

Philosophy 366, A2 - Fall 2016

Computers and Culture

Time	MWF 1300-1350
Location	NRE 2-090
Instructor	John Simpson
Office	TBD
email	john.simpson@ualberta.ca
Office Hours	WF 1400-1500, <i>by appointment</i>
Course Prerequisites	None
Community Service-Learning Component	Optional
Past or Representative Evaluative Course Material Available	Exam Registry

Course Description and Objectives

This course is interested in the intersections between computers and the society that computing practices are a part of. These intersections will include theory and practice, past and present, present and future, haves and have nots, art and science, and the material and the immaterial. We will look at original documents by the engineers, theorists, and artists who developed personal computing and the Web and ask about what they thought were the problems that computing would solve and what they presupposed about how we think, interact and work. To do this we will read closely selections of the original works of a number of the important pioneers and critics of computing and media. We will also engage in aspects of the current culture of computing to assist us in reflecting on the nature of contemporary computer use.

The specific topics of focus for class this term will be the place of computer programming in formal educational systems, the role and impact of social media, and critically reading video games. The overall goal of the class is to have students engage with these topics such that they are able to both ask and answer challenging and relevant questions after quickly synthesizing new content and ideas.

We have a partnership with the [Maker Space at the Edmonton Public Library](#) as part of the University of Alberta's [Community Service-Learning Program \(CSL\)](#). The CSL component is

optional and students must opt-in to participate (see description below). While *all students* will take part in a tour of the facility those choosing to take part in the CSL component will need to spend additional time at the Stanley Milner Branch over the term designing or running instructional programming related to the technology they have available.

Note that you are not expected to be proficient at computing related skills like programming to either simply participate or do well in this class. You are expected to pay attention to the discourse about computing in the popular culture, to participate in the (re)creation of important pieces of media, and to reflect on the value and nature of these tasks through diligent contributions to in-class discussions and assignments.

Texts

Required: [Social Media: A Critical Introduction, Christian Fuchs, 2014](#). This text is available from various sources---including the U of A bookstore---for approximately \$60. This text is required because we will use it regularly in class and the content is not available elsewhere. It provides a solid foundation in the application of critical theory to the study of social media, a major focus of this class.

Optional: [The New Media Reader, Wardrip-Fruin & Nick Montfort \(eds.\), 2003](#). This text is available from various sources---including the U of A bookstore---for approximately \$75. While we will be using content from this text regularly in class this content is available elsewhere. It is an excellent text with many important articles (more than we can possibly cover in a single term class) and would be a welcome addition to the library of anyone interested in the topics of this class.

Website

For simplicity and openness this class will use a GitHub repository as its website: <https://github.com/symulation/UofA-PHIL366-F16>. The majority of relevant materials for this class may be found here, including the most recent and accurate version of this syllabus.

It should also be noted that the class will be encouraged to use either [Google Docs](#) or [Etherpad](#) to take collaborative notes during class. We'll sort out which during the first few classes.

Evaluation

There are two evaluation options available. The theory centred evaluation option targets students who are looking for a traditional class experience that involves focus on engaging primarily with theory and the time constraints of a classroom environment. The theory-practice blended evaluation option targets students who are looking for a class experience that exposes them to some of the complexities of the real-world as they relate to the topic of computers in education.

The theory centred evaluation option is the default. Those wishing to opt-in to the theory-

practice evaluation option must read the Community Service-Learning section of this syllabus and following the instructions there.

Theory Centred Evaluation

Component	Weight	Due
Five pieces of draft writing	10% (all or nothing)	see description
Three best pieces of revised writing	60% (3 x 20%)	see description
Final exam	30%	December 15

Five pieces of draft writing must be submitted over the term that are further developments of in-class discussions. To count towards the "all or nothing" criteria these initial pieces of writing must be at least 500 words each and be assessed as "acceptable" based on the draft assessment rubric. These must be submitted within one week of the conclusion of the in-class discussion that they draw on. These five pieces of writing will be assessed on an "all or nothing" basis. If all five pieces are submitted and meet the criteria then the full 10% will be assessed. If even one piece is subpar or not submitted then the mark given for this section will be 0.

