

Introduction to Electronic & Digital Communication

EMAC 2322

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TR 4:00-5:15 CB3 1.306

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Course Description:

In 2006 *Time* named “You” as the person of the year. What at the time seemed like a clever ploy to sell extra magazines now appears to have accurately captured the zeitgeist, the sense that “you”—or “we”—now control the media. During the initial rapid growth of the internet, the dot com bubble of the 1990s, much ink was spilled and many pixels flickered to debate the cultural impact of the digital network, and for a short time after the bubble burst, those who saw the internet as a passing fad seemed to have their day. But what is now clear after the rise of “Web 2.0” is that the internet changes things—and by “things,” I mean everything. The way we share, create, and disseminate knowledge has fundamentally changed. What the particular contours of this change are have yet to be revealed, but I think it is clear that the next moment in our culture will be remarkably different from the prior. The focus of this class is in understanding this change, particularly the way that media has changed and is changing. Accordingly, this class will serve as an introduction for Emerging Media and Communications majors and serve as a building block for the rest of your coursework.

Required Texts:

- *Blown to Bits: Your Life, Liberty, and Happiness After the Digital Explosion.* Abelson, Leeden, Lewis. ISBN 0137135599
- *Culture and Technology a Primer.* Slack and Wise. ISBN 0820450073
- *The internet.* (Consider the cost of printing and the purchase of an internet connection at your home a “textbook” cost for this class.)

Course Expectations:

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

have acquired the information conveyed during the class (often in the form of a multiple choice test). This class will not use this learning model. Instead it takes lessons learned from the rise of network culture as its basic building blocks.

In particular, this class will reflect one of the fundamental principles underlying the strength of the internet: *None of us are smarter than all of us.* Or, if you prefer a slightly different take: *Knowledge is a communal process even if we have been taught to treat it as an individual product.*

This means that in the class you will do a lot more than memorize information gleaned from a range of sources I throw at you; instead we are going to use the class time to discuss, learn, and create as a group. This class is about co-llaboration, co-exploration, and co-learning. While I certainly see my role as someone who is knowledgeable in digital media, I am by no means the final voice. I will try to be provocative, trace points of connection, provide historical background, and serve as a resource, but in this class I view my role as facilitator of your learning, not as lecturer. Indeed, I expect, I hope, that this class will be far more a learning community than a twice-a-week pursuit of credit hours. *By taking this class, you are agreeing to participate in this community, to become active learners rather than passive subjects.*

Many parts of this class are experiments in which I am going to ask you to participate (and in which I will participate with you). This means that at times things will succeed and at times they will fail, but that is just the point: in this new emerging media environment we do not yet know what works, we just know the old ways no longer will. Over the course of the semester we will use blogs, wikis, online discussion forums, video aggregators (like YouTube), microblogging services (like Twitter), and a variety of other online tools. My hope is that through critical examination and experimental inquiry we will come to understand the strengths and limits of these mediums.

Class Goals:

Given all the above, you might ask yourself: “What’s in it for me?” A fair question, since I am going to ask a great deal of you, probably more than any other class you are taking this semester, not just because of the workload, but because I am requiring you to participate in a whole new style of learning. Let me begin by answering the question this way. . . I think we are approaching a critical cultural juncture, where literacy itself is changing. There will develop, perhaps already has developed, a significant divide between those who know how to use these emerging media, and those who uncritically consume them. *My goal for the class is to help you move into that first category: to become active, critical producers in this new media landscape.*

Concretely this means:

- Develop collaborative learning skills
- Become familiar with digital media and how they operate

- Understand the larger issues and debates shaping the transformation of the media landscape and more importantly the society at large

Class Requirements:

Given this class's focus on collaborative learning, it might seem somewhat awkward to evaluate people with individual grades. Nevertheless, you will receive a grade for the course. Some of the grade will be based on work you individually produce, while some of it will be an evaluation of collaborative effort.

Participation (20%): This is a crucial part of class. Students are expected to come to class on time, prepared, having completed the assigned reading and writing, and ready to contribute their thoughts to class discussions, to listen seriously and respectfully to the thoughts of others, and to participate in all in-class activities. I strongly urge you to attend every class, as most of the work done in class is necessary for successful completion of the course. Only three absences are permitted, and these should be used for illness or emergencies (i.e., this does not mean three absences plus absences for illness etc.). Missing more than three classes will affect your grade. More than five absences can result in failing the course. If you need to miss class for religious reasons, please speak to me ahead of time. Absences for religious purposes do not count against the permitted number (as long as prior notification is given). Lateness is also unacceptable; if you arrive late to class you will be marked as absent. Leaving early also counts as an absence. Your primary responsibility is to be in class and fully present. (Expect to spend 3 hours a week in class and roughly 3 hours a week doing reading for the class.)

Class Wiki (40%): To reflect the collaborative nature of this class a significant portion of the class will be spent working on a group wiki. Throughout the course we will be focusing on a range of issues (technodeterminism, privacy, identity, copyright, etc.) and will develop a wiki that attempts to explain, summarize, and engage these issues. Each student will be required to contribute to the note taking process, the synthesis process, and the editing and polishing process. (Expect to spend 1-2 hours each week on this.)

Digital Media (20%): In addition to the class wiki, we will be using other digital media tools. Additionally there will several creative projects using digital media throughout the semester.

