

MIT 214: Communication Technology and Society

Spring 2008
Northwestern University

11:00 – 12:30
Monday and Wednesday

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Office: 340C

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Office Hours: Wed 9-11 am & Sun 2-3pm

REQUIRED TEXTS

There are 3 required texts for this course:

Postman, N. (1992). *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Vintage

MacKenzie, D., & Wajcman, J. (2006). *The Social Shaping of Technology* (2nd edition). New York: McGraw Hill

Lievrouw, L.A., & Livingstone, S. (2006). *The Handbook of New Media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

In addition to these two books, electronic copies of articles and cases are posted on the course's blackboard site. All readings are to be completed before coming to class each day. Be sure to bring the text and all relevant readings to class on the day they are to be discussed.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines how communication technology shapes society and how people shape technologies and their effects. The course is divided into two major sections. The first section explores the social, economic, and political influences on technology design. The second section explores the implications that communication technologies have on relationships, communities, organizations, design, and public policy. By exploring these issues, the course will provide students with (1) A better understanding of what new communication technologies are and why they are those ways; (2) A foundation for thinking about the implications and effects of these technologies; and (3) Some ideas about the ways you fit into this changing world as both technology producers and users.

The course will be divided into three units. The first unit explores the development of new technologies and seeks to uncover why technologies come to be like they are. The second unit explores technologies that people use broadly in their everyday lives, including the increasing role of social networking technologies. The final unit explores the role of technology in the workplace. Within each unit, readings are organized to answer one broad question that will guide discussion for a particular week.

CLASSROOM DEPARTMENT

Since our goal is to become more effective speakers and writers of English we will use only English in class. In order not to distract classmates or negatively affect the learning environment, mobile phone and all other electronic devices should be turned off in class at all times. While computers will be used in class for specific activities, in general, computers will not be used during regular classes, so please bring note taking materials.

We will assume that each of us is coming to NU-Q with different backgrounds and that the common goals of the class are best achieved when we work together as a group and each give our best efforts both inside and outside of class.

We recognize that this is a safe place for different ideas, beliefs, and values. Students should feel free to express their opinions. We will be willing to experiment and take risks through our discussions and our writing.

students are expected to always show respect for the opinions and ideas of others.

ATTENDANCE

Class attendance is expected and will be taken at every class. Additionally it is important that you arrive on time, ready to learn and participate. You are allowed 3 unexcused absences, but keep in mind that these should be reserved for illness, unexpected emergencies, etc. For each absence beyond 3, your grade will be dropped one-half a grade (e.g., from B to B-). Also, three tardies equals one absence, so be sure to be on time. You are late to class if you arrive after I have finished taking attendance. If you are absent from a class you are responsible for getting all class material that was covered through classmates, Blackboard, etc.

OFFICE HOURS

Office hours are your opportunity to get individual help or talk about any issues or questions that you may have. I am happy to meet with you at any time to discuss your progress, help you with a specific writing assignment, a reading or go over concepts from the class. If you would like to meet, but cannot meet me during office hours, please email me at least 24 hours in advance or speak with me after class to arrange a time. I enjoy meeting with motivated students!

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students are expected to comply with University regulations regarding academic integrity. If you are in doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, speak to the instructor before the assignment is due and/or examine the University web site. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating on an exam (e.g., copying others' answers, providing information to others, using a crib sheet) or plagiarism of a paper (e.g., taking material from sources without citation, copying another student's paper). Failure to maintain academic integrity on an assignment will

result in a loss of credit for that assignment—at a minimum. Other penalties may also apply. The guidelines for determining academic dishonesty and procedures followed in a suspected incident of academic dishonesty are detailed on the university and school websites.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

In compliance with Northwestern University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability. Request for academic accommodations need to be made during the first week of the quarter, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are required to register for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations. Students should see Dean Dun. For more information, visit: <http://www.northwestern.edu/disability/>

SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY

It is the policy of Northwestern University that no male or female member of the Northwestern community—students, faculty, administrators, or staff—may sexually harass any other member of the community. Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute harassment when:

- submission to such conduct is made or threatened to be made, either explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of an individual's employment or education; or
- submission to or rejection of such conduct is used or threatened to be used as the basis for academic or employment decisions affecting that individual; or
- such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's academic or professional performance or creating what a reasonable person would sense as an intimidating, hostile, or offensive employment, educational, or living environment.

ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments are due at the beginning of the class listed in the syllabus. **Late work will not be accepted.** The only violation of this rule is for legitimate absences (verified health condition, participation in University-sponsored activities, serious family emergencies, religious observance, etc.). If the absence is known ahead of time, you **must make arrangements before** the date the assignment is due.

You will be graded on three types of assignments in this course: Weekly Assignments, Discussion Leading, Unit Papers, a final project.

Weekly Assignments. Each week, you will be asked to write a one-page response to a prompt that reflects on the week's readings. These assignments will be graded as check-plus, check, and check-minus. A check grade means that you have adequately addressed the question. A check-plus grade means that you have addressed the question and meaningfully incorporated some of the ideas from the readings for the week into your response. A check-minus grade means that you have not fully

answered the question and your response shows little reflection. You are allowed to skip one of the ten weekly assignments throughout the term. It is up to you which one you will skip.

Discussion Leading. Each student will participate with a group of other students as a discussion leader for an article or case study during one week of the course. It is your job as discussion leader to come up with questions, exercises, activities, etc. that will help the class to engage with your reading. You should plan that, as a group, you will lead discussion for 45 minutes during the class period. Your group will receive one collective grade for discussion leading for the week.

Unit Papers. At the end of each unit you will be required to submit one three-page paper. You will be handed the paper assignment two weeks before its due date. The paper should integrate concepts that we've covered from the unit into an original analysis and response to the question. Each student will present one of his or her unit papers to the class throughout the course. I will provide further details about presentation as the dates approach.

Final Project. Along with a group of three other classmates of your choosing, you will work on a final project that utilizes your learnings from this class to use technology to solve a social issue at NU-Q or in Qatar Foundation. The paper must draw on research from the class to analyze and solve the problem. I will select several problems and groups will be able to choose which problem they'd like to work on. The final paper must be no longer than 6 pages in length and is due at the beginning of finals period. You must also prepare a presentation to accompany the paper, which will also be presented during the finals period.

GRADES

In order to pass the class all major assignments must be completed. Failure to complete any of the major assignments will result in a failure in the course.

Your final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Weekly Assignments	30 pts.
Discussion Leading	10 pts.
Unit Papers (10 points each)	30 pts.
Final Projects	20 pts.
Participation	10 pts.
Total	100 pts.

If you believe that I have made an error in grading your paper or presentation, I expect you to bring your concerns to my attention. **I will not discuss grades until the next class period.** I will consider only *written* appeals for grade changes on assignments or exams, and will schedule a meeting about the change you propose *after* receiving the written appeal. We shall then discuss your written appeal and your understanding of the concepts involved. This policy is intended not to provide obstacles to appeals, but rather is designed to ensure justice to all concerned and allow you to demonstrate mastery over the topics covered.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Unit 1: Technologies in the Making

Week 1: Why do we care so much about new technology?

01/12/09 ***** *Course Introduction*

01/14/09

Readings:

Technological Determinism in American Culture (Blackboard)

Science and Technology for American Progress (Blackboard)

Qatar Inside View (Blackboard)

Assignment #1:

Interview 3 people. One over 60 years old, one between 30-40 and one who is in his/her teens. Ask them the following question: “*Should the invention of new technologies be an important priority for society?*” Write a paragraph summarizing and reflecting on the responses of your three interview respondents.

Week 2: Does technology change the way we think about the world?

01/19/09

Readings:

The Playboy Interview with Marshall McLuhan (Blackboard)

For Discussion:

Friend or Foe? (Blackboard)

01/21/09

Readings:

Chapter 1 - The Judgment of Thamus (Postman)

Chapter 7 – The Ideology of Machines (Postman)

Assignment #2:

Write a one-page response indicating your agreement with this statement: Is your cell phone an extension of your senses?

Week 3: Are Technologies Neutral?

01/26/09

Readings:*The Industrial Revolution in the Home* (MacKenzie)**For Discussion:***Houses Just Got Smarter* (Blackboard)

01/28/09

Readings:*Do Artifacts Have Politics?* (MacKenzie)**Assignment #3:**

Find a technology that is supposed to make your life easier, but actually makes it more difficult. Write a one-page paper describing what the technology is, why it makes your life difficult, and why you think it was designed the way it was.

Week 4: How do Technologies Change?

02/02/09

Readings:*Clio and the Economics of QWERTY?* (Blackboard)*Why the Best Doesn't Always Win* (Blackboard)*Blue-Ray vs. HD DVD* (Blackboard)*Timeline: HD DVD vs. Blue-Ray* (Blackboard)

02/04/09

Readings:*Users as Agents of Technological Change* (Blackboard)*7 Unintended Uses of the iPod* (Blackboard)**Assignment #4**

Write a one page-paper describing how you use a technology in a different way than you're "supposed to" use it. Why did you start using it this way?

