

COMM202
Spring 2006
MW 2-3:20PM
Instructor: Jay Douglas

Real-Life Office Hours: MW 3:30-4:30PM or by appointment

Course Description

“Technology,” a computer researcher once said, “is anything that is invented after you are born.” I see cell phones, for example, as a dramatic upheaval in the technology of communications. You most likely see them as just an ordinary appliance, like a television or a CD player. We both see the iPod as a technological advance in the realm of portable music. So, when we speak of “communications technology,” what are we talking about? A range of communications advances? The (relatively) small number of improvements that occurred in, say, the last ten years (when you became aware of them)? Or, is “communications technology” another one of those marketing buzz phrases designed to temporarily separate us from our credit card balances? Those are some of the areas this course will explore.

Since technology does not happen in a vacuum, the way we can orient our research is not by studying communications technology in the abstract—that is, from a clinical or scientific position—but rather by examining the various social, political, cultural and economic impacts of communications technology. In doing so, we will adopt both contemporary and historical positions: contemporary, because we must, as scholars and citizens, deal with the every day effects of communications technology, no matter what path brought us to engage with them today; historical, because we cannot hope to understand the present without understanding the traces of origins and experiences that form the web of everyday usage.

By the end of this course you should have a technical vocabulary rich enough to allow you to research and discuss communications technology; you should be able to address how the origins of current technology assert their presence today; and you should be able to discuss the nature and implications of several contemporary issues in communications technology through first-hand experience.

Readings

- Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen*
- Douglas Thomas, *Hacker Culture*
- A mandatory reader, available at University Graphics/Magic Machine in University Village.

Course Requirements

Your TAs and I will work to foster a high degree of participation in this class, so expect a mix of lectures, projects, discussions, and presentations. In order to be a productive part of the learning process, I expect you to do any readings (or other assignments) before class; complete all assignments on time; participate in discussions, whether in class or in your discussion section; attend discussion sections every week, not only because this is a requirement, but because these sections are important to your achieving the goals of this course.

Attendance

Your presence in lectures and discussion sections not only affects your learning environment but that of others as well. Your enrollment in the class comes with 4 free absences—no excuses required—in any combination of lectures and discussion sections. Subsequent absences lower your participation grade 10 points per absence. There are additional consequences for excessive absence in discussion sections. Read the “Consequences” section for the details.

Allied with attendance is punctuality. If you come in late you disrupt the class or discussion section because (a) someone must take the time to brief you on what’s going on, which annoys the people around you, (b) if your discussion section has begun an in-class project your assigned group has to adjust to your belated presence, and (c) it’s rude. Other people make the effort to show up on time. If you can’t put at least that much effort into this class, perhaps you need to consider another one.

Chronic lateness, which in this context means more than 6 late arrivals, again, across any combination of lectures and discussion sections, lowers your participation grade 10 points for each subsequent occurrence.

You are late if you arrive after the official start time of the lecture or discussion section, or when your TA or I begins the class meeting, whichever is later. If you are late to lecture, sign the late sheet. Do not sign the attendance sheet. Your TA will know who you are and put your name on the late sheet if you do not. If your name turns up on both the late and attendance sheets, you’ll lose 10 participation points for each such occurrence.

Projects, Papers and Presentations

You are responsible for the material covered in class, in discussion sections and in the reading. Your TAs and I evaluate you on: the level of your engagement with

the class materials (as evidenced in your written work and class participation); your capacity to explain your ideas and analysis in articulate and well-written forms; and, your ability to creatively explore practical implications of material. In your written work, we expect you to demonstrate an understanding of the principles discussed in class, discussion sections and the readings by clearly articulating and structuring your argument. In group projects and presentations, we also evaluate you on your ability to collaborate.

Consequences

Completing assignments on time is an important part of this class. Not only does submitting an assignment after its due date give you an inappropriate advantage over students who do their work on time, meeting deadlines is a real-world necessity. We are in an employer's job market. Employees, or applicants, who cannot deliver results on time are candidates for replacement from an expanding pool of potential employees.

Late assignments will lose 10% of their maximum grade for each 24-hour period, or part thereof, between the time the assignment is due and the time the assignment is submitted.¹ The 24-hour periods include Saturdays, Sundays, holidays and academic breaks. As an example, if a 200 point project is due at 2PM on Wednesday and it is not submitted until Friday at 5PM, the project's grade will be reduced by 60 points.²

Assignments will always have instructions. These may be as simple as prompts for a paper or as detailed as instructions for preparing class presentations. Failure to follow instructions will result in a 50% grade penalty, in addition to any reductions due to weak performance against the rubric. For example, the instructions for a class project require that I sign off on the project topic. A group delivers a project on a topic I haven't signed off on. The project, when evaluated against the project rubric, is worth 78 points. The actual number of points earned will be 39 points, half of the 78.