At least three pieces of draft writing---one from each of topics 2, 3, and 4---must be revised and expanded to at least 1000 words based on the comments received and resubmitted. At most *one* of these can be further revised. These revisions must be resubmitted no later than two weeks after either the return of the draft with comments *or* the conclusion of the topic as a whole, whichever is later. The best revised piece from each topic will make the contribution to the final grade.

Theory-Practice Blended Evaluation

Component	Weight	Due
Three pieces of draft writing	5% (all or nothing)	see description
Best piece of revised writing	20%	see description
CSL Experience Reflections	25% (4 x 6.25%)	see description
Activity/Lesson Plan	20%	November 21
Final exam	30%	December 15

Three pieces of draft writing must be submitted over the term that are further developments of in-class discussions. To count towards the "all or nothing" criteria these initial pieces of writing must be at least 500 words each and be assessed as "acceptable" based on the draft assessment rubric. These must be submitted within one week of the conclusion of the in-class

discussion that they draw on. These five pieces of writing will be assessed on an "all or nothing" basis. If all five pieces are submitted and meet the criteria then the full 10% will be assessed. If even one piece is subpar or not submitted then the mark given for this section will be 0.

At least one piece of draft writing---from either topics 3 or 4---must be revised and expanded to at least 1000 words based on the comments received and resubmitted. At most *one* of these can be further revised. These revisions must be resubmitted no later than two weeks after either the return of the draft with comments *or* the conclusion of the topic as a whole, whichever is later. The best revised piece will make the contribution to the final grade.

In addition to this writing four reflections on the CSL experience must be submitted during the term. There is no minimum word limit on these but they must be based on one of at least three (possibly two, this will be confirmed once the number of participants in this stream is clear) sessions run with children through the program.

Lastly, students in this stream will produce a simple, introductory activity/lesson plan for the EPL Makerspace that features one or more of the technologies available there. This is likely 2-3 pages in length.

Community Service-Learning

This course has a partnership with the [Edmonton Public Library \(EPL\) Makerspace](https://www.ualberta.ca/community-service-learning/) that will allow students who opt-in to the [Community Service-Learning (CSL)] (<https://www.ualberta.ca/community-service-learning/>) stream to spend time working on education programs for/with children at the EPL Makerspace. Students who opt-in to this stream will follow the theory-practice evaluation path that substitutes reflections and educational program development work for some of the papers and writing that other students in the course will be responsible for.

A full description of the CSL component will be given in class on September 7th and more details will be available on the course website by then as well.

To opt-in students must attend the orientation at the EPL Makerspace on September 9th (or make arrangements for an alternate orientation directly with the EPL Makerspace) *and* email the instructor before 11am on September 12th.

Instructor Availability

I am currently on parental leave from my usual role at the university (Compute Canada's Humanities and Social Sciences Specialist) so I have parental duties to navigate as well as those of this class. The office hours posted here are times that I expect to be available for meetings. I can be available at other times as well but know in advance that my daughter (<1 year) may need to accompany me. Beyond this you need to know four things about my availability:

1. I will **ALWAYS** do what I can to help you within the guidelines of what is fair,

reasonable, and within the academic policy of the university.

2. **Regardless of when you would like to meet with me--even during office hours--please coordinate the time in advance.**
3. **Email is the best way to contact me.** Please have your subject line begin with PHIL366 followed by the subject. If you do not include this then your email may not be given the attention it deserves. You can expect a response within one business day (usually less). Do not use the eClass messaging feature to contact me since this makes certain replies problematic.
4. **A face-to-face meeting is the best way to overcome misunderstandings.** If you have any questions or concerns regarding the class—including everything from feeling lost or bored to not understanding course material or how you are being graded, or the need for an exception to a policy outlined here or on an assignment—come and see me ASAP. There are very few problems with logistics or understanding that cannot be solved easily with an early discussion. Hiding or running away does not help you understand the material or get back on track.

Recording

Audio or video recording of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the instructor or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Recorded material is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the instructor.

