

University of Washington
Masters of Communication in Digital Media
Autumn 2004

COM 538: Theories and Criticism of Communication Technologies
(AKA Evolution and Trends in Digital Media and Technologies)

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Office: Communication 251b
Classroom: BAL 302
Time: Mondays, 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.
4 October – 7 December

1. Course Overview

This course is an entry point into the Department of Communication's Master of Communication in Digital Media program, for those who want to specialize and do research in this growing field.

The course focuses on the past, present, and future of digital media, in contrast to traditional media outlets studied in most communication programs. However, we *will* examine the connections between new technology, traditional media content, economics, social and individual influences, and communications theory. In short, we will explore what may be truly new and revolutionary about digital media, and what may be a continuation of traditional technology, content, and audience uses.

We will also examine information and telecommunications technologies that play a significant role shaping the modern society. These include the Internet, broadband communications systems, cellular telephony, wireless networking, and digital, cable, and satellite TV.

Throughout the course, we will investigate five major topics:

- Content creation
- Content distribution
- Content consumption
- Consumer applications and
- Corporate applications.

While we will examine these topics from a traditional “Who said What to Whom through What Channel with what Effect” model of mediated communication, will also move beyond this tradition “transmission approach” to explore a “ritual approach” to digital media and examine how the technology itself shapes our concepts and deeply rooted mythologies about self, culture and group membership.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Acquire an understanding of the historical context, current trends and future projections of digital communication methods
- Explore how digital media differ from traditional media, both technically and in their social influence
- Explore how digital media influence how communities and individuals relate and behave online
- Investigate the application of digital technology and how these applications may affect democratic societies
- Develop an awareness of the unintended consequences of new media technology

Course Requirements

Required readings include book chapters and articles from scholarly journals, trade magazines, and popular publications. Assigned readings will be available on-line through the library eReserve system. In addition, topical readings on-line and in print may be assigned when appropriate.

2. Course Structure and Teaching Strategies

Teaching methods for this course will include lectures, video demonstrations, student presentations, guest lecturers, reading, and writing assignments.

The course instructor will coordinate all class material, keep in close touch with each student in order to assess and meet individual needs, and evaluate all course assignments. Material will be available on the class web site:

<http://courses.washington.edu/com538/2004/>

Many classes will feature a guest lecturer who is a leading professional or scholar in interactive digital media. Class discussions are also a key element of the course, and students are encouraged to ask questions, offer their own observations, and share their own experiences with new technology.

Instructor’s Educational Philosophy

My goal is to provide a stimulating environment for learning. Course material includes both theory and application, with an emphasis on application to real world problems and situations. Written and oral reports are required because these skills are needed in

the work environment in general, and in web development, management, and consulting in particular. Students are required to comment and collaborate as these are practical skills; the means used demonstrates theories discussed in class.

3. Evaluation

Three papers are required in this course. Grades are determined as follows:

- 65%, three papers plus proposal
- 25%, class participation
- 10%, final presentation

A. Papers

Each student will choose an industry, issue, or technology and write three interconnected papers. All will be turned in electronically via eSubmit.

- One on history of an industry/issue/technology – due 9 November
- One on its current status – due 23 November
- One on its future – due 13 December

As this is a very broad paper topic, it will be up to each student (with help from the instructor and peers) to develop a specific, appropriate, and innovative focus to each paper. For instance, you may want to choose three case studies that represent past, present and future issues of a particular industry; examine a particular ethical or legal issue; or conduct a practical review of a specific technology.

Requirements:

Combined, the three papers must include *at least* 15 citations from scholarly books or journals. In addition, students should use citations or examples from popular media, news media, or corporate media, as well as personal interviews with media professionals or users.

Each paper should be approximately 8 to 10 pages in length and will be evaluated on quality of analysis, original thought, focus, and clarity of presentation. All work must be original, except for material from clearly attributed sources. A bibliography and footnotes or endnotes will be required for each paper.

Your analysis in each paper should explain and apply at least one theoretical model discussed in the course. For instance, is Uses and Gratifications a good way to examine issues connected to the topic you've chosen? Medium Theory? Diffusion of Innovation?

Each of the three papers must be submitted via eSubmit as a Word document and ideally will be created using Word's outline format. Papers must include endnotes or footnotes. Please use the Chicago Manual of Style as your style guide, as it is the most

commonly used style guide in business. (If you wish to use another style guide, feel free to petition me. Be persuasive!) Papers must be completed on time.

1. Proposal (draft due Friday 15 October; final due Friday 22 October)

The proposal should include the industry/issue/technology to be studied, the focus of the study, a clear and complete explanation of goals, and possible sources and citations for each of the three papers.

Students will use the Peer Review tool to help each other focus the proposals. Students will be assigned to small groups (at random) and expected to provide feedback on all small group member proposals. The sooner you draft a proposal, the sooner you allow feedback!

The following suggestions outline one approach to each paper; recognize that some specific topics may not be relevant to your focus, and you may want to include information and issues that aren't explicitly mentioned here. It's important to keep in touch with me if you have any questions about your paper and the direction you are heading.