Week 5: Unit 1 Summary

02/09/09 ***** No Class – NU Global Council Visit

02/11/09

PAPER #1 DUE TODAY**Presentations by first 1/3 of students****Unit 2: Technologies in Everyday Life****Week 6: Is Online Real?**

02/16/09

Readings:*Identity*

(Blackboard)

For Discussion:*Arguments in Case Involving Net and Suicide*
Cyber bullying

(Blackboard)

(Blackboard)

02/18/09

Readings:*Interpersonal Life Online*
A Rape in Cyberspace

(Lievrouw)

(Blackboard)

Assignment #5:

Write a one page-response to the following question: Should activities that happen in virtual worlds be subject to laws in the offline world? Why or why not?

Week 7: What's the Connection Between Life Online and Offline?

02/23/09

Readings:*Juggling Multiple Social Worlds*

(Blackboard)

For Discussion:

Second Life Used For First Look (Blackboard)
Real Lawsuits set to Materialize in Virtual Worlds (Blackboard)

02/25/09

Readings:

New Media and Internet Activism (Blackboard)
The Internet Key to Obama Victories (Blackboard)
The Facebooker Who Friendened Obama (Blackboard)

Assignment #6:

Pick a social cause that is important to you. Write a one-page paper describing how you would use social networking technologies to solicit support for your cause.

Week 8: Is There a Digital Divide?

03/09/09

Readings:

Perspectives on Internet Use: Access and Involvement (Lievrouw)
The Cost of Communication (Blackboard)

03/11/09

Readings:

Universal Access to New Information Infrastructure (Lievrouw)

For Discussion:

Nigeria: Giving Technology a Human Face (Blackboard)

Assignment #7:

Qatar is filled with many immigrant laborers who do not have access to the internet or other contemporary communication technologies. Write a one-page paragraph discussing how this lack of access might create or perpetuate social inequality with those in Qatar who have access to the Internet.

Week 9: Unit 2 Summary03/16/09 ***** *Guest Speaker*

03/18/09

PAPER #2 DUE TODAY**Presentations by second 1/3 of students****Unit 3: Technologies at Work****Week 10: How do you get people to use new technologies?**

03/23/09

Readings:*Adoption: From Exploration to Decision Making* (Blackboard)**For Discussion:***Too far ahead?* (Blackboard)

03/25/09

Readings:*Framing for Learning* (Blackboard)**For Discussion***Increasing Adoption* (Blackboard)**Assignment #8**

Think of a technology that you've tried to get your parents or grandparents to use, but they say no. Write a one page paper describing how you could use framing strategies described in the "Framing for Learning" article to try to "sell" them on the new technology.

Week 11: Are Social Networks Digital, Physical, or Both?

03/20/09

Readings:

Social Networks' Sway May Be Underestimated (Blackboard)
ABC News and Facebook (Blackboard)
The Network Unbound (Blackboard)

For Discussion:

We Googled You (Blackboard)

04/01/09

Readings:

Social Network Analysis (Blackboard)
It's not Just Who you Know (Blackboard)
Network Overload (Blackboard)

Assignment #9:

Your assignment for today is to draw a social network diagram of all the people you ask help from for you school work. You will draw arcs from yourself to those who you ask directly. Then, you should draw arcs to the people those people ask. If you don't know who those you ask ask help from themselves, ask them!

Week 12: Do New Technologies Enslave or Liberate?

04/06/09

Readings:

Workplace Surveillance and Managing Privacy (Blackboard)
Is your boss spying on you? (Blackboard)

04/08/09

Readings:

My Job Sucks (Blackboard)

For Discussion:

Customer Revenge (Blackboard)

Assignment #10:

Write a one page paper indicating your agreement with the following statement: Given that your paid to be at work and working, does your boss have the right to know what you are doing while you're at your computer?

Week 13: How do Technologies Change Organizations?

04/13/09

Readings:

New Media and Small Group Organizing (Lievrouw)

04/15/09

Readings:

Technology as an Occasion for Structuring (Blackboard)

For Discussion:

Mount Auburn Hospital (Blackboard)

Week 14:04/20/09 ***** *Guest Speaker*

04/22/09

PAPER #3 DUE TODAY**Presentations by third 1/3 of students****Week 15:****Final To-Be-Announced**