

Soc 115F TECHNOLOGY, MEDIA, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY

7-Jan-07

Professor: Bruce Barry
Office: 307 Management Hall
Voice/Fax: 322-3489 / 343-7177
Email: bruce.barry@vanderbilt.edu
Office hours: by appointment

OVERVIEW

In this seminar we look critically at the nature and role of media and technology in our lives, and develop students' abilities to think and write critically about them. We will examine questions about the impact of network technology and digital media on social, political, economic, and cultural institutions that comprise modern society. How are digital networks and new media transforming civilized society? What elements of society are affected? How will these changes evolve as technology continues to advance? To address these questions we will read social critics and social scientists who analyze and comment on the sociology, anthropology, and psychology of the wired life, with an eye toward current controversies about technology's impact. We will also explore the impact of digital media on a variety of applied domains, including business, politics, regulation, education, journalism, publishing, architecture, interpersonal relationships, community development, religion, entertainment, recreation, and others.

SOURCES FOR READINGS

Readings are drawn from this book:

- Erik P. Bucy, *Living in the Information Age* (second edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2005 (paperback).

And:

- Online readings linkable through course web page (see below).
-

ONLINE COURSE ELEMENTS

[1] COURSE WEB PAGE

A Web page for the course, <http://www2.owen.vanderbilt.edu/bruce.barry/soc115/> contains a day-by-day course outline and a downloadable version of this syllabus. Many of the readings

for this course are online, with links to them appearing on the Web page. I may add new links to relevant articles or destinations as we go along - when that occurs I'll alert you.

Three things you need to know about online readings:

- [1] Unless otherwise indicated, online readings are required readings.
- [2] Many online readings are available through Web-based bibliographic services that Vanderbilt subscribes to for use only by the university community. When attempting to link to one of these articles, you may be asked to authenticate your status as a Vanderbilt user (with VUNet ID and password).
- [3] You will need the Adobe Acrobat Reader in order to view some online readings. If you don't have it, there is a link on the SOC 115 web site to Adobe's free download page.

[2] ONLINE DISCUSSION VIA OAK/BLACKBOARD

Using Oak/Blackboard, we will keep an online discussion conference going throughout the semester. Your participation is welcome at any time (and counts toward participation grade).

Here is the login URL for online discussions <https://oak.vanderbilt.edu/webapps/login>.

During two designated weeks of the semester, *you are expected to participate in a focused online discussion on that week's class topic*. I will initiate and facilitate the online discussion by posing a question or two on the discussion board on Sunday evening no later than 5 pm. For the next three days, until Wednesday night at 9 pm, the class will meet "virtually" through our online discussion. The regular class meeting on the Tuesday of that week (January 30 and March 20) will not occur.

DELIVERABLES/GRADES

- Papers (75% of course grade)

You are expected to turn in three written papers, described briefly here, but to be explained in more depth when they are assigned in class. To pass the course, you must write all three essays. Paper length guidelines are expressed in word counts (to avoid the ambiguities of margins, spacing and font sizes).

[1] Media Memoir: Describe and analyze your own life in the universe of media and digital technology. This essay should be a mixture of reflection and analysis.

- Grade weight: 15%.
- Length: ~1000 words.
- Paper Due: Friday, Feb. 2 at 4:00 pm (hardcopy to BB's mailbox at OGSM)

[2] Critical Essay: You are the (erudite) critic! Write a critical review essay with an eye to the sociology of technology of a film/book/article about technology and/or media. I will give you several options. Pick one of mine or propose one of your own (subject to my approval).

- Grade weight: 25%
- Length: ~1500 words.
- Topic deadline: Your choice of "text" must be approved by Friday, Feb. 9
- First draft due: Friday, Feb. 23 (hardcopy to BB's mailbox at OGSM)
- Final paper due: Friday, March 16 (hardcopy to BB's mailbox at OGSM)

[3] Policy Polemic: Take a position on a current, controversial issues in technology and/or media. Back it up with research and solid arguments. I will give you several ideas; choose one of mine or pick your own (subject to my approval).

- Grade weight: 35%
- Length: ~2000 words.
- Topic deadline: Your topic must be approved by Friday, March 30
- Paper Due: Friday, April 20 at 4:00 pm (hardcopy to BB's mailbox at OGSM)
- Presentation: You will discuss your paper with the seminar on April 17 or 19

- Seminar Participation (25% of course grade)

Much of the value of the seminar follows from exposure to the ideas and insights of others, both in readings and in our seminar meetings. For this reason I put substantial weight on seminar participation. It is important that you come to class prepared to share your own ideas and insights about the readings and the subject under discussion. Experiment with your critical self: does a particular reading make sense? If not, why not? It is also appropriate to come with questions – if something seems missing or confusing or unclear, say so! Let's make this seminar a place where no question is silly or trivial. The only bad questions are the ones that never get asked.

Participation encompasses your involvement and contribution both when we meet in class and when we engage in online discussions (see below).

I will give you an interim evaluation of your seminar participation roughly half-way through the semester. Feel free to inquire about your participation (or anything else!) at any time.