1. The Past (due Tuesday 9 November @ 5pm)

Begin this paper with a clear statement of the industry you are studying, your reasons for studying it, your focus, and your goals for all three papers, then specifically introduce your approach to the past of this industry.

Next, provide an overview of the technological, cultural, and economic history of this industry, keeping in mind your focus. What historic events, social and economic trends, and technological developments are important to the development of this industry?

You may also want to explore cultural context. Is this industry based in the West? Specifically in the U.S.? Has the technology historically been used in a particular geographic area or by a particular group of people? Has the cultural context of the industry changed over time?

Keep in mind that you cannot cover the entire history of the industry. You will need to choose which events and trends are most important and decide how far back to go.

Finally, briefly summarize the main points of your paper and introduce the main ideas and goals you plan for the next paper. Be sure to clearly cite your sources. Use information from scholarly books, journal articles, and if appropriate, popular media. You may also want to talk to veteran industry professionals who have seen changes first hand.

2. The Present (due Tuesday 23 November @ 5pm)

It is important to stay focused. Introduce your main points and goals. Next, develop these by describing and analyzing the current state of the industry (or at least the parts of the industry relevant to your focus).

Include, as always, connections to historic, social, cultural, and economic contexts. What is the industry's primary source of revenue? Describe content, distribution, and consumption. Are there particular legal or ethical issues faced by the industry today? If so, what are they? What audiences are targeted by this industry? Is the Digital Divide an issue, and if so, why?

While you should use scholarly and trade publications as sources, you should also talk to industry professionals (and, if appropriate, clients or users).

3. The Future (due 13 December @ 5pm)

This will be the most analytical of the three papers. While you again should use outside sources to bolster your analysis, you will need to use your own knowledge of the topic to express and substantiate your opinion/viewpoint as you hypothesize about future directions/implications.

What is likely to happen to the industry economically? Will audiences or sources of revenue change? If so, why? If not, why not? Will the technology itself change? How? What is this industry or technology likely to look like in five or ten years? What sort of business, legal, or ethical decisions are industry professionals likely to face? What broader social and economic forces will shape the future of this industry/technology?

Use a similar format as in the previous two papers: Introduction, observations and analysis, conclusions.

II. Class Participation, 25%

These points will be based both on participation in the classroom and electronically. Occasionally, the instructor may pose a question or problem to the class and offer participation points for electronic discussion. Students may also suggest questions for class discussion and receive participation credit.

In one class, time will be set aside for students to discuss their own professional media experience, and (if appropriate) show examples of their work. Participation in this discussion will be worth three (3) points.

Proposals:

Providing feedback on other class member proposals is part of the participation grade. You must provide positive and constructive feedback to the members of your small group. We will use the Peer Review tool, which will establish the small group members randomly.

Reading Assignments:

Students are asked to summarize readings to help gain cognitive understanding of material as well as to hone analytical skills. Weekly assignments are not graded, except for completeness. Each week, students are to write a short (two-four paragraph) review of assigned readings and post those comments to the class ePost board; students are required to respond to at least one other student comment. [Total: two posts per week.]

The reading assignment review begins with the readings for Week 2 and are due prior to the start of that week's class; they end at Week 9. You are allowed to "miss" one week's postings – either summary or comments – without penalty.

Throughout the course, students will also read material that they will then summarize for in-class discussion.

Presentation Evaluation:

Students will evaluate one another's presentations, using a scoring sheet provided by the instructor. This, too, is part of the class participation score.

III. Class Presentation: 10%

The final portion of the term project is a formal presentation. Each student will present a concise (10-15 minutes) summary of their term project, highlighting the most relevant and intriguing findings. You may wish to supplement your summary with audio-visual material, such as Powerpoint slides or sound/video clips. The presentation will be evaluated based upon presentation style, engaging content, organization, and creativity.

There is no midterm or final exam.

4. Schedule and Readings

The class meets weekly on Monday from 6 p.m. until 10 p.m., and the schedule is posted on the class web site; net access is essential. Readings are from the text or are available online.

Required text:

- Brian Winston, *Media Technology and Society - A History: From the Telegraph to the Internet*

Recommended texts:

- Dan Gillmor, *We the Media* (eBook available online free)
- Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*
- Lynn Truss, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*
- Kate L. Turabian: *A Manual for Writers*
- University of Chicago Staff, *Chicago Manual of Style*

5. Course Policies

Absences

You are responsible for all assigned readings and materials presented in class lectures. You should be aware that missing class could adversely affect your performance on assignments. It is your responsibility to obtain all materials missed and complete all assignments, even if you missed the class where the assignment was made.

Assignments

All assignments are due when noted. Late submissions will not be accepted, except with advance notice of extenuating circumstances (sudden illness, death in the family, and so forth).

Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and are not tolerated by the University. For more information, please refer to the University's Academic Dishonesty policy.

Courteous Discourse

Whether in class or online, students are expected to conduct themselves with professional courtesy and decorum. Please make constructive comments; flames and insults are not acceptable. Disagree with the idea, not the person!