

# Comm315: Digital Technology & Cultural Change



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**Office:** 303 Higley, 587-8512  
**Office Hours:** Tuesday, 11:30-12:30; Wednesday, 2:30-3:30; or by appointment  
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## Course Summary

The world of communication continues to change rapidly, and with it, the cultural landscape. New avenues of social connection, political action, and creative production clash with powerful financial, legal, and political forces, and the outcomes of these clashes are far from certain. This class explores the possibilities for cultural change that digital technology presents and the social/economic struggles over the future of our culture.

The goal of this course is to help you acquire new vocabularies and skills of cultural analysis and participation that will allow you to better understand, explain, and intervene in the social, cultural, and political possibilities of digital technology. By the end of this class, you should be able to produce clear and sophisticated cultural analyses of new technological developments and their potential social and political impacts, and feel confident participating in read/write cultures at both low- and high-impact levels.

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## Required Texts

Benkler, Yochai. *The Wealth of Networks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). Available at the book store or for free (as in beer) online at [www.benkler.org](http://www.benkler.org).

Flew, Terry. *New Media*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford University Press, 2003). Available at the book store.

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## Assignments

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. Late assignments will be penalized ½ grade per day (e.g. B+ to B). Discussion questions may not be handed in late for credit.

Discussion Questions	10%	Teaching Session	15%
Class Summaries	05%	Final Exam:	25%
Homework	25%	Class Participation:	10%
Second Life assignment	10%		

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## **Policies and Expectations**

**Attendance:** Your attendance and participation are integral to the success of the course as well as your own personal achievement. I will be taking attendance daily, and missing class or failing to participate constructively will definitely impact your class participation grade.

**Lateness:** Be in your seat and ready to begin class at the scheduled start time. I am much more strict about lateness than absenteeism: I would rather you not come to class at all than interrupt your classmates by showing up late.

**Preparation:** Always bring that day's readings to class with you. The syllabus will always state clearly what you should read prior to each class, which assignments you should hand in, and what else you must do or bring for a given day. Late assignments will be penalized by a half-grade for each 24 hours of lateness (e.g. from B+ to B). If you know that you will have difficulty completing an assignment on time, let me know before the deadline and I will try to work with you if possible.

**Written Work:** All written work must be typed (double-spaced), spellchecked, and proofread. Failure to run your work through a spellchecker (one more time before printing is a good idea) will automatically result in a 5% deduction from your grade for that assignment. Multiple-page documents must be stapled—I will not accept unstapled work (please note that paper clips and dog-ears are *not* staples). I also will not accept assignments by email under any circumstances—you must hand in a hard copy of the assignment on the due date in order to avoid a late penalty.

**Grades:** All assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade. The calculation of your grade will be based on a 1,000-point scale, and the weight of each assignment is listed above. If you are concerned about your grade, come talk to me as early as possible.

**In-Class Behavior:** You may not eat in class unless you bring enough for everyone (beverages are okay). You may not use computers in class without prior approval. Your cell phone or PDA must be turned off and put away during class. Points will be deducted from your participation grade if your phone rings, or if I notice you using your cell phone or PDA during class. If you absolutely need to have your phone on during class, talk to me at the beginning of the semester.

**Email Policy:** I will regularly use email to send out announcements, changes in the syllabus, reminders about tests or due dates, etc. It is your responsibility to check your email regularly to keep up-to-date with these announcements. I will use the email address you have listed with the university; therefore, please make sure that this is indeed the correct address. I promise to answer all email from students within 24 hours (36 hours on weekends) and will hold you responsible for any announcements made via email within 24 hours of the announced change (36 hours on weekends). I will not accept assignments via email under any circumstances.

**Accessibility and Special Accommodations:** It is important that the course be accessible to all students. If you need any alternative accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or evaluation procedures in order for you to be able to participate fully in the course, or if there are any external issues that may affect your work in this course, please contact me privately as soon as possible to discuss your specific needs. I rely on the Academic Support & Enrichment Center in 102 Doane to verify the need for reasonable accommodations based on documentation on file in that office.

**Academic Honesty:** You may not turn in substantially similar work to two classes without the express consent of *both* instructors. All sources in your written work must be properly cited; if you have any doubts about correct citation while writing your paper, contact the Writing Center or any of the many paper and online guides to academic citation. Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated, and students found to have committed plagiarism, ***regardless of whether or not the plagiarism was committed intentionally and knowingly***, will face severe grade penalties and will also be reported to the university to face further academic discipline. You are encouraged to use the resources available in the library system and the Writing Center to guide your research.

