

Computer Sciences

The Social Implications of Digital Technologies **FYS 100J — Spring 2010 — Wake Forest University**

Instructor

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758-4137

Office Hours MWF 10:00 - 10:50

MWF 2:00 - 2:50

or by appointment, or just drop in

General Information

Course Meetings MWF 3:00 - 4:15

013 Kirby Hall

Course Web Site Sakai

Textbooks

A Gift of Fire: Social, Legal, and Ethical Issues for Computing and the Internet (3rd ed. 2008)

Sara Baase

Printed version: ISBN 0-13-600848-8

Reduced-price eTextbook: ISBN 0-13-600885-2

(available from www.coursesmart.com/0136008852)

Updates to the text can be found [here](#)

Blown to Bits: Your Life, Liberty, and Happiness after the Digital Explosion (2008)

Hal Abelson, Ken Ledeen & Harry Lewis

Printed version: ISBN 0-13-713559-9

A free PDF version is available online

(download at www.bitsbook.com)

A companion website, including a very lively and informative blog, can be found at

www.bitsbook.com.

Technology and Society (2009)

J. Harrington

Printed version only: ISBN 0-7637-5094-8

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Overview

The pervasive rise of digital technologies—including personal computers, the Internet and Web, digital media, and increasingly ubiquitous digital devices—is transforming society in ways both expected and unforeseen, both positive and negative. As citizens of this digital society, we all can benefit from

understanding better the expanding roles of these technologies in our lives. This course focuses on the interface between digital technologies and society, including social, legal, ethical, commercial, environmental, and other issues surrounding computers, computer networks and other digital technologies.

Examples of topics to be covered include:

Risks to privacy, security, and freedom of speech

Free speech on the global Internet vs. local and international differences in morality, laws and politics

The changing nature of interpersonal relationships in light of MySpace, Facebook, text messaging, etc.

Information credibility and authority in the age of Google and Wikipedia

Web 2.0: The shift from the Web as a publication medium to a collaborative environment

Journalism's shift from the printed page to online media, and from professional news-gathering organizations to independent sources such as blogs,

YouTube, Wikipedia, etc.

The growing Digital Divide that separates the haves from the have-nots

The exponential growth and increasing interconnectedness of vast databases of personal information

Effortless and free on-line file sharing vs. copyright and intellectual property laws

Health, safety and other risks that arise from the increasing dependence upon technological devices

The environmental costs of rapid technological advancement and resultant rapid device obsolescence

Goals and Objectives

This course will help you develop a deeper understanding of the range of possible consequences of recent technological advances, both in your personal

life and in the broader society, through participation in a combination of activities that are intended to help you to:

Gain an appreciation for the breadth and depth of the themes and issues raised in the course

Understand how computing and information systems give rise to social issues and ethical dilemmas in our complex technological society

Develop comprehensive research techniques that are valid even on quickly changing, current topics, recognizing the distinction between an Internet search engine and a library database
Learn to evaluate sources critically, discriminating between uncorroborated opinion and well-supported, logical exposition
Use authoritative sources to analyze specific topics and effectively develop, support, and present (in both written and verbal forms) rational conclusions concerning those topics
Be able to explore the arguments on all sides of complex, controversial issues, and argue convincingly for the position you select
Expand skills for thoughtfully discussing ideas with others, both verbally and through online channels, and for communicating clearly and carefully through written formats

Tentative List of Topics

This topic list is subject to change as the semester progresses.
Course Overview and Introduction. Themes and Issues.
Privacy and Free Speech.
Censorship and Anonymity.
Web 2.0 and Information Credibility.
The "Bit Brokers" - Google, Cloud Computing, Data Mining, etc.
Encryption and E-Commerce. Net Neutrality.
Intellectual Property.
Cybercrime.
The Digital Divide(s).
e-Waste and Environmental Issues.
Robotics and Artificial Intelligence.
Other Issues: Workplace, Environment, Child Development, OLPC, etc.
Evaluating and Controlling Technology.
Failures and Risks of Digital Technologies.
Digital Ethics.
Wrap-up.