Participation is, by the way, not possible without attendance. I expect you to attend and be prepared for every class. You can expect that unexcused absences will have a non-trivial effect on your participation (and by extension, course) grade.

- Quizzes (part of participation grade)

I will occasionally open our class meeting with a brief unannounced quiz consisting of three or four questions about the readings. It will be highly manageable if you have done the readings.

FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK

Appearance: Please be sure that all papers you turn in for this course have the following characteristics:

- printed out as hardcopy (no electronic submissions)
- text is double spaced, with pages numbered
- font size \geq 11 point
- 1" (or more) margins all around
- your name on a cover page only (nowhere else in document)

Sources: Please use footnotes (or endnotes), following the approach and format defined in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. This web page offers a handy quick guide to footnote formats for different kinds of sources you might use: <http://www.library.wvu.edu/ref/chicago.html>.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING WRITTEN WORK IN THIS COURSE

The papers you write for the seminar, whether reflective or analytical in nature, should be articulate, organized, logical, and appropriately supported. Here's what I look for when I read your papers:

- Your analysis should be thesis-driven, which is to say it should be clear to the reader what point you are making. Strive to justify your claims and arguments using relevant readings and other sources.
- Your analysis should be specific, with the rationale behind positions taken or refuted clear and unmistakable. Minimize the possibility that the reader will think "I wonder why he/she thinks this..." Don't assume much on the part of the reader.
- Value the quality of your own ideas. Bring in your own creative thinking when possible. Avoid superficial attempts to simply transplant ideas from one context to another.
- Incorporate the implications of your analysis. Go beyond the obvious to consider relevant tradeoffs. What if your assumptions are wrong?
- Pay attention to style. Papers should be thoughtfully organized, with main points clear, and the flow of argument easy to discern. Errors of spelling, grammar, and syntax are unwelcome. Sources should be explicit and appropriately cited (either footnotes or endnotes are okay). Turn in a clean, clear, readable paper. Please.

THE HONOR CODE

Students are bound by the Vanderbilt Honor System for all work in this course.

Specifically, for all written work, use appropriate citations (in some consistent format) to identify contributions to arguments and analyses that draw on the work of others. I expect students to adhere to accepted rules and conventions regarding plagiarism in academic writing.

To this end, I assume that students are acquainted with the section of the Vanderbilt Student Handbook (Chapter 2) addressing "The Honor Code Applied to Preparation of Papers," which can be found here:

http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/Honor_System.htm

It states, in part:

The Honor System presumes that all work submitted as part of academic requirements is the product of the student submitting it unless credit is given with proper footnoting and bibliographic techniques, or as prescribed by the course instructor.

I also encourage students to review the discussion titled "*What is plagiarism, and how can I avoid it?*" that appears at the Vanderbilt Honor Council's Web site:

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/HonorCouncil/plag.php>

SUMMARY OF KEY DATES

Monday , Jan. 29	Deadline for enduring the 24-hour “media moratorium”
Friday, Feb. 2	Paper #1 due at 4:00 pm (hardcopy to BB at OGSM)
Friday, Feb. 9	Proposal deadline for film/text to be analyzed in Paper #2
Tuesday, Feb. 13	No class meeting (online discussion starts Feb. 11, 5 pm)
Tuesday, Feb. 20	Field Trip: Class meets at the library, not in Garland 209
Friday, Feb. 23	Paper #2 first draft due at 4:00 pm (hardcopy to BB at OGSM)
Feb. 27 and March 1	Individual writing conferences; No seminar meetings this week.
Tuesday, Mar. 20	No class meeting (online discussion starts March 18, 5 pm)
Friday, March 16	Paper #2 final version due at 4:00 pm (hardcopy to BB at OGSM)
Friday, March 30	Proposal deadline for topic of Paper #3
April 17/April 19	Individual in-class presentations of Paper #3
Friday, April 20	Paper #3 due at 4:00 pm (hardcopy to BB at OGSM)

SEMINAR CLASS AND READING SCHEDULE

KEY TO READINGS	
•	= offline required readings (text)
>	= online required readings
#	= online things to browse/skim

Day		Topic	Readings
Thurs	11-Jan	First Meeting	
Tues	16-Jan	The Past / The Future ASSIGNMENT: MAKE A PREDICTION	• Reading 8-1: <i>Further Explorations into the Culture...</i>
Thurs	18-Jan	Convergence	• Reading 1-2: <i>Technological and Economic Origins...</i> • Reading 3-1: <i>Convergence and Its Consequences</i>
Tues	23-Jan	Media Ecology	• Reading 1-3: <i>Renaissance Now!</i> > Avatars at the Office
Thurs	25-Jan	Putting the "New" in New Media?	• Reading 2-2: <i>A New World</i> • Reading 2-4: <i>Uses of the Mass Media</i> > The Overconnecteds
Tues	30-Jan	Overload ASSIGNMENT: MEDIA MORATORIUM!	• Reading 6-1: <i>Supersaturation, or The Media Torrent...</i> • Reading 6-2: <i>Prest-o! Change-o!</i> > You There, at the Computer: Pay Attention > Climb in, Log on, Drop Out
Thurs	1-Feb	Cyberspace? (PAPER #1 DUE FRIDAY AT 4 PM)	> No "There" There > World of Ends > Entrepreneurs See a Web Guided by Common Sense • Optional Reading: Text pp. 166-170 on web origins
Tues	6-Feb	Social Capital	> Bowling Alone: America's Declining... # Pew report: "Strength of Internet Ties"
Thurs	8-Feb	Friendship (PAPER #2 PROPOSAL DUE FRIDAY 4 PM)	> Friends, Friendsters, and Top 8...

