COMS 465: Computer-Mediated Communication

Spring Semester 2019

Location: DuSable Hall 218
Time: MW 3:30-4:45pm
Instructor: Dr. David J. Gunkel
Department: Communication
Office: Reavis 112
Office Hours: MW 1:00-2:00 & by appointment
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Course Description

This undergraduate seminar addresses recent innovations in computer-mediated communication (CMC), providing students with the following:

- Critical overview of the significant technological developments in computers, digital media, data networks, and information systems
- Facility with the important questions, issues, and problems that shape contemporary debates and conversations about CMC
- Knowledge of the influential individuals and organizations that define the field and help shape our increasingly technologically dependent society.

In the process, students not only investigate recent innovations in communication technology but develop proficiency with the literature, history, major theories, and important practices of CMC. The objective of the course is to cultivate informed, critical citizens and decision makers, who are confident dealing with both current and future technologies.

Texts & Materials

Paul E. Ceruzzi. Computing: A Concise History. The MIT Press, 2012. ISBN: 9780262517676

David J. Gunkel. Of Remixology: Ethics and Aesthetics After Remix. The MIT Press, 2016. ISBN: 9780262033930

David J. Gunkel. Gaming the System: Deconstructing Video Games, Game Studies and Virtual Worlds. Indiana University Press, 2018. ISBN: 9780253035721

These texts are required and **must** be procured by all students enrolled in the course. In addition to these traditional print materials, we will employ a number of on-line texts. These materials are indicated in the course calendar and are required reading.

Objectives

Seminar members will be introduced to and become proficient with the following:

- *Theory and Concepts.* Students will know the terminology, fundamental texts, and basic concepts of computer-mediated communication. They will be able to talk the talk of CMC and feel confident discussing its social, political, and philosophical aspects.

- *Technology and Computer Literacy. Students* will learn and develop practical skills with CMC technology. They will learn how to employ the core technology of the web, *Hypertext Markup Language (HTML)*, to create basic web pages and Internet applications.
- *Critical Thinking and Information Literacy.* Students will practice critical evaluations of texts, media, and technology. They will learn how to question information, assess its importance, and communicate their findings.

Responsibilities

Preparation - Students are responsible for reading and preparing all assigned class materials in accordance with the course calendar. Reading involves not only looking at the text but engaging the material in a thoughtful and organized fashion. Note taking, outlining, and other reading strategies are highly recommended.

Course Structure - This class is not a lecture-course. It is a seminar. Therefore, the responsibility for working through the material and structuring an effective learning environment falls to each member of the seminar.

Attendance - Because the environment of the course is interactive and collaborative, it is necessary that students attend and participate in every class meeting. Attendance is, therefore, mandatory. Seminar participants are permitted two (2) unexcused absences over the course of the semester. After that, the final grade will be reduced by 20 points per additional absence. This guideline is not inflexible and is subject to change due to individual circumstances. This alteration, however, must be confirmed with the instructor. When possible, this should be accomplished before the additional absence(s). In the case of any absence, it is the student's responsibility to make-up the missed work by obtaining notes from classmates or reading the assigned material. The instructor will not provide individual instruction for students who have missed a regularly scheduled class meeting.

Activities - Student learning and achievement is assessed by three activities: a presentation, in-class exercises, and a mid-term and final examination.

1. Presentation - One of the skills necessary to live and work successfully in an age of information is the ability to process, organize, and present data. For this reason, the course offers you the opportunity to exercise, develop, and demonstrate this ability that has been and will continue to be an integral part of your educational experience. Each class meeting one or more seminar members will provide a formal presentation (approximately 20-30 minutes) of the texts/topics that are to be considered that class period. These presentations are not book reports. They must be critical engagements with the material that are designed to initiate and to structure seminar discussion. The manner of presentation is wide open, and you are encouraged to be creative and innovative. In presenting the material, each presenter is required to incorporate some mode of presentation technology. This may include video, overheads, web materials, PowerPoint graphics, etc. The presentations will be formally evaluated using the following evaluation form:

Evaluation Form

Sign-up Procedure - A sign-up sheet will be circulated during the second class meeting. You are encouraged to browse the course calendar to decide on a presentation topic and date. It is your responsibility to remember the date of your presentation and plan accordingly. Missing your presentation will constitute failure of the assignment.