Class Materials

Slides and presentations will generally be made available on the course website, typically within 24 hours of being used.

In most cases all handouts will be available on the course website at least 24 hours before the class they will be used in. You are responsible for bringing them to class. Copies will be provided in class on any occasion where handouts are required and were not posted 24 hours in advance. If you miss a class where handouts were provided then you are responsible for acquiring them from the course website.

Handing in Your Work

Unless otherwise stated on an assignment all term work is to be submitted by email to john.simpson@ualberta.ca. To ensure that there are no formatting issues across programs all submitted work must be as a PDF. To assist with managing the numerous files that will be sent in this way, you must follow the instructions in each assignment description for naming the files that you hand in.

Attendance, Absences, and Missed Grade Components

Regular attendance is essential for optimal performance in any course. In cases of potentially excusable absences due to illness or domestic affliction, notify your instructor by e-mail within two days. Regarding absences that may be excusable and procedures for addressing course components missed as a result, consult sections 23.3(1) and 23.5.6 of the University Calendar. Be aware that unexcused absences will result in partial or total loss of the grade for the “attendance and participation” component(s) of a course, as well as for any assignments that are not handed-in or completed as a result.

In this class there is no direct participation or attendance component but heavy parts of the assignments and the final exam will be drawn from class content, including discussions. It is expected that students come to each and every class after the first with two things:

1. *A working familiarity with the assigned readings* for both that day and all previous days. Typically this means that the student has summarized the article either through annotations in the margin (recommended) or some other means to the point that they can quickly extract statements and ideas from the article with the aid of their summary. Difficult passages that are not well understood should be marked for review. Note that simply highlighting text is a poor tactic for preparing for class since it does not require any analysis or synthesis on the part of the student.
2. *A way to access the Internet for checking facts and the like during class discussions.* Both a laptop and a phone are good examples of this. Make sure not to let the other functions of these tools distract you from the task at hand though.

Failure to bring these things will not hurt your grade directly but it will certainly hurt it indirectly since class will proceed on the assumption that students are prepared and those who are not will be left behind.

Policy for Late Assignments

Unless otherwise specified, late work loses 25% for every new 24-hour period that begins following the specified time that the work was due (e.g. work handed in one minute after it is due loses 25%). Justifications for late work are expected within 48 hours.

The time that counts is the stamp in the instructor's inbox, not in your sent mail folder.

Student Accessibility Services

If you have special needs that could affect your performance in this class, please let me know during the first week of the term so that appropriate arrangements can be made. If you are not already registered with Student Accessibility Services, contact their office immediately (1-800 SUB; ssdsrec@ualberta.ca; 780-492-3381; www.ssds.ualberta.ca).

Marking & Grading

Any student interested in an approximation of their standing in the course should speak with the instructor to get one and may do so at any time.

Your instructor will be adhering to the University's Assessment & Grading Policy and students can reasonably expect that raw scores (marks) will be compared to the normal grade distribution for the appropriate course level within in the Faculty of Arts and the target (historical) mean for 300-level classes at 3.0.

However, there is no automatic translation of raw percentile scores (marks) to the 4 point scale (grades) since this would (unrealistically) presume consistency in the setting of exams and assignments across years and instructors. *Very roughly* (as in, "there will likely be at least a few percentage points of shift up or down from these targets"), your instructor will be aiming for the following translation of percentile scores (marks) into final grades once all the percentile scores from the term have been aggregated using the weightings given in the evaluation section:

Percentile Score Cut-Off	Letter Grade	Grade Point
90%	A+	4.0
85%	A	4.0
80%	A-	3.7
77%	B+	3.3
74%	B	3.0
70%	B-	2.7
67%	C+	2.3
64%	C	2.0
60%	C-	1.7
55%	D+	1.3
50%	D	1.0
<50%	F	0

Past evaluative materials are available from the SU Exam Registry and may be made available in class as well.

The official drop date for a full refund is October. A final grade of W is available for withdrawals made before November 30.

Academic Integrity

The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at <http://www.governance.ualberta.ca>) and avoid any behaviour that could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.

