

**The Cultural Impact of Information Technologies**  
**COM 302 - CHID 370**  
**Spring 2011**  
**Mondays and Wednesdays 1:30-3:20**  
**153 Mueller Hall**

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How do new technologies influence our lives? This question does not have a straightforward answer. The process of innovation is deeply embedded into many cultural and social practices—we influence the direction and shape of new technologies almost as much as they influence us. While we're living in a period of remarkable technological change, it is not the first time in history that people have grappled with the social and cultural issues that arise with the introduction of new technologies. What can we learn about our own era from studying how innovations such as electricity and the telephone changed people's perspectives?

Within this course we will examine arguments about the social construction of science and technologies by looking at innovation during different periods of American and European history. Are there some commonalities and connections that we can see among the adoption of technologies and practices as diverse as the telephone, electricity, the Internet, and file sharing? How do our cultural hopes, dreams and anxieties shape new technologies? In what way do users shape new technologies? At the end of the course, we will be able to see technology as Thomas Hughes says, as “full of contradictions, laden with human folly, saved by occasional benign deeds, and rich with unintended consequences.” We will also be able to see more clearly the ways in which culture and technology are interdependent, shaping and influencing each other.

Students at the end of this course should be able to

- Understand basic themes in the social studies of science and technology including *social construction*, *mutual shaping*, and *design-in-use*;
- Understand the cultural impact of new computer technologies and be able to trace the history of differing cultural attitudes towards information technologies since World War II;
- Analyze current debates and discourses about new technologies and compare these previous ones from other historical moments; and
- Analyze how a new innovation can simultaneously influence culture and how it might arise out of our contemporary cultural environment.
- Develop new conceptual tools for examining technological change.

## **READINGS**

The required readings for this class are available online through the UW's Catalyst Commonview site.

## **WEEKLY OUTLINE**

### **1. WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION: Defining “technology”**

Monday 3/28:

Lecture

Wednesday 3/30:

- Thomas Hughes, *Human-Built World*, "Introduction: Complex Technology;" *Human-Built World*, "Chapter 2: Technology and the Second Creation," pp. 1-43.
- Kevin Kelly, Introduction to *What Technology Wants*

Friday 4/1

- Sections: writing exercise, blog assignment explained.

## 2. WEEK TWO: What are the meanings of technology? Who or what determines them?

Monday 4/4:

- Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime*. Selections
- Joshua Greenberg, *From Betamax to Blockbuster*. Selections

Wednesday 4/6:

- Thomas Streeter, *The Net Effect*, selections

Friday 4/8:

- Paper 1 Preparation and exercise

## 3. WEEK THREE: The Social Construction of Technology

Monday 4/11:

- **PAPER 1 DUE In Class**

- Langdon Winner, Do Artifacts have Politics? Reprinted in MacKenzie and Wajcman, eds., *The Social Shaping of Technology*.

Wednesday 4/13:

- Selection from *When Old Technologies Were New* by Carolyn Marvin.
- "Educating the Public" from *America Calling*, by Claude S. Fischer.

Friday 4/15

- **QUIZ 1 DURING QUIZ SECTIONS**

## 4. WEEK FOUR: Design-in-Use

Monday 4/18:

- Ronald Kline and Trevor Pinch "Users as Agents of Technological Change"

Wednesday 4/20:

- Lucy Suchman, "Working Relations of Technology Production and Use," in MacKenzie and Wajcman, eds., *The Social Shaping of Technology*.
- Gina Neff and David Stark, "Permanently Beta: Responsive Organization in the internet Era" in Howard & Jones, *Society Online*.

Friday 4/15

- Paper 2 Exercise

## 5. WEEK FIVE:

### Control Machine to Counterculture Tool to MySpace: Changing cultural notions of computing

Monday 4/25:

- **PAPER 2 DUE DURING CLASS**
- Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cybersculture*, selection.
- Thomas Hughes, "Chapter 4: Systems, Control and Information"

Wednesday 4/27:

- N. Katherine Hayles, "How We Became Post-Human"

Friday 4/29:

- Sections to be determined

## **6. WEEK SIX: Information Theories: Cultural Impact of Code**

Monday 5/2:

- James Gleick, *The Information: A history, a theory, a flood.* Selections.

