

**Fall 2013**  
**English 450-01**  
**Free and Open Source Culture**  
**Tue/Thu 12:30-1:45PM**  
**Lowenthal Hall 3225**

**Course Syllabus**

**Instructor:** Dr. Amit Ray, Associate Professor, Dept. of English

**Contact:** Dr. Ray-- axrgsl@rit.edu (e-mail); College of Liberal Arts, Room 2309 (office)

**Office Hours:** Tue/Thu 8:30-10AM and by appointment

**Course Description**

This course charts the development of the Free Culture movement by examining the changing relationship between authorship and cultural production based on a variety of factors: law, culture, commerce and technology. In particular, we will examine the rise of the concept of the individual author during the last three centuries. Using a variety of historical and theoretical readings, we will note how law and commerce have come to shape the prevailing cultural norms surrounding authorship, while also examining lesser known models of collaborative and distributed authoring practices. This background will inform our study of the rapid social transformations wrought by media technologies in last two centuries, culminating with the challenges and opportunities brought forth by digital media, mobile communications and networked computing. Students will learn about the role of Free Software in highlighting changing authorship practices, facilitating new business and economic models and providing a foundation for conceiving of Free Culture.

**This will be a reading intensive course. Though background technical knowledge is not necessary, the readings are complex and will require disciplined attention and patience.**

**Grades**

- **Final Essay or Project:** 40% of your final grade will be determined by the quality of an essay that you propose and write. In addition to exploring texts and themes from the course, you may propose additional areas or texts for inquiry. The paper proposal and abstract is due no later than the beginning of Week Eight.  
**Final Project:** In lieu of the final essay, students may individually or collaboratively submit a project –creative or analytical or some combination. Your project can take any form (writing, film, painting, animation, sculpture, multimedia, machinima, software, a musical piece, etc.) as long as it deals with topics, issues and/or works that we have studied in this course. The prerequisite is that you draw up a formal proposal in order to obtain our input and final approval. If you are considering this option, please consult with us sooner rather than later. We will not consider proposals after the sixth week of classes.

- 35% of your final grade will be determined by considerations related to attendance and active classroom participation.
- 25% of your final grade will be determined by your Response Paper/Leading of Class Discussion.

### **Grading Policy**

The qualitative designations below are for the final course grade and are taken from the *RIT Undergraduate Bulletin*. They will correspond to the following numerical ranges.

Excellent A	90-100
Good B	80-89
Satisfactory C	70-79
Minimal Pass D	60-69
Failure F	0-59

Final grades are not automatically “rounded up.” Borderline grades will be determined at the professor’s discretion, taking into account such factors as class participation, class progress, and indication of willingness to improve.

### **Attendance, Quizzes, and Exams**

The following statement is from the *RIT Undergraduate Bulletin*: “Students are expected to fulfill the attendance requirements of their individual classes. Absences, for whatever reason, do not relieve students from responsibility for the normal requirements of the course. In particular, it is the student’s responsibility to make individual arrangements prior to missing class.”

- Attendance is not only expected; it is *required*. Quizzes, exams, and papers will all be structured so as to incorporate in-class discussion.
- If you miss a quiz or exam, there will be no make-ups unless you have an excused absence. An excused absence requires one of the following documents: 1) a dated note from a doctor or the campus health service, 2) a note from the office of the Dean of your college, or 3) a dated obituary of a family member. In the case of recognized religious observance, prior written notification is required in advance.
- Quizzes and exams will be distributed at the beginning of class. These assignments are allotted specific amounts of time to complete; additional time will not be provided for late students.
- Attendance requires more than mere physical presence. Appropriate classroom demeanor is expected. This means: 1) no cell phones, 2) no laptops or tape recorders (unless necessitated by a documented disability; 3) no sidebar conversations; and 4) no sleeping.

### **Late Paper Policy**

- Papers are due the *beginning* of class on the date indicated on the syllabus. • Late papers will be downgraded 5 points/day.

### **Honor Code Policy**

- Academic honesty is a prerequisite for all RIT courses. Appropriate disciplinary

measures— potentially including being given a failing grade for the course—will be taken if anyone is found cheating. Plagiarism, the act presenting other people's writing or ideas as your own, will be viewed as cheating.

### **Other Policies**

- No grades of incomplete (I) will be given except for medical emergencies and personal situations that have been cleared through the office of the Dean of your own college.

### **Possible resources (texts, references, computer packages, etc.)**

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author" (1966)

Benkler, Yochai. "Coase's Penguin" (2002) and *The Wealth of Networks* (2006).

Derrida, Jaques. "The Law of Genre" (1980)

Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" (1967)

Jaszi, Peter. "On the Author Effect: Contemporary Copyright and Collective Creativity" (1994)

Johns, Adrian. *The Nature of the Book* (1999) and *Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wars from Guttenberg to Gates* (2010).

Kelty, Chris. *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software*. (2006)

Lessig, Lawrence. *Free Culture* (2004) and *Remix* (2008)

Galison, Peter; Biagioli, Mario. Scientific Authorship: Credit and Intellectual Property in Science (2002)

Stallman, Richard. "Free Software and the GNU Project" (2006)

Vaidhyanathan, Siva. *Copyrights and Copywrongs* (2001)

Viegas, Fernanda; Wattenberg, Martin; Dave, Kushal. "Studying Cooperation and Conflict between Authors with History Flow Visualizations" (2005)

Woodmansee, Martha. *The Author, Art, and the Market* (1994)

### **Topics (outline):**

- 6.1 What is an author? Historical precursors and contemporary controversies.
- 6.2 Enlightenment, Law and Print: Philosophy, Property Rights and the Rise of Romantic Authorship
- 6.3 Imagined Communities: Media, Literacy and Public Culture
- 6.4 Copyrights and Copywrongs: Changing Legal Perspectives on Media, Property and Ownership
- 6.5 Immaterial Mediation: Digital Analogies and Legacy Media.
- 6.6 Free Culture: Free Software, Distributed Computing and Massively Distributed Cultural Forms.
- 6.7 InfoWars: Information, Access and Democracy

**Intended course learning outcomes and associated assessment methods of those outcomes.**

Course Learning Outcome	Assessment Method
<p>Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to</p> <p>7.1 To historicize the changing concept of authorship</p> <p>7.2 To understand how diverse factors affect the manner in which cultural products are created, disseminated and consumed.</p> <p>7.3 To understand and articulate how the development of new mediums impacts earlier forms.</p> <p>7.4 To recognize the rapidly changing global circumstances which have given rise to Free Software and the Free Culture Movement</p>	<p>In each case the instructor will assess student success in achieving these outcomes by means of appropriate class discussions, written assignments, exams, oral presentations, multi-media projects and other graded activities.</p>