COML 509
Social Dynamics of Communication and Technology

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Course description:
In this 8 week course, we will examine the social impact of important communication technologies, especially the Internet. These will include relatively new technologies like email, instant messaging, chat, blogs, virtual communities, Web sites, and social networks like MySpace, as well as older technologies like television, radio, print, and writing. We will even consider the oral and writing eras of communication history. The objective of the course is to help students develop a critical stance toward computer-mediated communication (CMC) and the deluge of electronic communication we are all subjected to. In particular, students will come to understand that with every technology there are winners and losers. Further, they will understand that every communications technology shapes the thinking of those who use it.

Course Requirements:
Weekly participation in online discussions
Reading reaction papers
Research paper

Weekly Participation in Online Discussions:
Students are required to engage every week in the Discussion Board postings. This is the online equivalent of attending classes on campus. In these posts, you are addressing your fellow students. Grades will not be based on the volume of postings, but rather on their thoughtfulness, relevance, the extent to which they advance the discussion, and their contribution to our collective understanding. You should try every week to post one original note relating to the week’s discussion, as well as a response or commentary on another learner’s posting. I will use them as evidence that you are engaged with the readings and with your colleagues. You should let me know if you are away or otherwise unable to post at any time. At the end of each week, I will post grades for the discussion on BlackBoard. Any earnest effort will receive a perfect score.
Reading Reaction Papers:
Students will write three short (2 page) reflective essays. These are due by midnight, Sunday at the end of the 2nd, 4th, and 6th weeks. Each course module has a PowerPoint presentation called "Questions to Consider." The paper must address one or more of these questions or questions that were raised in the PowerPoint presentation for that week. Though the essays are less formal than the final paper, they should be edited, include citations of any material you reference, and, above all, demonstrate a familiarity with the readings for the week. The papers must be in 12 point type, double-spaced, with 1 inch margins all around. If you cite works in the short papers, use APA format. These papers are meant to be an exterior expression of your thoughts, and as such, they can take various forms. They can be comments on a specific text or on a specific part of a text in which you compare ideas in the course readings to other thinkers you have read elsewhere. Here you would be drawing distinctions and/or making connections. These are two fundamental intellectual activities that we seek to cultivate in this program. Again, these reaction papers can take many forms. The goal of the reaction paper should be to “THINK IN INK.” Above all, a reaction paper is not a summary of the reading. It is your reaction to the reading.

Since these papers are intended to be exploratory writing, I will be grading perceived effort rather than content. I will grade them A, B, C. You will have the chance to re-do any of the reaction papers until you get at least a B. What I am after is thoughtful engagement with the readings. Thought does not occur in a vacuum; it is always a provoked response to what others have said or written. You will be tempted to summarize the reading. Indeed, it is often helpful to get one’s thought’s flowing, but do not submit summary for your reaction.

Please name your papers: yournameNumber.doc
Were I a student, my first paper would be called pauldepalma1.doc where the doc indicates a Microsoft Word document. It is necessary for you to submit papers in MS word format so that I can give electronic feedback.

Research Paper:
In this research paper, you are formally addressing fellow members of an intellectual community. Your research paper must be 8 - 12 pages (double-spaced, 12 pt font, 1 inch margins all around). Your paper should be more argumentative than exploratory. That is, the overall thrust of your paper should be an argument for a certain claim or position (your thesis) rather than an exploration of a topic. Along the way you should be considering the positions and arguments that others have made on this topic -- this is where your research comes in. The research that you will do for this paper will involve more than Google-accessible web sources. You should also use the online resources that are available to you through Foley Library. Click on Distance Learner after bringing up the Foley Library web site in your browser. Meanwhile, please see the link Research Paper Ideas and Guidelines (under the Syllabus tab) for sample topics, stylistic advice, and preliminary notes on acceptable sources. The paper is due at midnight on the last day of the last week of class.

Grading policy:
A-level written work will have the following characteristics:
• An introduction that ends in a hypothesis
• Argumentation based on verifiable fact, scientific experiment, or textual interpretation
• Arguments following one from another in some order (i.e., strong to weak, weak to strong, specific to general, general to specific, having the overall effect of advancing the hypothesis)
• A conclusion that restates the hypothesis and speculates about other areas for investigation
• Citations in APA format. See: Purdue University Writing Lab
• Grammar, spelling, and orthography conforming to standard usage
• A graceful, fluid style. See the articles/books by Turkle, Romano, Gitlin, Postman, and De Palma to understand what is meant here. Please note that these do not necessarily use APA citation format.
• Please see the link Sample Research Paper (under the Syllabus tab) to see an example of a research paper that meets all of the above criteria (if I do say so myself).

Work that earns a grade than an A will be (in my opinion) missing one or more of the characteristics.

I weight the three components of the course as follows:

Final Paper: 40%
Short Papers: 25% in total
Postings: 35% in total

Since we are constrained by the spreadsheet that Blackboard presents us for grading, I'm forced to give a numeric grade and then translate that to a letter. This is how it works:

• A = 20 points = 100%
• B = 16 points = 80%
• C = 12 points = 60%
• F (nothing submitted) = 0 points = 0%.

The BlackBoard spreadsheet will compute a running, weighted-average of all work.

Here is the scale I use to translate the weighted average to a letter grade:

A 94 - 100
A- 90 - 93
B+ 87 - 89
B 84 - 86
B- 80 - 83
C+ 75 - 79
C 65 - 74
C- 60 - 64
D+ 55 - 59
The complete range of grades from A through F are forced on me by Blackboard. You'll find that if you do all of the readings, engage in all discussions, and submit thoughtful papers, you will receive the A or B necessary (I believe) for graduate credit.

**Required Texts/videos/articles:**

- *Technopoly*, Postman (Vintage, 1993)
- *Media Unlimited*, Gitlin (Metropolitan, 2001)

· Readings: I’ve posted all readings other than the three books online. Find them by module under the Course Resources link.

**Useful Books**

These are inexpensive collections of topical readings on the social impact of computing drawn from the (mostly) popular press. You can see the articles in each by going to the [McGraw-Hill web site](#) and typing `Computers in Society` in the search box.


These three books are as useful for their bibliographies as for the texts themselves:


**Important Web Sites:**

- [Computer Mediated Communication Resources](#)
- [The Pew Internet and American Life Project](#)

**Technology Requirements:**

Blackboard access  
High speed internet connection  
Ability to open Microsoft PowerPoint presentations  
Ability to compose papers in or save them to Microsoft Word format.