

Information in the Digital Age

NCLC 348 001/002 | 6 credits, including 1 Experiential Learning credit
Fall 2007 | Tuesday & Thursday, 1:30-4:30 | Enterprise 278

Instructors

Lesley Smith
ENT 431
703.993.4586
lsmithg@gmu.edu

Sean Johnson Andrews
ENT 416
703.993.4591
sandrew3@gmu.edu

Learning Community Website
<http://classweb.gmu.edu/nclc348/f07>

LEARNING COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

Welcome to this six-credit learning community on the social, cultural, political and economic life of information. The increased ability to represent information in a digital form has caused an explosion in the creation and distribution — not to mention discussion and classification — of information. It has also broken down some old boundaries — between people, places and kinds of information — that existed in the so-called material world and reinforced others. The nature, form, usage and effects of digitizing information are constantly evolving, as are our perspectives on older forms of information. In this 6-credit learning community, we will examine how the purpose and function of information relate to form, social formation and the “digital dialectic” within the circuit of culture.

We will examine the unique concerns about the production of value, P2P collaborations, copyright, security and privacy in a digital environment. We will explore significant social, cultural, ethical, business, educational and economic consequences of the digital age, as well as the continuities that remain despite the rise of the “information society,” such as the divide between the “haves” and the “have nots.” We will also learn to evaluate digital information (text, graphics, etc.) to distinguish between “junk” and potentially useful information. Lab classes will provide hands-on learning experiences which will inform your own understanding of “information in the digital age.”

REQUIRED TEXTS(this means you **must** buy them)

- Nardi, Bonnie and Vicki O'Day. *Information Ecologies: Using Technology with Heart*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.
- Course reader packets (2) available in Johnson Center Bookstore.

LEARNING COMMUNITY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- become knowledgeable (and think critically) about various forms of (digital) information
- become an active and thoughtful participant in your information ecology
- become knowledgeable about social, political, legal, ethical, commercial and psychological aspects of a digital environment
- learn how to research, analyze, and critique digital resources
- understand and think critically about copyright and other intellectual property laws
- further develop a variety of information analysis, manipulation and dissemination skills using lab. software and online tools
- engage in and critique communication on a variety of computer-mediated communication mediums
- further develop your collaborative work skills and abilities to teach others
- compose well-designed compositions for a variety of audiences and purposes
- articulate your learning experiences in this learning community in terms of New Century College Competencies

LEARNING COMMUNITY REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

This learning community helps you develop critical thinking and reading skills, oral and written communications skills, group interaction skills and information technology skills. Consistent class

attendance is expected of all students. WE expect you to carefully read all assignments, and often, we will have in-class writing assignments or quizzes. **These in-class assignments may not be made up.**

As is true of all New Century College learning communities, your active engagement in all stages of the learning process is expected. WE expect you to meet all deadlines for turning in assignments.

- Papers and other assignments turned in after the beginning of class on the due date will be *marked down one letter grade per day*.
- No work that is more than one week late will be accepted without a valid written medical excuse or notice of death in the family.
- The evaluation process will take place through written feedback, interaction in peer groups and conversations with us.

GRADE BREAKDOWN FOR THIS LEARNING COMMUNITY IS AS FOLLOWS

Class Participation, divided evenly between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in-class discussion/assignments/quizzes • Glossary and Reflection Blog 	25%
Individual Information Ecologies Project	20%
Group Project “Teach us to do something ‘digital’” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Presentation 	15%
Individual pedagogy aspect of group project	5%
Individual learning portfolio	35%

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Introduction

Participation in a New Century College learning community requires both preparation for each class meeting, and an active involvement during each class. As out-of-class preparation significantly enhances the quality of in-class participation, you will gain half your class participation grade for the quality of **your preparation for class**, and half for **your participation in class**.

Preparation

So how do we assess **preparation** for each meeting? First, we have integrated throughout this learning community writing and thinking exercises to help you to prepare for class meetings. For example, each student will keep a weekly journal of informed responses to readings and viewings. As all writers find it difficult, at the beginning of any new project (such as this learning community), to start writing about ideas and experiences, we shall provide both introductions to our weekly readings and study questions to kick-start your reading responses. You will find yourself encountering, yes, pop quizzes from time to time on readings and concepts central to each week’s work, in-class writings, and collaborations with your colleagues.