The code of student behaviour is lengthy, but it would be well worth your while to make sure that you fully understand what constitutes cheating, plagiarism and violations of safety or dignity. An appropriate summary may be found at www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/governance/StudentAppealsCheatsheet.cfm. The “Truth-In-Education” handbook or website (<http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/TIE/>) is also useful. Note that that neither of these summary resources are a substitute for reading the full code.

Learning and Working Environment

The Faculty of Arts is committed to ensuring that all students, faculty and staff are able to work and study in an environment that is safe and free from discrimination and harassment. It does not tolerate behaviour that undermines that environment. The department urges anyone who feels that this policy is being violated to:

- Discuss the matter with the person whose behaviour is causing concern; or
- If that discussion is unsatisfactory, or there is concern that direct discussion is inappropriate or threatening, discuss it with the Chair of the Department.

For additional advice or assistance regarding this policy you may contact the student ombudservice: <http://www.ombudservice.ualberta.ca/>. Information about the University of Alberta Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures is described in UAPPOL at <https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/>.

Academic Honesty

All students should consult the information provided by the [Office of Student Conduct and Accountability](#) regarding avoiding cheating and plagiarism in particular and academic dishonesty in general (see the (Academic Integrity Undergraduate Handbook) [<http://www.osja.ualberta.ca/en/Students/UndergraduateHandbook.aspx>] and Information for Students). If in doubt about what is permitted in this class, ask the instructor.

An instructor or coordinator who is convinced that a student has handed in work that he or she could not possibly reproduce without outside assistance is obliged, out of consideration of fairness to other students, to report the case to the Associate Dean of the Faculty. See the [Academic Discipline Process](#).

Content Overview

Class this term will devote approximately four weeks each to each of three topics. Exact content and the distribution of this content will be available on the eClass page. Important core readings that can be expected are listed here.

Introduction to Core Concepts

September 2 - 14

Review of foundational concepts and authors related to the rise of computers both in and of themselves and as machines that both shape and are shaped by culture. It is expected that these authors will be returned to throughout the term so they will only be given brief introductions here and the details filled in later as required.

- [Bush, *As We May Think*](#) (Note that there are no pictures in this (*The Atlantic*) version, these were added in the abridged version that was printed in *Life*. The *New Media Reader* version uses *The Atlantic* text with *Life* pictures.) [Doug Englebart's annotated copy](#).
- [Englebart's "Mother of All Demos"](#)
- [Turing, *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*](#) (Note the site that is providing this article.)
- [Nelson, selections from *Computer Lib / Dream Machine*](#)
- [Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*](#)
- [McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Chapter 1 - "The Medium is the Message"](#)

Computer Programming in Formal Educational Systems

September 16 - October 10

- [CBC, *Back to school: Canada lagging in push to teach kids computer coding*](#)
- [Bajarin, *Why Basic Coding Should Be a Mandatory Class in Junior High*](#)
- [Papert, *Selections from Mindstorms: children, computers, and powerful ideas*](#) (Pages 19-37 and 78-93)
- [Kay and Goldberg, *Personal Dynamic Media*](#)
- [Nelson, *No more teacher's dirty looks*](#)
- [The Guardian, *How to teach coding and programming*](#)

Impacts of Social Media

October 12 - November 4

For this topic we will work through much of Christian Fuch's [Social Media: A Critical](#)

[Introduction](#). He uses a critical theory heavily grounded in the works of Karl Marx to investigate social media and we will make use of both the mechanics of his arguments and consider their conclusions.

Critically Reading Video Games

November 14 - December 5

We will build on the skills acquired looking at the previous topics to begin to critically evaluate computer games.

- [Turtle, *Video Games and Holding Power*, Selection from *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*](#)
- [Bogost, Chapter 1 from *Persuasive Games*](#)
- [Bogost, *Gamification is Bullshit*](#)
- [Flanagan, Chapter 1 from *Critical Play*](#)
- Saklofske, *Can There Be A Feminist War Game?*

Review

December 7

We'll use this last day to ensure that students are prepared for the final exam.

Policy about course outlines can be found in Section 23.4(2) of the University Calendar.