Communications Theory and Practice

COM 200 (D03)   www.outsidethetext.com/arche
SJU, Fall 2013   Office Number: MH 173
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Merion Hall 174, TR 12:30-1:45

Course Description

It is an overused cliche that we live in a digital world. But this cliche, also points to a certain truth: communication is now primarily digital. Indeed it would be possible to argue that all research, writing, and communication is digital, or at least structured by the digital landscape. The ability to write in digital spaces, research online, and participate in these evolving social communities has become a critical 21st century knowledge. In this class we will not only study these evolving digital literacies, but actively practice them. This course serves as one of the foundational courses for Communication majors and minors.

Required Texts

There is one required text for this class:
  • *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online.* Howard Rheingold. ISBN 0262017458
In addition you will also need your own domain and hosting. (Many of the things we will do in class require you have your own domain and hosting.) We will cover the details of this in 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, content aggregators, microblogging services, 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, not just because of the workload, but because I am requiring you to participate in a different 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 (25%): 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 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). Latenesss is also unacceptable; if you arrive late to class you can be marked as absent. Leaving early also will count 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 3-4 hours a week reading for the class.)

Digital Writing (40%): You will be doing a great deal of writing in this class. Most of this will take the form of writing for your own individual website, building a semester long project. This will serve as the focus of much of the class as you learn to master writing online, including how to filter, connect, and engage readers. These assignments will vary both in terms of lenght and content, but expect to work on this every week. (Expect to spend 1-2 hours a week on this.)

Reflection Essays (10%) You will be asked to write several short pieces throughout the semester reflecting on your engagment with the digital tools and spaces we expirement with in class. (Expect to spend 4-6 hours over the course of the semester on these.)

Digital Media (10%): Throughout the course we will be experimenting with multiple digital platforms. (Expect to spend approximately 1 hour a week on this.)

Presentations (15%): During the final weeks of the course students will work in pairs to evaluate one of the digital platforms and tools we did not cover in class and present their findings to the class. (Expect to spend 10-12 hours during the final weeks of the course on this final project.)

Course Website

The course website for this class can be found at www.outsidethetext.com/arche. You should get in the haabit 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 www.outsidethetext.com a much 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. A majority of the tools we will be using in class are web-based, thus you will not need any special software.

One further note about technology. As much as technology makes life easier, at times it can also be difficult (computer crashes, deleted work, slow internet connection, 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.

Digital Etiquette

Many of the assignments throughout the semester will require participation in online spaces. Students should work to preserve the same atmosphere of respect and consideration that occurs in the classroom. Disagreements may arise and consensus is not always possible (indeed disagreements are productive). However, name calling, harassing, flaming, trolling etc. is

antithetical to the goals of this course.

How to Reach me

The best way to reach me is by email dparry@sju.edu or you can find me online at www.outsidethetext.com. I check email frequently throughout the day. If you email me and do not receive a response within 48 hours 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 far less frequently than email.

My office hours are TR 2:00-3:00. My office is Merion Hall 173.

University Policies

Academic Honesty: Please familiarize yourself with the [University's Academic Honesty Policy](#).

Disability Support: In accordance with state and federal laws, the University will make reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. For those who have or think that you may have a disability requiring an accommodation (learning, physical, psychological) should contact Services for Students with Disabilities, Room G10, Bellarmine, 610-660-1774 (voice) or 610-660-1620 (TTY) as early as possible in the semester for additional information and so that an accommodation, if appropriate, can be made in a timely manner. You will be required to provide current (within 3 years) documentation of the disability.

For a more detailed explanation of the University's accommodation process, as well as the programs and services offered to students with disabilities, please see the [Student Resources Page](#). If you have any difficulty accessing the information on-line, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities at the telephone numbers above.

A Final Note

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

Week 1

August 27th, Tuesday

- Class Introduction

August 29th, Thursday

- *Net Smart* (1-33)

Week 2

September 3rd, Tuesday

- *Net Smart* (111-119)
- "My Ten Years of Blogging" Om Malik *Gigaom*

September 5th, Thursday

- Introduction to Digital Writing Assignment and Setting Up Your Website

Week 3

September 10th, Tuesday

- In Class Workshopping

September 12th, Thursday

- "Twitter is as Bad (or Good) as YOU Make It." Jamie Harrop *Twitip*
- "Be Better at Twitter: The Definitive, Data Driven Guide" Megan Garber *The Atlantic*

Week 4

September 17th, Tuesday

- *Net Smart* (35-50)
- "The Myth of Monotasking" Cathy Davidson *Harvard Business Review* Interview

September 19th, Thursday

- *Net Smart* (50-75)
- "Attention Class" by Maggie Johnson *Boston.com*
- "Cognitive Control in Media Multitakers" Ophir, Nass, Wagner *PNAS*
- "Two Must-Have Tools for a More Readable Web" Scott Hanselman

Week 5

September 24th, Tuesday

- *Net Smart* (77-109)

September 26th, Thursday

- "The Top 15 Web Hoaxes of All Time" Mashable
- "Sorting the Real Sandy Photos From the Fakes" Alexis Magidral *The Atlantic*
- "In the Context of Web Context: How to check out any Web Page" Scott Rosenberg

Week 6

October 1st, Tuesday

- "How to Solve Impossible Problems" John Tedesco
- Search Engine Literacy

October 3rd, Thursday

- "Beware online 'filter bubbles'" Eli Pariser TED Talk
- "Why our Webs are Rarely World Wide, and What We Can Do About It" Ethan Zuckerman PDF Talk

Week 7

October 8th, Tuesday

- *Net Smart* 119-126
- "Everything is Miscellaneous" David Weinberg
- "Introduction to Social Bookmarking" Common Craft

October 10th, Thursday

- *Net Smart* 126-134
- "RSS in Plain English" Commoncraft
- "Introduction to RSS" BleepingComputer.com
- "RIP:Google Reader Meets Its Inevitable End" Mat Honan *Wired*

Week 8

October 15th, Tuesday (Fall Break)

- NO CLASS

October 17th, Thursday

- *Net Smart* (134-145)
- "How to Storify. Why to Storify" Pete Rorabaugh and Jeese Stommel *HybridPedagogy*

Week 9

October 22nd, Tuesday

- *Net Smart* (147-173)

October 24th, Thursday

- Library Day

Week 10

October 29th, Tuesday

- *Net Smart* (173-187)

October 31st, Thursday

- *Net Smart* (191-215)

- Network Analysis

Week 11
November 5th, Tuesday
- *Net Smart* (215-238)

November 7th, Thursday
- *Everything is a Remix* (Watch Parts 1-4)

Week 12
November 12th, Tuesday
- "The Selfish Gene" Richard Dawkins
- "If It Doesn't Spread It's Dead" Henry Jenkins

November 14th, Thursday
- Copyright and Plagirism Penn State Libraries
- Creative Commons: About the Licenses Creative Commons (be sure to watch the video "Wanna Work Together")

Week 13
November 19th, Tuesday
- "The Hive" Marshall Poe. *The Atlantic*
- Wikipedia: Five Pillars Wikipedia

November 21st, Thursday
- Collaboration Tools

Week 14
November 26th, Tuesday
- *Net Smart* 239-253

November 28th, Thursday (Thanksgiving Break)
- NO CLASS

Week 15
December 3rd, Tuesday
- Platform and Tools Presentations

December 5th, Thursday
- Platform and Tools Presentations