2. Maker Exercises - Students will complete four "learn-by-doing" exercises designed to provide hands-on practical knowledge of digital media technology and to assist in the development of basic computer/digital media skills. These exercises will be developed, executed, and evaluated during specially designated class meetings. Students who are absent for these lab sessions, will need to complete the work on their own outside class and present the results to the instructor no later than 1 week after the scheduled lab session.

- Code - Learn how computers are programmed and function by writing basic Javascript programs.
- Web Content - Use the core technology of the web (HTML) to produce basic Internet applications.
- Remix - Use audio processing and editing tools to create an original digital remix.
- Avatar - Create an avatar and explore the opportunities and challenges of online identity.

3. Mid-Term and Final Examinations - There will be two examinations, one at the mid-term and another at the conclusion of the course. The final examination will not be comprehensive. It will only concern course materials covered since the completion of the mid-term. Each examination will consist of four sections:

Talk the Talk - Define technical terms and acronyms (i.e. URL, Hypertext, ARPANET).

It's Who You Know - Identify major figures in the field of CMC (i.e. J. C. R. Licklider, Jaron Lanier, Donna Haraway).

Short Answers - Provide brief responses to short answer questions (i.e. The Internet has been described as a "decentralized web of heterogeneous processors." What does this phrase mean?).

Essay - Write an essay in response to a question. This part of the exam will be written on the computer and students may use both word processing tools (spell check) and Internet resources in constructing their responses.

Questions in the first three parts will be based on course materials and our investigation of these materials in seminar discussions. They will examine your understanding of terminology, people, and basic concepts that are necessary for a working knowledge of advanced communication technologies and computer-based systems. The essay question will provoke critical reflection on or assessment of a particular issue previously discussed in seminar meetings. It will assess your ability to reflect critically on a contended issue and your skill in communicating this assessment in writing. Several days before the examination, an on-line study guide will be published. The study guide will list all elements that need to be reviewed prior to the exam. The best way to prepare for the examination is to complete the study guide. And the only way to complete the study guide is to read the course material, to attend class, and to take notes during discussion. If you read the material and participate in class, you should have no problem with the examination. If you do not read the material and are consistently absent, you should expect to have significant trouble with the examinations.

Grading

Evaluation Distribution (400 Total Points)

Presentation = 100 points
Exercises = 100 points (4 x 25 points per project)
Mid Term Exam = 100 points
Final Exam = 100 points

Grade Scale

A = 369-400
A- = 360-368
B+ = 353-359
B = 328-352
B- = 320-347
C+ = 313-319
C = 280-312
D = 240-279

Policies

Academic Integrity - Good academic work must be based on honesty. The attempt of any student to present as his or her own work that which he or she has not produced is regarded by the faculty and administration as a serious offense. Students are considered to have cheated if they copy the work of another during an examination or turn in a paper or an assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else. Students are responsible for plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging those sources or if they paraphrase ideas from such sources without acknowledging them. Students responsible for, or assisting others in, either cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, quiz, or examination may receive a grade of F for the course involved and may be suspended or dismissed from the university

Classroom Conduct - This course encourages students to form, express, and defend their own ideas. In order to ensure a fair and equitable environment for the open discussion of these ideas, students agree to be respectful and civil in their interactions with each other and

with the instructor. Debate and criticism will be directed to ideas and the mode of their expression and not to the individual person who articulates it.

Accessibility - Northern Illinois University is committed to providing an accessible educational environment in collaboration with the Disability Resource Center (DRC). Any student requiring an academic accommodation due to a disability should let his or her faculty member know as soon as possible. Students who need academic accommodations based on the impact of a disability will be encouraged to contact the DRC if they have not done so already. The DRC is located on the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 or drc@niu.edu.