Tues	13-Feb	<p>Social Networks CLASS MEETS ONLINE; NO REGULAR MEETING INITIATING QUESTION ON OAK BY SUN. FEB. 11 AT 5 PM</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading 5-1: A Nation of Voyeurs • Reading 5-3: Weblogs: A History and Perspective > Users Lose the Thrill Of 'Social Networking' > Facebook.com Goes to High School > In Teens' Web World, MySpace Is So Last Year. > Who's Knocking at the Door? Check Your E-Mail... # social networking web sites
Thurs	15-Feb	<p>Life Online</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading 5-4: Love.com > Big Mother is Watching > When a Risque Online Persona Undermines... > Traveling the Too-Much-Information Highway. # The Social Impact of Internet Use

Tues	20-Feb	<p>Field Trip Class Meets in Heard Library</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Critically Evaluating Information Sources > Citing Sources > What is Plagiarism? > Evaluating Web Pages > Web Site Evaluation Worksheet
Thurs	22-Feb	<p>Research Online (FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER #2 DUE FRIDAY AT 4 PM)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > A False Wikipedia 'Biography' > It's Online, But Is It True? > Wikipedia Prankster Confesses > Growing Wikipedia Revises Its... > Internet Encyclopaedias Go Head to Head

Tues	27-Feb	<p>Writing Conferences Seminar Doesn't Meet</p>	
Thurs	1-Mar	<p>Writing Conferences Seminar Doesn't Meet</p>	

6-Mar & 8-Mar	SPRING BREAK	
---------------	---------------------	--

Tues	13-Mar	<p>Media Bias</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Bias? What Bias? > Bias, Slander, and BS > Media Bias Is Real, Finds UCLA Political Scientist # various media bias watchdog web sites
Thurs	15-Mar	<p>Concentration (FINAL VERSION OF PAPER #2 DUE FRIDAY AT 4 PM)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading 4-1: <i>The New Global Media</i> • Reading 4-2: <i>Global Media</i> • Reading 4-4: <i>Big World: How Clear Channel...</i> # The Media Ownership Chart # Media Reform Information Center

Tues	20-Mar	<p>Expression</p> <p>CLASS MEETS ONLINE; NO REGULAR MEETING</p> <p>INITIATING QUESTION ON OAK BY SUN. MAR. 18 AT 5 PM</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading 11-1: Who Will Own Your Next Good Idea? > Spam Doubles, Finding New Ways to Deliver Itself > Anonymous Mud-Slinging Wins a Round
Thurs	22-Mar	<p>Privacy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading 12-2: In Defense of the Delete Key • Reading 12-3: Privacy and the New Technology • Reading 12-4: The Challenge of an Open Society > Privacy vs. Viewing the Internet User...

Tues	27-Mar	<p>Education I</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Children and Computers - New Techology, Old... > Fools Gold: A Critical Look at Computers... # How Do Computers Affect Our Children's Minds?
Thurs	29-Mar	<p>Education II</p> <p>(PAPER #3 PROPOSAL DUE FRIDAY AT 4 PM)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Technology and the Commodification... > A Weblog Starts a Fire > Pepperdine in a Treehouse

Tues	3-Apr	<p>Music</p> <p>(PAPER #3 PROPOSAL DUE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading 11-2: <i>The Next Economy of Ideas</i> • Reading 11-3: <i>Free</i> > File Sharing: It's Music to our Ears > Anti-Piracy > Illegal Music-File-Sharers Targeted... > The Right Price for Digital Music > Follow the Money: Who's Really Making... # Some relevant Web sites to browse
Thurs	5-Apr	<p>Entertainment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading 3-3: <i>The Fast-Forward, On-Demand...</i> • Reading 3-4: <i>Digital Cinema, Take 2</i> > Well, It Turns Out That Lonelygirl Really Wasn't > College Students and Computer, Video... > At Last, Movies to Keep Arrive on the Internet # Second Life # Escape From SimCity

Tues	10-Apr	<p>Journalism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading 9-4: <i>Fragmentation and Cybercascades</i> > Online Opportunities Make Journalism's Future... > Gannett to Crowdsource News
Thurs	12-Apr	<p>Democracy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading 9-1: <i>Media Participation...</i> • Reading 9-2: <i>Smart Mobs...</i> (skim) > Internet Injects Sweeping Change into US Politics > Uploading American Politics > Youtube? It's So Yesterday # The Internet and Campaign 2004

Tues	17-Apr	Presentations 1	
Thurs	19-Apr	Presentations 2 (PAPER #3 DUE FRI. 4 PM)	
Tues	24-Apr	Wrapup	> Five Things We Need to Know About Tech. Change