Wednesday 5/4:

- John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid. *The Social Life of Information* Chapter 1.  
<http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/738/647>

Friday 5/6:

- Paper 3 Exercise

## **7. WEEK SEVEN: Connections, Affordances, and Constraints**

Monday 5/9:

- **PAPER 3 DUE DURING CLASS**
- Donna Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto*

Wednesday 5/11:

- Lawrence Lessig, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace*. “Is-ism”, “Architectures of control”.

Friday 5/13:

- **QUIZ 2 DURING QUIZ SECTIONS**

## **8. WEEK EIGHT: Digital Connection**

Monday 5/16:

- Christakis and Fowler, *Connected* “Hyperconnected”.

Wednesday 5/18:

- Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together*. Selections

Friday 5/13:

- Paper 4 exercise

## **9. WEEK NINE: The Dark Side of Connections**

Monday 5/23:

- **PAPER 4 DUE**
- Nick Bilton, *I live in the future and here's how it works*, “Distracted”

Wednesday 5/25:

- *Selections to be determined*

## **10. WEEK TEN: Wrap up.**

Monday 5/30:

- Memorial Day; No Class

Wednesday 6/1:

- Last Day of Class; Review, Wrap-up

Friday 6/3:

- **QUIZ 3 DURING QUIZ SECTIONS**

## **GRADES & POLICIES:**

|                     |               |                    |
|---------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Written Assignments | 4 x 15 % each | 60% of total grade |
| Quizzes             | 3 x 10 % each | 30%                |
| Section Assignment  |               | 5%                 |
| Class Participation |               | 5%                 |

**Written Assignments.** Four written assignments are due throughout the course of the term. These are due by the beginning of class on the due dates. LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. Please plan on completing these assignments early to avoid any problems. Each of these four written assignment will be graded on a scale from 0-10. Every assignment may not receive extensive written comments, but the professor and the T.A. will review writing assignments and give feedback during a meeting with students upon request. Notice that the majority of your grade will come from these assignments. This gives us the opportunity to identify any problems with your writing early in the course and for you to obtain a good grade through consistent reading and writing. A sheet with a grading scheme follows.

**Class Participation.** Participation grades will be based on in-lab and in-class writing assignments and participation in group discussions and exercises. If a student misses more than two of these assignments, at least 2 percentage points will be deducted from the total participation grade. There are no make-ups available for participation assignments. Failure to complete those assignments will constitute a zero for that day's participation.

**Section Assignment.** Groups will be responsible for writing one blog post that connects to readings for a particular week. This assignment will be explained during sections on week 1.

**Plagiarism.** It is expected that students will be familiar with the university's policy on plagiarism. Please be aware of "unintentional" plagiarism--recognize that failing to differentiate between your ideas and words and those of others is also plagiarism. Plagiarism and other violations of the policy will not be tolerated in this course. All students suspected of violating these policies will be referred for disciplinary action. Assignments that are plagiarized will be considered incomplete and can not be re-submitted at a later time.

**Late Assignments or Missing Exams.** Without a written medical excuse no make-up exam will be given. No late assignments can be accepted for any reason unless previous arrangements have been made. In the event of unusual extenuating circumstances, students should be advised that arrangements to hand in assignments must be made with the professor in advance and are not guaranteed. Arrangements for medical excuses include dropping the assignment and averaging the grade out of three instead of four assignments, and this option is at the discretion of the professor.

**Classroom Learning Environment.** Creating a good environment for learning is a responsibility shared by students and faculty. In addition to the general UW rules in this regard, this course entails a few additional rules to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to fully engage in each class session, in an atmosphere of mutual respect and without distractions from others.

