

COM460 – Spring 2008
Social Technologies, Media and Politics
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“News is a conversation.”

- *Jeff Jarvis, print journalist, blogger, educator, media consultant (2003)*

"[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*

“[J]ournalism, like everything else that used to be centralized, is in the process of being distributed. In the future, every educated person will be a journalist, as today we are all travel agents and stock brokers. The reporters have been acting as middlemen, connecting sources with readers, who in many cases are sources themselves. As with all middlemen, something is lost in translation, an inefficiency is added. So what we’re doing now, in journalism, as with all other intermediated professions, is decentralizing.”

- *David Winer, father of RSS, computer scientist, research fellow at Harvard (2007)*

1. Course Overview

Course Description

In this course, students explore how social technologies like blogs and wikis and social spaces like YouTube and Facebook are affecting both traditional journalism and politics. Students will learn by doing: they will create a personal blog and maintain it regularly, engage in social news spaces like Newsvine and Twitter, and collaboratively create an online project related to the 2008 election.

Students will use digital media technologies throughout the course, providing them with practical experience with the evolving tools of journalism. To apply the art of new media design, students will work in small groups to plan, design and create new media content.

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. We will also have Seattle-area journalists – traditional and citizen – as guest speakers.

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 political campaigns
- Students can describe three social web technologies and explain how they facilitate disintermediation of news and political communication
- Students can explain how digital technologies affect copyright and professional ethics
- Students can critically assess a blog for conformance with genre

Skill Development

- Use email as well as blogging and other social web technologies (such as Twitter or WetPaint) to interact with one another, the instructor and the world
- Use an RSS reader to regularly read journalism and political blogs
- 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 collaborative, group project

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	COM460
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 learn the difference between traditional reporting and the more conversational style of online communication * 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 * Students collaborate on a group project
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

We will read the book *Dispatches From Blogistan* (available at the UW Bookstore). Additional required readings, published on the class website, include book chapters and articles from scholarly journals, trade magazines and popular publications. Assigned readings that do not have a public URL can be found through the library's eReserve system. Students must have a working UW e-mail address and check mail regularly. Internet access is required. Basic computer literacy is required.

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://com460.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; definitive schedule is on the course blog.

week 1 – social and technological context (Th 3 Apr)

- Who are we and why are we in this class?
- What does the world of journalism and politics look like in an digital age?
- What are social media? What's the impact on journalism and politics?
- *Technologies: Wordpress, blog categories*

week 2 – social and technological context (Tu 8 Apr, Th 10 Apr)

- From Thomas Paine to Blogs (and points in-between)
- A brief history of the Internet and blogging.
- Blogging: definition, features and forms.
- *Technologies: RSS, Bloglines*

week 3 - journalism in a digital world (Tu 15 Apr, Th 17 Apr)

- Why are newspapers and broadcast outlets on the Web?
- Why are politicians and governments on the Web?
- *Technologies: Twitter, GoogleMaps*

week 4 – journalism and social media

- How have social media changed the relationship between media outlet and audience?
- *Technologies: "tags" (folksonomy), Wikis*

week 5 – blogs as citizen journalism (Tu 22 Apr, Th 24 Apr)

- "Personal" journalism
- What is "news"
- Newspapers go hyper-local
- *Technologies: Newsvine*

week 6 – social media and politics (Tu 6 May, Th 8 May)

- What is the impact of blogs on politics, especially campaigns?
- What is the role of the political blogger and online pundit?
- *Technologies: Facebook, MySpace*

week 7 – moving beyond the blog: podcasting, Flickr and YouTube (Tu 13 May, Th 15 May)

- What is the impact of NetVideo on politics and mainstream newspapers?
- What is the role of multi-media journalist?
- *Technologies: YouTube, Blip.tv, Current.tv, Flickr*

week 8 – the legal environment (Tu 20 May, Th 22 May)

- Ethics, copyright and other laws
- *Technologies: Creative Commons*

week 9 – how technology shapes the world (Tu 27 May, Th 29 May)

- Why networks matter
- What is the role of computer code in shaping social processes?
- How do financial pressures shape news and public service?

week 10 – convergence and the future of journalism (Tu 3 June, Th 5 June)

3. Assessment

Student performance is evaluated in these five ways:

- Weekly blog posts (35%)
- Group project (20%)
- Peer interaction (15%)
- Class participation (15%)
- Final essay (15%)

Weekly Blog Posts (140 points, 35% of the grade)

Students will create a blog (on WordPress.com) where they will reflect (not summarize!) on each week's readings and, beginning week three, make at least one post per week about digital journalism/politics.

(a) Reading Reflections – 100 points

Students are asked to write about the readings to help gain cognitive understanding of material as well as to hone analytical skills. Weekly reading reflections are not graded, except for completeness. Be sure to check your spelling and grammar, however, as this is a journalism class. Significant errors will result in no points for the assignment.