Terms & Conditions - The policies, procedures, and responsibilities articulated on this website are considered binding and in full force and effect for the entire academic semester during which a student is enrolled in the course. By registering for the course, students consent to these stipulations and affirm that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by everything contained herein. Only students who officially drop the course or withdraw from the university will be considered to be released of these responsibilities prior to the recording of final grades. Additionally, exceptions to and/or alterations in the policies, procedures, and responsibilities listed on this website will only be considered in situations of extreme hardship, documented learning disability, or medical emergency. In all cases, the instructor will be considered to be the final arbiter of any request for exception.

Calendar

Introduction

14 January - Introduction
- Course Website

Computer

16 January - The Computer
- Ceruzzi - *Computing* - ch. 1-5
- Computer History Museum - First 2000 Years of Computing

21 January - MLK Holiday
- No Class Meeting

23 January - History of Computing
- Ceruzzi - *Computing* - ch. 1-5
- Timeline of Computer History

28 January - Software & Programming
- Timeline - Software & Languages
- Sutcliffe - Hacking the Future (video)
- Maker Exercise #1 - Code

Networks

30 January - The Internet
- Ceruzzi - *Computing* - ch. 6
- Brief History of the Internet

4 February - World Wide Web
- Computer History Museum - The Web
- Conversation with Tim Berners-Lee (video)

6 February - Web Programming
- The Evolution of the Web
- W3Schools - HTML Tutorial
- Maker Exercise #2 - Web Content

11-13 February - Robot/AI Conference (Utrecht)
- No Class Meeting
- Mid-Term Exam Study Guide

Midterm

18 February - Midterm Exam
- Midterm Examination

Net Effects & Debates

20 February - Net Neutrality
- Wu - The Fight for Net Neutrality (video)
- Wired Guide to Net Neutrality
- Gharakheili - Perspectives on Net Neutrality

25 February - Digital Divides
- Gunkel - Second Thoughts
- Molinari - Let's Bridge the Digital Divide! (video)

27 February - Communication & Community
- Carey - A Cultural Approach to Communication
- Turkle - Connected, but Alone? (video)

4 March - Privacy
- Acquisti - Why Privacy Matters
- Internet Privacy
- Privacy & Social Media

6 March - Cryptocurrency & Blockchain
- Fox32 News - Bitcoin Introduction
- Brito & Castillo - Bitcoin Primer
- Gupta - Blockchain for Dummies - ch. 1 & 2

Spring Break

11 March - Spring Break
- No Class Meeting

13 March - Spring Break
- No Class Meeting

Digital Media & Remix

18 March - Remix Introduction
- Gunkel - *Of Remixology* - Introduction & ch. 1
- Ferguson - Everything is a Remix (video)

20 March - Remix & Mashup
- Galor - *Rip: A Remix Manifesto* (video)
- Maker Exercise #3 - Remix
- Remix Exercise Resources

25-27 March - AAAI Conference (Stanford)
- Complete Remix Exercise

1 April - Remixology
- Gunkel - *Of Remixology* - ch. 2 & ch. 6

Virtual Worlds/Digital Lives

3 April - Computer Games & Gaming
- Computer History Museum - Computer Games
- Gunkel - *Gaming the System* - Introduction

8 April - Avatars & Identity
- Maker Exercise #4 - Avatar
- https://avachara.com/avatar/
- https://en.vonvon.me/quiz/390
- http://doppelme.com/create/register.asp

10 April - Avatars & Identity
- Gunkel - *Gaming the System* - ch. 2
- Dibbell - A Rape in Cyberspace

15 April - Virtual Worlds
- Castronova - Virtual Worlds
- Gunkel - *Gaming the System* - ch. 3

17 April - Bots & Other Things
- Gunkel - *Gaming the System* - ch. 4
- Epstein - From Russia with Love

Cyborgs, AI & Robots

22 April - Posthumanism & Cyborgs

- Case - We are All Cyborgs Now (video)
- Gunkel - Resistance is Futile

24 April - Artificial Intelligence

- Slavin - How Algorithms Shape Our World (video)
- Gunkel - Mind the Gap

29 April - Robots

- Darling - Ethical Issues in Human-Robot Interaction (video)
- Gunkel - The Other Question
- Jibo demo

Conclusion

1 May - Conclusions & Projections

- Future Opportunities
- Course Evaluation
- Final Exam Study Guide

6 May (4pm)

- Final Examination