

Syllabus

“[E]very computer desktop, and now every pocket, is a worldwide printing press, broadcasting station, place of assembly, and organizing tool...”

- Howard Rheingold, educator, author, 2008 Macarthur Scholar (2003)

“More than half of blog readers say blogs influence public opinion (68%), mainstream media (56%) and public policy (54%).” - 2005 Ipsos Survey

1. Course Overview

In this course, we will explore how social technologies like blogs and wikis and social spaces like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter are changing how consumers find information and how organizations communicate.

This course is split between thinking about and using social and digital media. Our in-class work will involve traditional discussion and analysis, but out-of-class work requires that students gain fluency in blogging technology (WordPress.com) and become a subject matter expert on a technology of their choice. Students will learn by doing: they will create a personal blog and maintain it regularly, engage in emerging social news spaces like Twitter, and create an online project using blogging technology as a content-management system. This use of digital media technologies provides practical experience with evolving digital communication tools. There will be limited in-class tutorials.

This is a multi-disciplinary course with readings in human-computer interaction, communication studies, media studies, literacy studies, sociology, business and journalism. Most readings for the course are online but a handful may be accessed through UW library digital resources (eReserve).

The course is structured like a workshop or seminar: each class member is responsible for formally and informally contributing to discussion of readings, activities and assignments. There is an expectation that students will support one another through an online community for our class; we will use an email mailing list (which uses your UW address) and a Facebook group.

Learning Outcomes

- Students understand the roots of computer-based communication and can describe how the

transition from radio to television is similar to and different from today's digital transition

- Students can provide two examples of how digital media technologies are impacting (a) the business of traditional journalism and (b) the business of communication (e.g., marketing, PR, advertising or employee communication)
- Students will have working knowledge of several digital and social media tools and applications.
- Students can explain how digital technologies affect copyright and professional ethics

Skill Development

- Use email as well as blogging and other social web technologies to interact with one another, the instructor and the world
- Develop a personal voice by actively blogging throughout the quarter
- Create a blog that conforms with genre norms, including the use of tags and categories, blogroll and RSS
- Use a content management system like WordPress to create a project
- Use basic web design principles, HTML and CSS to customize a blog, including embedded video and images

Student Responsibilities

- Be prepared for class; have reading and assignments done on time
- Participate in active learning inside and outside of class (in other words, both on-line and face-to-face). That means asking questions, helping classmates answer questions, and working with one another to solve problems.
- Be in class. It's the only time we'll have to work face-to-face.
- Ask questions!
- Regardless of your experience with digital technologies at the start of the class, I expect you to challenge yourself so that your skills are greater at the end of the quarter than at the start.

Alignment With Core Values and Competencies:

Core Value/Competency	COM495
Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications	* Through readings, discussion and in-class assignments students compare the disintermediation of today's digital environment with the most recent media transition: radio to television

Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity	* Through the use of case studies and analysis of the neophyte “blogger ethics” movement, students can explain issues of trust and transparency in a digital age
Think critically, creatively and independently	* Students, with guidance from the instructor, collaboratively create an online project * Students experiment with various design templates for their individual class blog and learn how to make informed decisions that balance creativity (form) with usability (function)
Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve	* Students develop a personal voice by actively blogging throughout the quarter
Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness	* Students read and comment on one another’s work
Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work	* Hands-on use of blogging and content management system software

Course Requirements

Students must have a working UW e-mail address and check mail regularly. Internet access is required. Basic computer literacy is required.

Students without regular access to a broadband network are encouraged to use one of computing commons areas on campus; if you want to work in the library after class, you will need to have your UW ID.

2. Course Structure and Teaching Strategies

Teaching methods for this course will include lectures, demonstrations, student collaboration, guest lecturers, reading, and writing assignments. The class functions more like a workshop than a traditional lecture-driven course.

Classes may feature a guest lecturer who is a leading professional or scholar in digital media. Class discussions are 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.

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. Communication outside of class will be via a class mailing list; students must have a working e-mail address. All material is available on the class web site: <http://com495.wordpress.com/>

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 and technologies explored in class.

Schedule

Subject to change; see **Readings and Schedule**.

3. Assessment

Student performance is evaluated in these ways:

1. Blog (35%)
2. Project (30%)
3. Two quizzes (10%)
4. Discussion leader (15%)
5. Participation (10%)

Grading Scale (for blog posts and qualitative assessment)

- A. 4.0 – Exceptional work. Student performance demonstrates full command of course material and evidences a high level of originality and/or creativity
- B . 3.0 – Good work. Student performance demonstrates average understanding of the course

material.

- C. 2.0 – Below average work. Student performance does not demonstrate a comprehension of the course material.
- D. 1.0 – Poor work. Student performance does not demonstrate a comprehension of the course material and does not meet minimum technical requirements.
- E. 0.0 – Very poor work. Work does not meet minimum standards.

Points-to-Grade matrix:

- >950 points = 4.0
- 900-949 points = 3.8
- 870-899 points = 3.6
- 840-869 points = 3.4
- 800-839 points = 3.1
- 770-799 points = 2.8

4. Course Policies

By becoming a member of this class, you agree to abide by these rules and any other policies not explicitly stated here that are detailed in the UW Student Conduct Handbook.

Participation

Students are expected to attend all classes; this is not a lecture class, it is run as a seminar and missing a class affects your learning. For courses that meet twice a week, like this one, two absences are allowable without affecting a student's participation grade. Routinely being late to class will also affect your participation grade; I define lateness as coming into classroom after the class begins.

