.g., you get a "free" blog post that _might_ turn a course grade of C into a C+). More crucially, the time and effort it takes to engage in "good" (i.e., undetectable) plagiarism is probably more time and effort than it would take to do the assignment in question the honest way.

Some helpful resources to avoid academic dishonesty include:
- http://oscai.umn.edu/avoid-violations/avoiding-scholastic-dishonesty
- http://www.gilrodman.com/2015/03/01/how-to-plagiarize-well-tips-for-my-undergraduates-rerun-sunday/

Miscellaneous
- Our discussions will cover topics that are likely to evoke strong differences of opinion. I don't expect our class meetings to produce unanimous agreement about those topics, but I do expect our discussions to be characterized by mutual respect and collegiality. Strong opinions are acceptable; verbal bullying and personal attacks, on the other hand, will _not_ be tolerated under any circumstances.
- Significant disruptions of the normal flow of course-related business -- e.g., using cell phones in class, excessive side chatter, premature leave-taking behavior -- may result in grade penalties.
- You may make audio and/or video recordings of class meetings for your personal use, provided you 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.
- I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students' needs relating to religious holidays and/or documented disabilities. By University policy, you must provide written notice (for religious holidays) and/or official documentation (for disabilities) with enough lead time for accommodations to be arranged.
- University policy prohibits sexual harassment as defined in the December 1998 policy statement (see http://policy.umn.edu/hr/sexualharassment). Questions or concerns about sexual harassment should be directed to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (274 McNamara).

Reading/assignment schedule

[Readings should be completed prior to the dates listed. Except for the Slack & Wise book, all readings can be found on the course Moodle site.]

introduction

17 Jan   no reading

19 Jan   this syllabus
"How to Do Well in This Course"
Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts"
Major, "Thoreau's Cellphone Experiment"
Mother, "No Internet Week"

theory

24 Jan   **Thought paper deadline**
Slack & Wise, pp. 1-47
Lessig, "Is-ism"

26 Jan   Slack & Wise, pp. 49-73

31 Jan   **Senior Project deadline #1 (register for Comm 3995W-002)**
Slack & Wise, pp. 77-104

2 Feb   Slack & Wise, pp. 107-147

7 Feb   **Senior Project deadline #2 (meeting)**
Slack & Wise, pp. 149-194

9 Feb   Slack & Wise, pp. 197-228

the telephone

14 Feb   **Senior Project deadline #3 (topic proposal/bibliography)**
Marvin, "Community and Class Order"

16 Feb   Snowden, "Reporting by Phone"

21 Feb   Wresch, "Information Exiles"

the personal computer

23 Feb   Johnson, "The Desktop"

28 Feb   **Senior Project deadline #4 (thesis paragraph draft)**
Streeter, "Missing the Net"

the internet

2 Mar   Carey, "Historical Pragmatism and the Internet"

7 Mar   Sterne, "Thinking the Internet"

9 Mar   Rodman, "The Net Effect"

14 Mar   **NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK**

16 Mar   **NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK**

portable/digital music
21 Mar   du Gay *et al.*, "Consuming the Walkman"

23 Mar   Rodman & Vanderdonckt, "Music for Nothing or, I Want My MP3"

manufacturing/labor
28 Mar   **Senior Project deadline #5 (rough draft)**
                "Fifteen Million Merits" (*Black Mirror*, season 1, episode 2)

30 Mar   Dyer-Witheford, "App Worker"

intimacy/connectivity
4 Apr   "The Entire History of You" (*Black Mirror*, season 1, episode 3)

6 Apr   Crawford, "These Foolish Things"

surveillance/privacy
11 Apr   "White Bear" (*Black Mirror*, season 2, episode 2)

13 Apr   Andrejevic, "The Kinder, Gentler Gaze of Big Brother"

status/algorithms
18 Apr   "Nosedive" (*Black Mirror*, season 3, episode 1)
                Striphas, "Algorithmic Culture"

20 Apr   **NO CLASS**

hacking/activism
25 Apr   "hellofriend.mov" (*Mr. Robot*, season 1, episode 1)

27 Apr   Coleman, "From Internet Farming to Weapons of the Geek"

justice/punishment
2 May   "Hated in the Nation" (*Black Mirror*, season 3, episode 6)

4 May   Ingraham & Reeves, "New Media, New Panics"

9 May   **Final deadline for CEs, blog posts/comments, and Senior Projects**
(1:30 pm)