- Some class sessions will involve group exercises in which everyone is expected to participate.
- Cell phones and pagers must be turned off during class.
- Laptops and other note-taking devices may be used only for the purpose of note-taking while class is in session. If you use an electronic device for a purpose other than note-taking during class, this may distract from other student's ability to pay attention in class. You could lose the privilege of using the device during class for the rest of the quarter if disruption occurs.
- Reading newspapers and other non-course texts during class is not permitted.

**Problems or Complaints.** If you have complaints or problems related to the course, please come and see me about them. I will try to fix them! Should you have further complaints or concerns, please see David Domke, Department Chair, in Communications 102.

## WRITING ASSESSMENT

| <b>Grade</b> | <b>Explanation of Expectations</b>  |
|--------------|---|
| 10-9         | <p><b>Knowledge:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high level of understanding of concepts</li> <li>• thoughtful or deeper understanding material</li> <li>• sophisticated or original argument</li> <li>• goes “extra mile” in presenting depth of understanding</li> </ul> <p><b>Structure:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strong, clear thesis and closely followed</li> <li>• presentation of material is inventive and original</li> <li>• organization of paper is strong and apparent</li> <li>• ideas are well supported and researched</li> <li>• ideas flow logically from paragraph to paragraph</li> <li>• has strong introduction and conclusion</li> </ul> <p><b>Style:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• includes detail about readings and/or topic</li> <li>• writing uses appropriate tone, and word choice</li> <li>• presentation of paper (grammar, sentence structure) is clear and polished</li> </ul>   |
| 8.5-7.5      | <p><b>Knowledge:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explains concepts well</li> <li>• May Lack depth or sophistication</li> <li>• May Lack polish</li> <li>• May focus more on description than analysis</li> <li>• May contain a few factual errors</li> <li>• Addresses the material less formally without clear mastery</li> </ul> <p><b>Structure:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• argument may lack strength and focus but argument present</li> <li>• has thesis and sticks to it most of the time</li> <li>• organization of ideas is apparent and generally strong</li> <li>• ideas are sometimes supported by readings but may rely heavily on personal opinion or unsupported examples</li> <li>• has a conclusion and introduction, but either or both may be weak</li> </ul> <p><b>Style:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• argument lacks strength and/or focus</li> <li>• has thesis and sticks to it most of the time</li> <li>• uses paragraphs, though transitions between paragraphs may be rough</li> <li>• grammatical errors detract from writing</li> </ul> |
| 7 and below  | <p><b>Knowledge:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Superficial use of course material</li> <li>• factual errors prevalent</li> <li>• does not develop or support arguments from the readings or course material</li> </ul> <p><b>Structure:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper lacks a clear focus</li> <li>• May have a topic, and wander off</li> <li>• organization is weak</li> <li>• little evidence of a clear argument</li> <li>• Conclusion is missing or weak.</li> </ul> <p><b>Style:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possibly poor grammar, word choice, and/or sentence structure</li> <li>• includes little descriptive detail</li> </ul>  |

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|--------------------|-------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------------|----------|
| SUNDAY             | MONDAY            | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY       | SATURDAY |
| WEEK 1             | MARCH 28          | 29      | 30        | 31       | APRIL 1      | 2        |
| WEEK 2             | 4                 | 5       | 6         | 7        | 8            | 9        |
| WEEK 3             | 11<br>Paper 1 DUE | 12      | 13        | 14       | 15<br>Quiz 1 | 16       |
| WEEK 4             | 18                | 19      | 20        | 21       | 22           | 23       |
| WEEK 5             | 25<br>Paper 2 DUE | 26      | 27        | 28       | 29           | 30       |
| WEEK 6             | MAY 2             | 3       | 4         | 5        | 6            | 7        |
| WEEK 7             | 9<br>Paper 3 DUE  | 10      | 11        | 12       | 13<br>Quiz 2 | 14       |
| WEEK 8             | 16                | 17      | 18        | 19       | 20           | 21       |
| WEEK 9             | 23<br>Paper 4 DUE | 24      | 25        | 26       | 27           | 28       |
| WEEK 10            | 30 NO CLASS       | 31      | JUNE 1    | 2        | 3<br>Quiz 3  | 4        |