Routinely leaving class early for reasons other than a medical emergency or having to do with your work at the University will also affect your participation grade. Arriving more than 15 minutes late two times or leaving more than 15 minutes early two times is equivalent to one absence.

You should e-mail me if you miss class because of illness or emergency; this communication is part of your class participation. However, you should also check the class website (this blog) as well as your classmates to "see what you missed." In-class assignments cannot be made up except by pre-arrangement.

Additionally, from the Faculty Code:

A student absent from any class activity through sickness or other cause judged by the instructor to be unavoidable shall be given an opportunity to perform work judged by the instructor to be the equivalent... Examples of unavoidable cause include death or serious illness in the immediate family, illness of the student, and, provided previous notification is given, observance of regularly scheduled religious obligations and might possibly include attendance at academic conferences or field trips, or participation in university-sponsored activities such as debating contests or athletic competition (Faculty code, Vol. 4, Part 3, Chap 12, sec 1B).

Deadlines/Quality

All work must be completed on time; assignment due dates serve to determine how well students can master the content in a specified amount of time. For the sake of equity and fairness, all students will have the same amount of time to demonstrate their mastery of assignments. Late assignments are not accepted; late is defined as failure to hand in an assignment on the scheduled due date in the manner in which it is due. If you cannot attend class for an extenuating circumstance, it is your responsibility to turn in your work beforehand. I require a note from a health care professional or Student Health Services for medical absences.

Errors (facts, spelling and grammar) will result in a reduced grade. You are expected to produce original work and properly cite the thoughts and works of others. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and are not tolerated by the University. For more information, please refer to the University's Academic Honesty policy.

24-7 Rule and Grade Records

When graded materials are returned, you must wait 24 hours before discussing your grade with me. This is to allow you to think calmly about the grade and your performance and to formulate a rational basis for discussion. You will have seven days in which the grade is open for discussion; after these seven days have passed, you can no longer discuss the grade. If you are not doing as well in the course as you had anticipated, please talk to me so that we can discuss how you might improve your performance on the remaining assignments.

Grades are maintained on a Google spreadsheet and Catalyst.

Classroom Environment

Students and faculty are responsible for creating a good learning environment. We will use computing technology in the classroom during labs; specific uses of computing technology will be announced in advance with detailed instructions. Students may use laptops or other portable devices for taking notes. However, these portable devices should not be used to engage in non-classroom activities, such as surfing the Net, checking e-mail, playing games or listening to music. These activities would certainly divert your attention away from class and could distract other students as well, thus corrupting the learning environment. I reserve the right to end your use of a portable device, ask you to move, or revoke the privilege of using wireless devices in the classroom. During class breaks, students may use portable computing devices or lab computers for personal use as long as they respect other class members. Material visible on the computing device should not be offensive or incendiary. Any music played during breaks should be at a level conducive to classroom civility.

As a courtesy to your instructor and to your classmates, please make sure at the beginning of each class period that your cell phones are turned off.

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!

Incompletes

The instructor will not give incompletes except under exceptional circumstances.

Accommodations

To request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact Disability Resources for Students, 448 Schmitz, 206-543-8924/V, 206-5430-8925/TTY. If you have a letter from Disability Resources for Students indicating that you have a disability that requires academic accommodations, please present the letter to me so we can discuss the accommodations that you might need for the class.

E-mail Communication

E-mail communications among members of this class should reflect respect for the rights and privileges of all members of the academic community. This includes not interfering with university functions or endangering the health, welfare, or safety of other persons. In addition to the University

of Washington's Student Conduct Code, there are additional policies for this class:

- E-mail communication from a student to the instructor will be acted upon, if possible, within 24 hours (M-Th). If an e-mail from a student does not receive a response within 48 hours, then the student should investigate other ways of contacting me (telephone, office hours, etc.). E-mail to the instructor must have clear, not cryptic, subject lines and should include the course number (COM495).
- Students are responsible for checking their UW mail regularly; instructor and class mailing list mail is directed to the student UW address, as it is the official e-mail address for class enrollment.
- E-mail communications should not include any CCing of anyone not directly involved in the specific educational experience at hand.
- E-mail communications should not include any blind-CCing to third parties.

5. Why I Give Writing Assignments

In this class, the writing assignments are designed to help you:

- gain more knowledge about a particular field that interests you
- synthesize different positions and evaluate which position has the greatest internal consistency
- develop support for your own position
- apply an intellectual framework to a new problem
- use theoretical criteria discussed in class in an analytical framework
- extrapolate from ideas developed in readings and in class to suggest what might happen in the future or how a past event might have changed had conditions differed

Research shows that writing improves thinking (analytical) skills. It forces us to practice a skill that may have gotten rusty, because most of the time, our thinking remains isolated in our own minds. Reflection, in these hectic, "down-sized" days, is a luxury that we often postpone, sometimes indefinitely. Thus the request to blog: to reflect, then to put our thoughts on digital paper. The act of writing helps us evaluate our beliefs and assumptions and also helps cement knowledge.

These reading reflections are mini-essays. Please don't just summarize the content of a reading. Instead, the post should demonstrate that you have thought about the reading and your experiences. How did the reading relate to other readings in this or another course? How did the reading relate to your experience? Did you enjoy the reading? What were your insights, criticisms, comments,

questions?