- These are short (three-five paragraphs) reflections on assigned readings. Each post must also include at least two (2) open-ended discussion questions about the assigned readings. Length: 300-450 words + two open-ended questions at the end of the post.
- These posts are due Monday at 9 pm. Because this is a journalism class, and deadlines are a reality of the profession, late posts are not accepted unless the student asks for *an extension in advance*, has a reasonable explanation of need, and gets an OK *before* the deadline passes. Exceptions include true unforeseen events, such as being in the hospital emergency room.
- Each regular weekly reading should be categorized “reading”. Any extra credit reading should be categorized “extra credit”. This practice allows the blog to conform to genre and makes it easier for fellow classmates and the instructor to find posts on the blog.

Points are assigned per the following:

- Reflection within minimum-maximum word count and no significant errors - 10 points
- Reflection over-or-under word count by more than 5% or with significant grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors - 7 points
- Reading summary (summary *instead of* reflection) within minimum-maximum word count - 3 points
- Reading summary (summary *instead of* reflection) over-or-under word count by more than 5% or with significant grammatical errors - 1 point

In addition, students are to include two or more open-ended questions at the bottom of the post:

- Two or more open-ended discussion questions - 2 points
- Only one open-ended discussion question or only closed-ended questions – 0 points

The maximum number of reading points per week is 12; there are eight (8) reading posts (weeks 2-9) for a total of 96 points. The remaining 4 points will be awarded at the end of the quarter if blog posts have been properly categorized.

(b) Digital Journalism/Politics posts – 40 points

Beginning with week three, students will practice different forms of blogging rhetoric: the annotated link post, the analytical post, and the persuasive post. The maximum number of points per post is 5; there will be eight (8) posts.

Group Project (80 points, 20% of the grade)

Students will use Wordpress to create a group blog. Students will work in teams of three to produce content for the blog, which will focus on voting issues. More details after the class organizes, as there will be student input into the project.

Peer Interaction (60 points, 15% of the grade)

Social media such as blogs differ from traditional media in their facilitation of interaction. For five of our 10 weeks together, we will practice this two-way conversation. Each week, three students will have one extra reading reflection. Students will provide comments on these posts (five students per post, randomly assigned each Tuesday), and the post author will interact with his or her readers through this medium.

- Post Author (max 20 points) – Reflect on the ideas in the extra reading, relate to the course readings, relate to personal experience. Post assessed on creativity, how well it meets journalistic standards (grammar, punctuation, spelling, style), how well it integrates course material, voice. Interaction with class members assessed on relevance, timeliness, courtesy.
- Post Comments (max 40 points, 8 points per week) – Respond to the ideas in the reflection. Comments assessed on relevance, integration of course material/personal experience, timeliness, courtesy, voice.

Class Participation (60 points, 15% of the grade)

Students are expected to attend all classes and are responsible for completing all course material on deadline. Discussion about readings and other class material will be conducted seminar-style, that is with an exchange of questions, explanations and viewpoints about readings and key ideas. There will also be in-class assignments posted to your blog. To participate, you must be present.

Students are also encouraged to comment on one another's postings (banter is OK!) to continue discussion outside of class.

In addition, students will complete a (non-graded) pre- and post online assessment WebQ, focused on the learning outcomes but also with some questions about familiarity with technologies to be used in the class. This is part of an ongoing assessment of journalism courses.

Reflective Essay (60 points, 15% of the grade)

This, the final assignment, substitutes for a final exam. In this essay, you should reflect upon what you have learned in the course and what you learned as a result of the group project. Illustrate how your thinking changed (or was reinforced) or detail other “ah-ha” moments. You must give examples (evidence, such as references to readings or other material covered in class). How will you apply these learnings outside the classroom? Length: 850-1000 words

- The essay will be turned in via Catalyst CollectIt and will be graded on how well it meets the above requirements as well as creativity, grammar-spelling-punctuation.
- Due Tu 10 June at 11.30 am

Grading Scale (for reflective essay, blogging genre posts, and peer interaction post)

- A. 4.0 - Exceptional work. Student performance demonstrates full command of course material and evidences a high level of originality and/or creativity
- A- .3.9 - Outstanding work. Student performance demonstrates full command of course material and exceeds course expectations.
- B . 3.6 - Good work. Student performance demonstrates above average understanding of the course material.
- B- . 3.0 - Average 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 mean minimum technical requirements.
- E . 0.0 - Very poor work. Work does not mean minimum standards.

Grades:

- >380 points = 4.0
- 370-380 points = 3.9
- 360-369 points = 3.7
- 350-359 points = 3.4
- 340-349 points = 3.1
- 320-339 points = 2.7
- 300-319 points = 2.4
- 280-299 points = 2.0
- 260-279 points = 1.0
- <260 points = 0

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.

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 and homework. Rather than ask me what happened while you were away, you should check the course blog as well as talk to your classmates

to “see what you missed.” It is your responsibility to obtain all materials missed by working with other students. If you email me and ask me what you missed, I will only point you to the class blog.

You must e-mail me if you miss class and explain the absence. *This communication is part of your class participation grade. Moreover, in-class assignments cannot be made up except by arrangement.*

Academic Honesty

You are expected to produce original work and properly cite the thoughts and works of others. All sources must be properly cited; just because information can be found online does not mean it is exempt from citations! 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.

Assignments

All work must be completed on time. Late submissions will not be accepted, except with advance notice of extenuating circumstances (sudden illness requiring medical attention, death in the family, and so forth). 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.

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.

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.

28 March 2008