Some assignments may have consequences that differ from the ones listed here. In that case, the consequences will be described as part of the written assignment. Make sure you understand the consequences that apply to any assignment. If you are unsure, speak to me or your TA.

Since I consider discussion sections an integral part of the learning process that goes on in this class, your attendance in these sessions is a serious responsibility. If you are absent from 7 or more discussion sections, you will earn zero points for your course participation grade. Make sure you understand this. The 7th time you are absent from your discussion section, your participation grade for the class (which represents 20% of your grade) drops to zero, and stays

¹Submission method(s) for late assignments must be approved by me.

²The assignment loses 10% for the 24-hour period between Wednesday at 2PM and Thursday at 2PM, and another 10% for the 24-hour period from Thursday at 2PM to Friday at 2PM. The final 10% grade reduction represents the time from Friday at 2PM to Friday at 5PM. The total grade reduction is 30% of 200 points or 60 points. The 60 points will be deducted from whatever (unpenalized) grade the assignment earns.

there. You cannot “erase” a discussion section absence by sitting in on another discussion section.

If you lose points on an assignment, you cannot make them up. Please do not ask your TA or me for extra credit opportunities.

Extensions and Other Considerations

While deadlines are a part of the real world, so are emergencies. I understand that these happen and it may not be possible to complete an assignment on time. In such cases, get in touch with me as soon as you realize you will not be able to meet the deadline. There are always ways to work around problems if you bring them to my attention **before** the deadline. After the deadline you will be subject to the stated consequences.

The truth is always the best excuse in my classes. It is better to tell me that you mis-budgeted your time, overestimated your ability to complete a project quickly, ran into a research problem you didn’t anticipate and so forth. I am more than willing to work with you to arrive at an equitable solution. Often that means granting you an extension (where appropriate). Please understand that you get an extension when I **approve** it, not when you request it. I will always confirm extensions or other arrangements via email so there is no confusion. If you are expecting a confirmation and do not get any related email, call me.

Requests for extensions or other considerations have to be made at least 24 hours before the due date (as time-stamped by email, my voicemail, or face-to-face or telephone conversation). Requests made in less than 24 hours may be honored if the problem is medical, involves the death of a relative or results from a situation beyond your control.³ These situations must be documented. Doctor’s notes should indicate that your condition was either acute or was of such a nature that you could not contact me—or have a friend or classmate contact me—earlier. Deaths require a copy of a certified death certificate (photocopy okay).

I hate to impose these kinds of restrictions; in some sense, I find them beneath the integrity of college students at a major research institution. However, my experience has been that too many students, instead of telling the truth, concoct stories because they feel that either I will not believe the truth or that telling me they failed to prioritize their time will make me think less of them (and therefore lower their grade). If that’s your orientation, get over it. I was a student once (and not that long ago). I know how things go. I also had a friend who, pressured by deadlines as an undergraduate, killed off his entire family three times. I am not as concerned about your making mistakes as I am about helping you not make the same mistakes over and over.

³Beginning a paper 12 hours before it’s due, acquiring a hangover the night before a deadline, holding floor-level seats for a Lakers playoff game, and the like are **not** situations beyond your control. They are choices you make.

Grades

Grading is a collaborative effort between your TAs and me. We grade all assignments together. In addition, since your TA will most likely interact with you more than I will, I consider his or her evaluation of your performance very seriously.

I don't curve grades because it makes grading a zero-sum game: if somebody wins somebody else has to lose, and the incentive to help your fellow classmates is dampened if not extinguished altogether. I prefer you receive the grade you earned, independent of the rest of the class. There is one exception to an independent grade. If you work on a group project, all members of the group receive the same grade for that project.

Grading is straightforward. Total points: 1000, with the following breakdown:

Papers (2)	100 points each
Web Site Contribution	300 points
Final Exam	300 points
Participation/Discussion Section	200 points

Final grades are computed on a linear scale:

A	950-1000
A-	900-949
B+	870-899
B	830-869
B-	800-829
C+	770-799
C	730-769
C-	700-729
D	650-699
F	649 and below

Participation Criteria

If you come to class, sit in your seat, answer questions when called upon you'll wind up with about 100 participation points. If you take the initiative by asking thoughtful questions, suggesting areas for exploration and showing strong leadership in discussions you're headed for the 200-point mark.

On the other hand, if you talk in class or otherwise disrupt the learning for others, you will **lose** points. You will also lose points if you fail to participate in discussion sections or ignore any other in-class responsibilities.

Plagiarism

When taking this class, you enter into a contract that states that all the work you turn in has been your own and no one else's; and, that you have not turned

in any work for which you have received credit in another class. Do not take this policy lightly.