Group Presentation (10%): As part of the wiki project, in the final weeks of the class students will be divided into groups. Each group will be responsible for building out and polishing a specific page (dedicated to one issue). During the final two days each group will be responsible for a class presentation based on this issue. (Expect to spend 8-10 hours over the final weeks of the semester on this.)

Final Learning Record (10%): Each student will be individually responsible for producing a learning record. This is a short document (3-4 pages) chronicling and reflecting on the class experience, the collaborative learning environment, and the issues discussed. (Expect to spend 3-4 hours over the final weeks of class on this.)

Course Website:

The course website for this class can be found at <<http://emac2322.pbworks.com/>>. You should get in the habit of checking this regularly as I will post suggestions and thoughts about the readings here, as well as links to other things that might interest the class. The syllabus can be found here as well, and any changes to the syllabus will be posted here. If you forget the web address you can always find it from <<http://www.outsidethetext.com>>, an easier url to remember.

A Note on Technology:

Because at its core this class is about how technology changes our culture, we will necessarily engage with a range of computer tools and web based applications. You do not need any prior skill, however; you merely need a willingness to engage and learn. I am more than willing to take extra time: all you need to do is ask.

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

One further note about technology. As much as technology makes life easier, at times it can also be difficult (computer crashes, deleted work, unavailable internet connections, etc). Plan accordingly: "the computer ate my homework" or "the internet was down" are not reasons to forgo doing the assigned work. It is in your best interest to leave extra time, especially at first, to ensure that technology does not get in the way of your work.

How to Reach Me:

The best way to reach me is by email <dparry@utdallas.edu> or you can find me online at <<http://www.outsidethetext.com>>. I check email frequently throughout the day. If you email me and do not receive a response within 48 hours (usually I will get back to you within a day), please feel free to email me again (I might not have received your first one) and give me a reminder. I promise not to consider this harassing. Don't call my office phone, though; voice mail is annoying and I tend to check it less frequently than email.

My office hours are Tuesday 2:30-3:30 and Thursdays 6:00-7:00. My office is ATEC 1.502.

A Final Note:

Should any aspect of class confuse/concern/trouble you, or if you have questions about any of this, please see me.

Proposed Schedule of Readings

The Central Debates: Evolution, Revolution, or De-Evolution?

Week One

August 25th

- Class Introduction

Week Two

August 30th

- Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message"
- *Blown to Bits* Chapter 1

September 1st

- *Culture and Technology* Chapters 3, 4, 8, & 9

Week Three

September 6th

- *Culture and Technology* Chapters 10-12

September 8th

- "DIGITAL MAOISM: The Hazards of the New Online Collectivism," Jaron Lanier
- Nicholas Carr, "The amorality of Web 2.0,"
- Nicholas Carr, "The Good, the Bad, and the Web 2.0" *Wall Street Journal Online*
- Andrew Keen, "The Great Seduction" from *The Cult of the Amateur*

Architecture of the Net

Week Four

September 13th

- *Blown to Bits* Appendix
- Miles Townes. "The Spread of TCP/IP and the Political Origins of the Internet."

September 15th

- Tim Wu, "The Radicalism of the Internet" (selection from *The Master Switch*)
- "History of the Internet" (Video)
- *Blown to Bits* Chapter 3

Your Identity Online

Week Five

September 20th

- *Culture and Technology* 13 & 14
- Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs"

September 22nd

- Nakamura "Race and Identity in Digital Media."

Big Brother and Little Brother

Week Six

September 27th

- Michel Foucault "Discipline and Punish" (selections)

Proposed Schedule of Readings

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

September 29th

- *Blown to Bits* Chapter 2
- *Blown to Bits* Chapter 5

Week Seven

October 4th

- *Erasing David* (film) David Bond

October 6th

- danah boyd "Why Youth Heart Social Network Sites"
- Jason Calcanis, "Is Facebook unethical, clueless, or unlucky?"

Week Eight

October 11th

- *We Live in Public* by Ondi Timoner

A Different Kind of Work

October 13th

- Yochai Benkler "Peer Production and Sharing"

Week Nine

October 18th

- Trebor Scholz, "What the MySpace Generation Should Know About Working for Free."
- Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy,"

October 20th

- *Blown to Bits* Chapter 6

Week Ten

October 25th

- *Rip: Remix Manifesto* film Brett Gaylor

Art and Entertainment in a Digital World

October 27th

- "Remediation" Bolter and Grusin

Week Eleven

November 1st

- Alison Norrington, "Transmedia and the Future of Storytelling"
- Henry Jenkins *Convergence Culture*. (selections)

Who Controls the Internet

November 3rd

- *Blown to Bits* Chapter 7

Week Twelve

November 8th

- Evgeny Morozov, "The Internet in Society: Empowering or Censoring Citizens."
- Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media."

November 10th

- "Understanding Net Neutrality" (video)

Proposed Schedule of Readings

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

Week Thirteen

November 15th

- Aaron Bady, "Julian Assange and the Computer Conspiracy; 'To Destroy this Invisible Government.'"
- Gabreilla Coleman, "Anonymous-From Luz to Collective Action."

November 17th

- Cory Doctorow, "Why I won't buy an iPad (and think you shouldn't either)."
- Project Reclaim (selections)

Week Fourteen

November 22nd

- Project Reclaim Remix

November 24th (No Class)

Week Fifteen

November 29th

- Group Presentations

December 1st

- Group Presentations

Week Sixteen

December 6th

- Final Class