

IDIS 215: Living in a Digital Society

Syllabus – Spring 2009

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PPHAC 214

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Description

This course considers how society has changed as a result of increased accessibility to information through computer technology. The two main themes are dealing with “information overload” through information literacy and regulating decentralized systems such as the Internet. Topics include Internet regulation in a global society, property rights issues related to file-sharing programs, and issues related to the regulation of Spam.

Goals

- Explain how technology has changed the value and uses of information.
- Find sources of information and determine their appropriateness for a given situation.
- Critically read and evaluate news stories, articles, and other sources of information.
- Describe how decentralized regulation governs the Internet.

Texts

The reading for this course will come from sources including online news services and academic databases of articles. I will distribute some of the articles in class, but in general I will provide information for you to locate the articles on the web or in the library.

Assignments

Only 40% of your work for this course is mandated – you get to choose how you complete the other 60%:

- **Journal** – (40% – Mandatory) Journal activities give you an informal opportunity to think about the course material and respond to in-class activities. You must complete twelve journal assignments during the semester, which is approximately one per week. See pages 5-6 for more details about the format and grading of these assignments.
- **Additional Journal Entries** – (25%) Complete an additional eight journal assignments during the semester. If you select this option, your best twenty journal entries will be graded together for 65% of your grade.

- **Tests** – (15%) Two in-class tests will be given during the semester on Thursday, March 10 and Tuesday, April 21. Each test will contain a variety of short-answer questions as well as one or two questions requiring longer response.
- **Final** – (10%) The final will be held on Thursday, May 7 starting at 1:30 p.m. It will be cumulative, and have a similar format to the tests.
- **Survey Paper or Survey Presentation** – (15%) In these assignments, you will explore how a particular issue related to technology is discussed in both popular and scholarly sources. Using a minimum of ten sources, the survey paper will be three to five pages while the presentation will last approximately 20 minutes. Note: You are not allowed to do both of these assignments. The paper is due Tuesday, March 24, and presentations will occur between Thursday, March 12 and Tuesday, March 24. You are encouraged, but not required, to select topics listed on the schedule below for classes between March 12 and March 24. Other topics on the schedule may not be used for these assignments.
- **Position Paper or Position Presentation** – (20%) The goal of these assignments is for you to argue your position about an issue related to technology. Using at least ten sources, the written paper will be eight to ten pages while the presentation will last approximately 20 minutes. Although not a requirement, I encourage you to do a prospectus or survey presentation if you do one of these assignments. Note: You are not allowed to do both of these assignments. The position paper is due on Thursday, April 30, and the presentations will occur between Thursday, April 23 and Thursday, April 30. The rules for topic selection described above apply for these assignments.
- **Custom Project** – (15 - 20%) I firmly believe you will take more from this course if you are interested in the assignments. If you have an idea for a significant project that fits within the goals of the course, I would love to hear about them.
- **Participation** – (5%) In addition to preparing for class, it is important that you contribute during each class meeting, and I expect you to visually engage in the material – participate in the activities in class and contribute on a regular basis. You start with a "B" and improve your grade through regular participation. Likewise, your grade goes down by being disengaged (texting, checking email, etc.).
- **Attendance** – (5%) It is critical that you attend class regularly because it is not possible to "make up" most of the class activities and discussions. Therefore, rather than considering excused and unexcused absences, your grade is simply the number of days you attended divided by the number of non-test class sessions (approximately 26).

By Tuesday, February 3 you must submit your selections from the above list. After you make your choices, any change to your plan must be discussed with me. Some suggested distributions are presented on the next page.

Please note that because of limited class time only a certain number of survey and position presentations will be allowed. If you are interested in presenting, please contact me to reserve a spot. This may be done before you formally submit your choices.

Suggested Distributions

The Written Tradition		The Book Learner	
12 Journals	40%	20 Journals	65%
Prospectus	15%	Tests	15%
Position Paper	20%	Final	10%
Tests	15%	Attendance	5%
Attendance	5%	Participation	5%
Participation	5%		
The Oral Tradition		The Writer	
12 Journals	40%	20 Journals	65%
Survey Presentation	15%	Prospectus	15%
Position Presentation	20%	Position Paper	20%
Tests	15%		
Attendance	5%	The Free Thinker	
Participation	5%	20 Journals	65%
		Custom Project 1	15%
		Custom Project 2	20%

Course Policies

- **Late Policy** – I understand that life sometimes gets in the way of getting work done. Consequently, late assignments will be accepted without penalty in the class after the assignment was due. However, this policy should not be used as a crutch, and if you frequently use it I will deduct from your grade.
- **Extensions** – In a similar vein, I am generous with extensions on work if you approach *before* the day the assignment is due.
- **Academic Honesty** – While preparing journal assignments and their corresponding readings, you are encouraged to discuss material from class with other students. However, you must produce your own journal write-up. Similarly, all work on the tests and final must be your own. For the other projects, you will be given various opportunities to discuss your work with other students in the class, and you are free to discuss your topic outside of class. However, written papers and oral presentations must be your original work with sources documented, as appropriate for your field of study. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade for the course.
- **Disabilities** – If you have a disability that may affect your performance in this course, please contact me immediately to discuss academic accommodations.