## Discussion Questions

Five times over the course of the semester, or roughly once every two weeks, you are required to write two discussion questions derived from the readings for that class period. The dates for which you have questions due will be assigned on the first day of class. **Questions must be emailed to me at [kirkpatrickb@denison.edu](mailto:kirkpatrickb@denison.edu) by 8:00 p.m. the night before class.** These questions will be graded as ✓+, ✓, or ✓- and cumulatively comprise 10% of your final grade. For the purposes of calculating your grade, you will receive 2 points for each ✓+, 1.5 points for each ✓, and 1 point for each ✓-. Questions submitted between 8:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. will lose half a point (e.g. a ✓+ question will receive 1.5 points instead of 2 points); questions submitted after 10:00 p.m. will receive no credit, but you may get feedback on them (time permitting).

These questions should demonstrate your ability to grapple with the material, think about it, connect it to other things we've read or discussed, apply it to issues beyond the scope of that particular reading, and generate points that are worth further consideration. A good discussion question forces us to confront the assumptions and implications of our arguments and decisions. Here's a sample of a ✓+ question, from a set of readings about copyright policy:

*Both articles address problems regarding copyright and both are critical of current copyright policy. For example, Ward argues that it is very difficult for small companies to compete in the market because of overly restrictive intellectual property provisions, which raises the relationship of copyright policy to the smooth functioning of a fair and free market. Davis argues that artists are also hurt by current IP laws, which suggests that the current system is neither economically nor culturally optimal. So how do we prioritize the competing values of fostering creativity, ensuring free and fair competition, and rewarding successful creators? Can we strike a balance among these three important considerations, and what policy tools do we have to achieve (or at least approach) that balance? Finally, as we read in the Benton Headlines, the RIAA is now arguing that even ripping a CD to one's computer violates copyright: in the face of such nonsensical and antisocial copyright claims on the part of IP holders, is civil disobedience (e.g. P2P filesharing) morally justified? Lessig seems to think not; what does the class think?*

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## Class Summaries

Seven times over the course of the semester, I will ask you to write class summaries of that day's discussion. These will be assigned only on days on which we have had time to substantively discuss issues; therefore, it is impossible to predict the days on which they will be assigned. The form will vary, but all of them will require that you have paid close attention to class discussion, taken notes, and thoughtfully engaged with the material. These summaries will be graded as ✓+, ✓, or ✓- and cumulatively comprise 05% of your final grade. For obvious reasons, if you are absent, you will receive a zero on that day's summary. However, I will drop the lowest two summary grades before calculating your semester grade for this area of the course (i.e., you have two "freebies"). For the purposes of calculating your grade, you will receive 2 points for each ✓+, 1.5 points for each ✓, and 1 point for each ✓-.

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## Homework

Over the course of the semester, there will be fifteen homework assignments; of these, *you must complete ten, including at least two of the three case studies (#7, 9, 13) and the YouTube video (#10).* Homework will be graded as ✓+, ✓, or ✓- and will cumulatively comprise 25% of your final grade. For the purposes of calculating your grade, you will receive 1 point for each ✓+, .75 points for each ✓, and .5 points for each ✓-. The specific assignments with grading criteria are detailed on a separate sheet.

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## Daily Schedule

Readings should be completed by that day's class, and you should come prepared to discuss them. Those that are not from the textbook are marked as either on electronic reserve (e-res) or on Blackboard (BB).

*Every single thing on this syllabus is subject to change, so check your email or Blackboard for announcements and keep on your toes.*

### UNIT 1 – INTRODUCTION

Sep. 2      **A Time of Epochal Change**

Sep. 4      **Theoretical foundations I**      Read:      Bush, "As We May Think" (e-res)  
Flew, Ch. 1 ("What's New About 'New Media'?")  
Turn In:      Discussion Questions (Group 1)  
HW 1: New Media Estimate

Sep. 9      **Theoretical foundations II**      Read:      Williams, "The Technology and the Society" (e-res)  
Shirky, "Gin, Television, and Social Surplus" (BB)  
Turn In:      Discussion Questions (Group 2)  
HW 2: New Media Interview

Sep. 11      **Theoretical foundations III**      Read:      Benkler, Ch. 1 ("Introduction")  
Turn In:      Discussion Questions (Group 3)  
HW 3: RSS Feed Screenshot

### UNIT 2 – KNOWLEDGE AND IDENTITY

Sep. 16      **New Forms of Knowledge**      Read:      Weinberger, "The Geography of Knowledge" (e-res)  
Holson, "Text Generation Gap" (BB)  
Turn In:      Discussion Questions (Group 4)  
HW 4: Post an interesting article to del.icio.us