In addition, we are both available and, more importantly, eager to discuss readings and viewings. If you do not understand the assignment for the next class, or you run into problems with a particular reading or exercise, let us know as soon as possible. We are both on campus several days a week, we enjoy talking about information studies, digital media, and human interactions with computers, and we’re more than happy to help in person, via e-mail or by telephone. But you do need to let us know as soon as you need assistance. Do remember, as you allocate your time, that if you attend class unfamiliar with the readings and viewings, laggardly in your writing, and indifferent to the ideas and work of your peers, your grade will inevitably suffer.

Participation

How about **participation** during each meeting? The in-class work for this learning community includes discussion, writing, research, formal and informal collaboration with peers, information technology instruction and exploration, and a variety of hands-on creative projects. If you are uncomfortable speaking

in a large group, you can share your ideas through writing or within a small group of peers. If you think best as you speak, you can demonstrate your capabilities in full-class discussions or collaborative presentations. If you think and communicate most effectively visually, you might excel as we investigate visual arguments and design electronic portfolios. Whatever your learning style, whatever your intellectual and practical strengths, you should find several ways to demonstrate your excellence and contribute to our ongoing exploration of information in the digital age.

Attendance

Missing class is not the answer to any roadblocks you might encounter. In fact, you might learn more from a meeting when you talk about what you don't understand than from a meeting when you show how much you do know. Reading, and critically thinking about readings, nourishes your in-class work. In-class work supports your individual and collaborative assignments. The conscientious execution of your assignments enlivens subsequent classes. If you miss a meeting, you break that cycle, not only for yourself, but also for your group members and for the learning community as a whole. Thus, class attendance is mandatory (except for medical reasons or religious holidays). If you are absent, inform me of the circumstances as soon as possible and remember that it's your responsibility to research and make up the work you have missed. Regular or persistent absences will reduce your grade.

GUIDELINES FOR FORMAL ASSIGNMENTS

Since this is a class related to digital technology, we will expect all assignments in a digital format. We ask you to send assignments as attachments and we encourage you to consider the creation of some form of electronic portfolio.

We treat assignments as they would be treated in the working world. No supervisor will tolerate an employee turning in an expected report a day late or failing to present an oral presentation on the date anticipated. Meeting deadlines is an important key to success as a student and as a professional in the working world. Failure to turn in portions of the assignment will result in a minimum one letter-grade reduction in your final score for the assignment. A paper or assignment will be considered "late" if it is not turned in at the beginning of class on the date it is due. Papers and assignments will receive a one letter-grade penalty for each day they are turned in late.

IMPORTANT REMINDER

Save all work. That means save soft copies on your computer and on a back-up drive or disk. Also, save hard copies of your drafts, source material and final papers. You will need all of that work for your final portfolio. We do not accept technical excuses for lost work, even when printers are out of cartridges or computers crash. Always plan for the worst and hope for the best when it comes to your technology.

ACADEMIC CITIZENSHIP AND CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

We expect students to take responsibility for their own learning and their own learning environments. We expect students to come to class prepared to take part and even to facilitate class discussion and to support your assertions and theories with evidence from reading and research.

Honor Code

We take the Honor Code, as stated in the George Mason University Undergraduate Catalog, very seriously. It is your responsibility to study it carefully and to ask for further explanation of any part you do not understand. The honor code requires that the work you do as an individual for this learning community be the wholly original product of your own individual synthesis or integration of ideas. The honor code does not prohibit you from working collaboratively on group products. The products produced by your peer groups will reflect the group's collective ideas. As university faculty members, we have an obligation to refer the names of students who may have violated the Honor Code to the Student Honor Council, which treats such cases very seriously. Two issues that are important to understand are plagiarism, and how to avoid it, and appropriate collaboration.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism means using ideas, opinions, factual information, or language from a source without giving that source appropriate credit. The problem with not citing sources isn't just an ethical one (people who come

up with ideas should get some credit for them) but a practical one: citing authorities gives your argument more credibility and, in turn, tells your readers where they can go to learn more about the important ideas you've been considering in your writing. In this case, Wikipedia is not an excellent source for you to cite as it isn't always accurate, but the model they run on—where every major idea needs to be cited—is a good one to follow. Direct quotations, paraphrasing and summaries of opinions or factual information not formerly known to the writer must also be cited. The exception to this rule is information termed general knowledge—in other words, information that is widely known and stated in a number of sources. Determining what is general knowledge can be complicated, so “When in doubt, cite.”