Daily Schedule

T Jan 20	Introduction	T Mar 17	Cyber-Bullying
R Jan 22	Information Overload	R Mar 19	Electronic Voting
T Jan 27	Wikipedia	T Mar 24	Internet Gambling
R Jan 29	Sources of News	R Mar 26	Copyright
T Feb 3	Internet Regulation	T Mar 31	Fair-Use
R Feb 5	Regulation Through Law	R Apr 2	Google Print
T Feb 10	ICANN	T Apr 7	Copyright Reform
R Feb 12	Privacy	R Apr 9	Intellectual Property
T Feb 17	Consumer Privacy	T Apr 12	MP3s
R Feb 19	Spam	R Apr 16	CD Sales
T Feb 24	More Spam	T Apr 21	Test #2
R Feb 26	On-Campus Spam	R Apr 23	Presentations
T Mar 10	Test # 1	T Apr 28	Presentations
R Mar 12	Workplace Monitoring	R Apr 30	Presentations

The dates and percentages on this syllabus are subject to change.

Journals

The purpose of journal assignments is to give you a partially structured place to explore the material in this course. The activities will vary, but they will all contain a written component. The type of writing required is not the formal essay-like writing with which you are familiar. Instead, you will use informal writing techniques such as exploratory or expressive writing where you “think out loud on paper.” The following quote from a psychology professor who also uses journal writing summarizes the benefits:

Journal writing can help many students become more productive and more focused thinkers. Research has shown that the regular habit of journal writing can deepen students’ thinking about their course subjects by helping them see that an academic field is an arena for wonder, inquiry, and controversy rather than simply a new body of information. This way of looking at an academic field can make college more interesting, even exciting. The more you see yourself in this course asking questions and questioning answers, the more you will be thinking like a psychologist.¹

In this style of writing, spelling, grammar, and structure are not important, and you should not be concerned whether the writing is effective for another reader. You are writing primarily for yourself and to demonstrate that you are thinking seriously about the readings.

Journal Tasks

The writing tasks in your journal will vary in the amount of structure. For example, I may ask you to describe how you have experienced one of the topics discussed in a reading. Alternatively, I may give you a sequence of questions that you answer in your journal to help guide you through a difficult reading.

Each journal assignment will contain two parts. All students must complete the first, or basic part of the assignment, and interested students will complete the advanced portion. As described below, a student who completes the required number of basic journal assignment will earn a "B" for his/her journal.

In many cases, we will use the entries in the next class session. For example, I may ask you to share you entry with the class or with a small group (always with an option to pass). Alternatively, the entry may have a more implied connection where I simply assume that you gained some preliminary knowledge for a class session. Regardless of the use, you will gain much more from this course if you come with completed entries.

Your journal assignment will be collected at the end of the class period in which it is used and (hopefully) returned the next class session.

Grading

Your journal will **not** be graded based on layout, structure, grammar, or spelling. Instead, I will look for evidence that you were seriously thinking about the questions or problems posed. This also means that you don’t always have to use the right terms, show mastery of material, or be an encyclopedia of knowledge. Instead, I will be looking to see that you made connections between the readings and in-class content, and that you thought about how the content of the course relates to your day-to-day life.

¹*Engaging Ideas* by John C. Bean, pp. 102

Grades on journal assignments will be assigned using a three-point system:

- **Three** means that you successfully completed both the basic and advanced portions of the journal assignment. This requires a minimum of three pages of writing.
- **Two** means that you successfully completed the basic portion of the assignment while writing at least one and a half pages.
- **One** indicates that there was a problem with your journal assignment. Typically this means that you either failed to complete part of the assignment or that I was fairly certain that you did not seriously approach the reading or assignment (e.g. much too short). I will always indicate why a grade of one was assigned. If you disagree, please come speak with me.
- **Zero** is given if you fail to turn in your journal. assignment.

At the end of the semester, your average journal score will translate into an actual letter grade as follows:

≥ 2.5	A
≥ 2	B
≥ 1.5	C
≥ 1	D
< 1	F

Essentially, this scale means that you must earn threes on at least half of the journal assignments to earn an A (with the remainder of your scores being twos).

Procedures

You are welcome to hand-write or type your journal, whichever is more comfortable. However, because most students can type faster than they can write by hand, maintaining your journal electronically may be more efficient. If you choose this option, please print your responses and bring them to class.

Please do not change fonts, margins, or other settings to make your writing appear longer.