The School of Communication is committed to the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical support. It endorses and acts on the *SCampus* policies and procedures detailed in the section titled “University Sanction Guidelines.” These policies, procedures, and guidelines will be assiduously upheld. They protect your rights, as well as those of the faculty. It is particularly important that you are aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, fabricating data for a project, submitting a paper to more than one professor, or submitting a paper authored by anyone but yourself (or, in the case of group projects, by anyone outside your group). Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade in the course and will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. If you have doubts about any of these practices, you must confer with the professor.

Week by Week

Jan. 9 — Introduction

Jan. 11 — Technology as a Communication Medium

Reading:

Nicholas Negropante, “The DNA of Information” and “Debunking Bandwidth”
Bolter and Grusin, “The Dual Logic of Remediation.”

Jan. 18 — Technology: Practice and Culture

Reading:

Arnold Pacey, “Technology: Practice and Culture.”

Jan. 23 — Technology and Identity

Reading:

Turkle, “Identity in the Age of the Internet”
Cheung, “A Home on the Web”
Pariser, “Artist’s Websites”
Dibble, “A Rape in Cyberspace.”

Jan. 25 — From Programming to Simulation

Reading:

Turkle, “The Triumph of Tinkering.”

Jan. 30 — Internet Dreams

Reading:

TBA

Feb. 1 — Technological Visions: Utopian and Dystopian Views of Technology

Reading:

Winner, “Sow’s Ears from Silk Purses”

Gibson, “Johnny Mnemonic”

Nye, “Technological Prediction: A Promethean Problem.”

First paper assignment given

Feb. 6 — Science Fiction and the Culture of Technology

Reading:

Edwards, “Computers and Politics in Cold War II” Bukatman, “Terminal Identities.”

First paper assignment given.

Feb. 8 — Virus Culture: Metaphors of Infection

Reading:

Thomas, “Viral Style: Information, Subculture, and the Politics of Infection.”

Feb. 13 — Redefining Place

Reading:

Gross, “Somewhere There’ is a Place for Us”

Chabran and Salinas, “Place Matters”

Gibbs, et al., “The Globalization of Everyday Life”

Hafner, “When the Virtual Isn’t Enough.”

Feb. 15 — From Analog to Digital: The Origins of Computing

Reading:

Burger, “The Nature of Technology”

Turkle, “A Tale of Two Aesthetics”

Levy, “The Tech Model Railroad Club.”

First paper due

Feb. 22 — PC Basics: Hardware and Software

Reading:

Davos. “Fundamental Computer Concepts”

Hutheesing, “Faster, Chapter, Better—forever.”

Feb. 27 — From the Mainframe to the Micro

Mar. 1 — Applications and End Users

Reading:

Cringely, “Software Envy”

Stephenson from *In the Beginning was the Command Line*.

Mar. 6 — The Cathedral and the Bazaar: Open Source Software

Reading:

Raymond, “The Cathedral and the Bazaar”

Sterling, “A Contrarian View of Open Source.”

Mar. 8 — AI, A-Life and the Future of Computing

Reading:

Turkle, “Artificial Life as the New Frontier”

Turing, “Can a Machine Think”

Gauntlett, “The Future: Faster, Smaller, More, More,More.”

Mar. 20 — Digital Storytelling

Reading:

TBA

Second paper assignment given

Mar. 22 — Bodies, Genes and Codes

Reading:

Gruber, “Map the Genome, Hack the Genome”

Weinberg, “The Dark Side of the Genome.”

Mar. 27 — Censorship, (In)decency, and the CDA

Reading:

Platt, “NetSex”

EFF Press Release

White House Press Release

Software Publishers’ Press Release

Supreme Court Ruling.

Mar. 29 — Database Culture

Reading:

Garfinkle, “Database Nation”

Agre, “Beyond the Mirror World.”

Apr. 3 — Secrecy and Encryption

Reading:

Dyson, Release 2.0 (“Privacy”)

ITAR Civil Disobedience

Schneier, “Why Cryptography is Harder than it Looks.”

Second paper due

Apr. 5 — The Culture of Content

Reading:

TBA

Apr. 10 — Code, Law and Cyberspace

Reading:

Lessig, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace*.

Apr. 12 — MP3 and the History of Copyright

Reading:

Thomas, “Piracy and the Ethos of New Media”

Lessig, “Intellectual Property.”

Apr. 17 — Hacker History

Reading:

Thomas, *Hacker Culture*, pp. 1-111.

Apr. 19 — Hacker Representations

Reading:

Thomas, *Hacker Culture*, pp. 111-173.

Apr. 24 — Hacking and the Law

Reading:

Thomas, *Hacking Culture*, pp. 173-239.

Apr. 26 — Summary

Reading:

Monday, May. 8 — Final Exam — 2-4PM