Sep. 18      **Who Knows You're a Dog?**      Read:      Turkle, "Who Am We?" (e-res)  
Bailey, "Virtual Skin" (e-res)  
Turn In:      Discussion Questions (Group 1)

Sep. 23      **Technology and Community**      Read:      Flew, Ch. 4 ("Virtual Cultures")  
Turn In:      Second Life assignment

Sep. 25      **Social Networking & Social Change**      Read:      Thompson, "Brave New World of Digital Intimacy" (BB)  
Boyd, "Viewing American Class Divisions Through Facebook and MySpace" (BB)  
Nussbaum, "Say Everything" (BB)  
Turn In:      Discussion Questions (Group 2)  
HW 5: Social networking (auto)biography

### UNIT 3 – ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS

Sep. 30	<b>The Networked Economy</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Benkler pp. 29-58 ("The Networked Information Economy" and "Some Basic Economics...")
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 3)
Oct. 2	<b>E-Commerce</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Flew, Ch. 8 ("Electronic Commerce") Anderson, "The Long Tail" (BB)
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 4)
Oct. 7	<b>Open Source Society</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Benkler, Ch. 3 ("Peer Production and Sharing")
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 1) HW 6: Wikipedia edit
Oct. 9	<b>NO CLASS TODAY</b>		
Oct. 14	<b>Student Teaching I</b>	<u>Prepare:</u>	Teaching Session (Groups A and B)
Oct. 16	<b>What Can We Learn From Wikipedia?</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Zittrain, Ch. 6 ("The Lessons of Wikipedia")
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 2)
Oct. 21	<b>Changes in the Music and Television Industries</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Flew, pp. 94-100 <b>plus any four of:</b> Love, "Courtney Love Does the Math" (BB) Sternbergh, "Turn On. Tune In. Take Over" (BB) Thompson, "Sex, Drugs And Updating Your Blog" (BB) Doctorow, "Illegal Filesharing" (BB) Patry, "Educators Forced to Become MPAA's Cops" (BB) Albini, "The Problem With Music" (BB) Kuchera, "Web 2.0 Rockstar" (BB)
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 3) HW 7: Music/TV case study

### UNIT 4 – MEDIA AND POLITICS

Oct. 23	<b>The Networked Public Sphere</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Benkler pp. 212-261 (excerpt from "Political Freedom Part 2")
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 4) HW 8: Post a comment to a political blog
Oct. 28	<b>Participatory Politics</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Jenkins, "Photoshop for Democracy" (e-res)
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 1) HW 9: Online politics case study

### UNIT 5 – PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

Oct. 30	<b>Web 2.0</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Wikipedia entry on Web 2.0 Benkler pp. 356-377 ("Social Ties") Jenkins, "Nine Propositions Towards a Cultural Theory of YouTube" (BB)
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		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 2) HW 10: Post a video to YouTube
Nov. 4	<b>Cultural Freedom</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Benkler pp. 273-300 ("Cultural Freedom") Lethem, "The Ecstasy of Influence" (BB)
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 3)
Nov. 6	<b>NO CLASS TODAY</b>		
Nov. 11	<b>Student Teaching II</b>	<u>Prepare:</u>	Teaching Session (Groups C and D)
Nov. 13	<b>Copyright and IP Law</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Vaidhyanathan, "The Digital Moment" (E-Res) Doctorow, "Creative Commons" (BB)
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 4) HW 11: Apply a Creative Commons license to your work
Nov. 18	<b>The Cult of the Amateur?</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Keen et al., "Readings on Participatory Culture" (BB)
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 1) HW 12: YouTube comments assessment
Nov. 20	<b>Student Teaching III</b>	<u>Prepare:</u>	Teaching Session (Groups E and F)

**THANKSGIVING BREAK, NOV. 22-NOV. 30**

**UNIT 6 – PROBLEMS**

Dec. 2	<b>Privacy</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Lessig, "Privacy" (e-res) Thompson, "How I Stole Someone's Identity" (BB)
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 2)
Dec. 4	<b>Security</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Zittrain, Ch. 3 ("Cybersecurity") (e-res) Pogue, "How Dangerous is the Internet for Children?" (BB)
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 3) HW 13: Security case studies
Dec. 9	<b>Enough Already?</b>	<u>Read:</u>	McKibben, "Even More" (e-res)
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Group 4) HW 14: New media addiction assessment
Dec. 11	<b>Policy Implications</b>	<u>Read:</u>	Benkler, pp. 460-473 ("Conclusion") Flew, Ch. 11 ("Internet Law and Policy")
		<u>Turn In:</u>	Discussion Questions (Extra Credit) HW 15: Letter to your congressperson

**Take-home final exam due no later than:** Thursday, Dec. 18, 8:30 p.m.