In academic work, credit should generally be given in an appropriate format (for example, the systems created by the Modern Language Association—MLA—or the American Psychological Association—APA.) You should own a good grammar or stylebook manual and should use it when making citations. Using someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit is plagiarism, a very serious offense. It also really upsets us. It is very important to understand how to prevent committing plagiarism when using material from a source. If you wish to quote verbatim, you must use the exact words and punctuation just as the passage appears in the original and must use quotation marks and page numbers in your citation. If you want to paraphrase ideas from a source, you must put the ideas into your own words, and you must cite the source, using the APA or MLA format.

Appropriate Collaboration

Appropriate collaboration is different from plagiarism. In an academic or work setting, some projects are designed to be completed by a group. With collaborative work, names of all the participants should appear on the work. If a group member does not participate in completing the project, his or her name should not appear on the project. Other assignments are designed to be completed independently. In this case, you may discuss your ideas with others and receive feedback from peers on drafts of projects. However, it is not appropriate to turn your papers over to someone else to finish or to revise for you.

You are responsible for making certain there is no question the work you turn in is your own. If your name appears on an assignment, we have a right to expect that you have done the work yourself—fully, independently, and originally for this class. Four fundamental principles to follow at all times are:

- All work submitted with your name on it must be your own
- When using the work or ideas of others, including your fellow students, you must cite appropriately.
- If you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification.
- Additionally, the re-use of papers, presentations, etc., from another learning community, is not appropriate. In every NCC learning community, faculty expect that the work that is submitted has been done only for that class.

No grade is important enough to justify cheating, for which there are serious consequences. If you feel unusual pressure about your grade in this or any other learning community, please talk to us or a member of the Counseling Center staff.

ELECTRONIC ETIQUETTE

GMU provides email and access to the Internet to support the educational mission of the university. Use of these facilities is defined as a privilege, which means that access can be denied in the case of inappropriate use (such as sending of chain letters, harassment of any kind, etc.) Sometimes the nature of electronic communication and the feeling of invisibility one may have when using email may encourage disrespectful behavior. If you say something rude or offensive, even unintentionally, your message will be preserved permanently in writing and can easily be forwarded to a much larger audience (including faculty and prospective employers). Electronic communication is more public than a conversation between friends in the hallway.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see us and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703.993.2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. They can supply you with a faculty contact sheet from that

office explaining your learning difference so that we (and your other instructors) can adjust your learning community requirements accordingly.

COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY STATEMENT

New Century College is an intentionally inclusive community that celebrates diversity and strives to have faculty, staff and students who reflect the diversity of our plural society. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, class, linguistic background, religion, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, or physical ability.

WRITING CENTER

Occasionally, we will refer students to the Writing Center, located in Robinson A116 (993-1200). We take these referrals very seriously, so if we have referred you to the Writing Center, we will expect a report from your Writing Center tutor on your progress. The services of the Writing Center are available by appointment, on-line and, occasionally, on a walk-in basis, and we urge you to take advantage of them whenever you can, without waiting for a referral. Even professional writers seek feedback before they submit final versions of their articles and books!

COMPUTER SUPPORT

Each student in this class should obtain a computer account on the Mason cluster. For privacy reasons George Mason University will only allow us to correspond with you using a "@gmu.edu" account. We will use email for collaborative work and peer review in this class. It is your responsibility to check your email frequently, because adjustments to the course syllabus, class discussions and some assignments will be handled via email. You need to make sure this account is active and check it regularly.