Activities

This course will utilize a variety of activities, including readings from the texts and other sources; monitoring of current events; blog posts and comments on those posts; student-led debate/discussion sessions; two written research papers with peer review; short essays; class preparation quizzes; and a final exam. Note that this is a First-Year *Seminar* course, not a First-Year *Lecture* course. Your benefit from the course will depend directly on your contributions to and participation in the course activities.

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A significant fraction of your grade depends upon your participation and interaction, both in class and online. In the rapidly changing digital world, keeping up with current events is an important part of making sure that the technologies work in your favor and that you can make the most of new developments. Throughout the semester you will be asked to post comments on the course blog about current events that you find interesting, alarming, exciting or otherwise notable, and also comment on others' postings. Frequently you will be assigned readings from the texts, library reserves, or other sources to provide context and background material to help prepare you for classroom discussions. On days when readings have been assigned class will begin with a short "class preparation quiz" based on the assigned readings. Late arrivers will miss their opportunity to complete that day's quiz. Once during the semester you (with a partner) will be asked to lead the class in a debate and discussion on a topic of interest, chosen by the instructor from among class blog posts or other current events. During each of these "debate days", you and your partner will describe and explain the arguments and positions held by opposing sides of the issue (with each each of you presenting one of the two sides) and then lead the rest of the class in further deliberation on the topic. You will write two 10-page research papers this semester, with multiple milestones for each (specific dates for the various milestones will be finalized early in the semester). Specifically, the milestones will include:
Paper proposal: topic selection, thesis statement, general outline, and preliminary sources
First draft
Peer review
Final version

Finally, the course will include a written final exam during the scheduled finals period (Saturday May 1st, 9:00 am - noon) covering the themes and issues discussed throughout the course.

Attendance

Class attendance at every session is expected and required. Unexcused absences will reduce your course grade.

Illness is excusable but if possible please email the instructor before the class you will miss.

Please provide a schedule as soon as possible if you have planned activities that will require you to miss any class meetings or reschedule any assignment due dates.

Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are due at the beginning of class on the assignment due date. If you are unable to turn in an assignment

when it is due, please make arrangements to submit it *before* the due date. Late submissions of graded work will be penalized one letter grade per

calendar day late. Late submissions of ungraded but required work will not receive credit.

Evaluation

The various contributions to your overall course grade will be weighted as follows:

In-class and online participation
(including other misc. assignments):
30%

Class preparation quizzes: 10%

Student-led debate/discussion: 10%

Two research papers
(with stepwise milestones)
40%

Cumulative final exam: 10%

Your overall course grade will be based on the percentage of total weighted points earned as shown below (no curves):

92 % or above: A 72 thru 77.9: C

90 thru 91.9: A - 70 thru 71.9: C -

88 thru 89.9: B + 68 thru 69.9: D +

82 thru 87.9: B 62 thru 67.9: D

80 thru 81.9: B - 60 thru 61.9: D -

78 thru 79.9: C + below 60 %: F

Other Course Policies

Announcements and other course communications will frequently be made via email. It is your responsibility to regularly monitor your WFU email

account or to have it forwarded to your personal email account.

Laptops can be a valuable learning tool and an irresistible distraction. The use of laptops during class may be allowed for class-related purposes at

the discretion of the instructor; however, abuse of this privilege will not be tolerated.

Other electronic devices (cell phones, music players, calculators, recording devices, etc.) are not to be used during class without prior permission of the instructor.

If you have a limitation or other condition that may require an accommodation for taking this course, please contact the [Learning Assistance Center](#)

(758-5929) as soon as possible within the first two weeks of the semester.

Wake Forest University is an academic community that subscribes to an [honor system](#). By accepting membership in this community, we all assume

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the obligation to be trustworthy in all pursuits. Violations may be referred to the [Honor and Ethics Council](#) for investigation and determination of appropriate sanctions.

WFU subscribes to [Turnitin](#), a proprietary system that instantly identifies papers containing unoriginal material.

In the unlikely event of a major disruption of normal university activities (such as might result from a health emergency or other disaster), a course

continuation contingency plan will be enacted in order to allow completion of the course.

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