TENTATIVE SUMMARY SCHEDULE...CHECK THE WEBSITE AND E-MAILS FOR UPDATES

Date	Daily Topic	Readings for Discussion	Assignments/Other information
Tuesday, 28 Aug.	Intro to learning community		
Thursday, 30 Aug.	Processing Information	Jerome Groopman, " What's the Trouble? "	
Tuesday, 4 Sept.	Frameworks of Knowledge	John Lye, " Ideology "; James Kavanagh, " Ideology " (Extracts); Walter Lippman, Public Opinion (Extracts)	
Thursday, 6 Sept.	Reading complex Texts	Bonnie Nardi and Vicki O'Day, <i>Information Ecologies</i> , Intro. & chs. 1 & 2	Intro to social softwares, reflection blogs & information ecologies
Tuesday, 11 Sept.	Myths and Cyberspace	Vincent Mosco, ch. 2, "Myth and Cyberspace."	
Thursday, 13 Sept.	Information Ecologies, cntd.	Nardi/O'Day, ch. 3	Introduction to individual project: Information Ecologies
Tuesday, 18 Sept.	Technology and Society	Raymond Williams, ch. 1, "The Technology and the Society" & ch. 5, "Effects of the Technology and its Uses."	Introduction to group project: Teaching Us Something Digital
Thursday, 20 Sept.	Information Ecologies, continued	Nardi/O'Day, ch. 4	Due: Individual proposal for Information Ecologies
Tuesday, 25 Sept.	The "New" Economy	Doug Henwood, "Novelty."; David Barboza, " Ogre to Slay? Outsource it... "; Richard Howard, How I Escaped from Amazon.cult "	
Thursday, 27 Sept.	Value and Information Ecology	Nardi/O'Day, ch. 5	Due: Proposal of teaching options for group project
Tuesday, 2 Oct.	Media Ecology	William Mitchell, "Connecting Creatures"; Vincent Mosco, ch. 5, "When Old Myths were New"; Marshall McLuhan, TBA	

Date	Daily Topic	Readings for Discussion	Assignments/Other information
Thursday, 4 Oct.	Case Studies in Information Ecologies		Due: Group Presentation of case study chapters from <i>Information Ecologies</i>
Tuesday, 9 Oct.	COLUMBUS DAY HOLIDAY		
Thursday, 11 Oct.	Computer vs. Computee	Madelaine Sorapure, " Five Principles of New Media... "; Peter Lunenfeld, ch. 1, "Unfinished Business"	Mid-Semester Assessments and Self-Assessments
Tuesday, 16 Oct.	Virtuality and cognition	Steven Johnson, "Games"; Katherine Hayles, "The Condition of virtuality"; Marie-Laure Ryan, "The Two Faces...Virtual."	
Thursday, 18 Oct.	Information Ecology Analyses		Due: Full Draft of Individual Information Ecologies project and short discussion of your project
Tuesday, 23 Oct.	Digital Imaging and Photographic Truth	Peter Lunenfeld, ch. 5, "Digital Photography: Dubitative Images"; Articles on Digital Photography, TBA	
Thursday, 25 Oct.	Hypertext and Digital Composition		
Tuesday, 30 Oct.		Peter Lunenfeld, "Introduction - Screen Grabs: The Digital Dialectic & New Media Theory."	
Thursday, 1 Nov.	Individual Information Ecology Presentations		Due: Final Information Ecologies Project and short presentation
Tuesday, 6 Nov.	Law and the Public Sphere	James Boyle, "Preface" & ch. 1, "The Information Society;" Jessica Litman (TBA)	
Thursday, 8 Nov.	Who owns Culture?	View Lawrence Lessig, TBA	
Tuesday, 13 Nov.	Value and P2P	Daniel Anderson, " Prosumer Approaches... "; Yochai Benkler, TBA (handout); Adam Arvidsson, " Crisis of Value... "; Michel Bauwens, " The Political Economy of Peer Production "	
Thursday, 15 Nov.	Teaching to Teach		Due: Individual portion of the group project a) teaching your pedagogy article to your group b) written pedagogy analysis
Tuesday, 20 Nov.	Virtual Class		Due: Online group discussion (copy to instructors, please) on how to incorporate lessons from 11/15 into your group project
Thursday, 22 Nov.	THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY		
Tuesday, 27 Nov.	Group Project Presentations		Due: Group Presentation and write up
Thursday, 29 Nov.	Group Project Presentations		Due: Group Presentation and write up
Tuesday, 4 Dec.	Digital Divide and Intellectual Property	Siva Vaidhyathan, "Culture as Anarchy"; Peter Drahos & John Braithwaite, Intro. & ch. 1, "Cultural Trespassers"; Mark Warschauer, TBA	
Thursday, 6 Dec.	A Viral World?	Mark Pesce, " Piracy is Good? "	Plus: Wrap up & Learning community evaluations
Thursday, 13 Dec.	Due: Portfolio (12 noon)		Due: Portfolio (12 noon)