

The Information Society



We are often told that we are living in an “Information Society,” and indeed, this is a truth that seems self-evident: communications and information technologies increasingly pervade our homes, our workplaces, our schools, even our own bodies. But what exactly do we mean when we talk about the “Information Society”? If we are living in an Information Society, when did it come into being? What developments — social, economic, political, or technological — made it possible? How does it differ from earlier eras? And finally, and most significantly: what does it all mean?

This course will explore the ways in which Western industrialized societies, over the course of the previous two centuries, came to see information as a crucial commercial, scientific, organizational, political, and commercial asset. Although at the center of our story will be the development of new information technologies — from printing press to telephone to computer to Internet — our focus will not be on machines, but on people, and on the ways in which average individuals contributed to, made sense of, and come to terms with, the many social, technological, and political developments that have shaped the contours of our modern Information Society. Our goal is to use these historical perspectives to inform our discussions about issues of contemporary concern about information technology.

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I222 • Fall 2016

I222: The Information Society

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Course Goals:

The goal of the course is to provide you with the tools for critically evaluating claims made about the role and influence of information technology in modern society. Our primary methodology will be historical. This might at first seem unusual, since so much of the rhetoric of the Information Society asserts that there is no relevant history, and that we are living in an era in which the old rules and modes of thinking no longer apply. But we are not the first society to believe itself to be living through an unprecedented technological revolution, and so in this course, we will learn to apply the time-honored perspectives of the humanistic disciplines to the study of contemporary technological developments.

Students will learn to think historically about information technologies, to broaden their perspective on the relationship between technology and society to include insights from the humanities and social sciences, and to master the very best available relevant scholarly literature.

Course Format:

The Information Society course meets twice weekly. To the degree possible with such a large course, our meetings will be a mixed lecture-discussion format. Our first session each week will typically introduce our week's topic; the second provides further development, as well as an opportunity to talk about the readings and answer any questions that you might have.

Attendance:

Attendance in the course is more than usually essential. My lectures make extensive use of images, audio, and video. Although I will make some of this material available on the course Canvas site, much of it will be available only during class. All students will have one discretionary absence that they can use during the semester. Students using a discretionary absence will not need to present documentation to support the absence, such as a doctor's note. Students who need to miss more than one class should inform their AI beforehand to avoid being penalized.

Readings:

The readings in the course draw on the very best literature from history, sociology, anthropology, and the emerging field of Internet studies. Your need to prepare each week's readings *in advance* of the first lecture of that week.

There are no required book for the course. All of the readings will be made available electronically via the Canvas site.

Grading:

Grading in this class will be based on three major components: weekly reading response online questions/quizzes (50%); in-class mid-term (25%); final exam (25%).

Course Schedule

I Introduction

August 23: Introducing the Information Revolution!

August 25: Gutenberg, Galileo, Google

Reading(s): Cook, Scott D.N. "Technological Revolutions and the Gutenberg Myth." In *Internet Dreams: Archetypes, Myths, and Metaphors*, edited by Mark Stefik. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997.

Assignment: Medieval Management Consultant

II The Age of Information

August 30: The Politics of the Post-Office

September 1: The Annihilation of Space & Time

Reading(s): Henkin, David. "Embracing Opportunities: The Construction of the Personal Letter." *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (University of Chicago, 2006); Collister, Lauren. "Why Does Using a Period in a Text Message Make You Sound Insincere or Angry?" *New Republic* (July 19, 2016)

<https://goo.gl/NND8CK>

Assignment: Digital Diary: the social norms of text messages

III Industrializing Information

September 6: Information Factories

September 8: When Computers Were Human

Reading(s): Campbell-Kelly, Martin. *The Railway Clearing House and Victorian Data Processing*, 1994.

Assignment: Tracking Packages in the 19th Century

IV When Information is Power

September 13: From Mad Men to Big Brother

September 15: Popular Cinema, Mass-Market Music, Intellectual Property

Reading(s): Urban, Glen, Sultan, Fareena, and Qualls, William. "Placing Trust at the Center of Your Internet Strategy." *MIT Sloan Management Review* (Fall 2000); Gladwell, Malcolm. "The Science of Shopping." *New Yorker* (Nov. 4, 1996)

Assignment: In the Internet We Trust ...

V War: what is it good for?

September 20: Giant Brains; or, Machines that Think

September 22: Build your own Computer!

Reading(s):

Campbell-Kelly, et al. "Inventing the Computer." Chapter 4 in *Computer: A History of the Information Machine* (2013)

Assignment: Simulation: Enigma Machine Emulator

VI The Computerization of Society

September 27: IBM and the Seven Dwarves

September 29: Software Revolution

Reading(s): Campbell-Kelly, et al. "Software" Chapter 8 in *Computer: A History of the Information Machine* (2013)

Assignment: The Computer Girls Take Over...

VII Information Regurgitation

October 4: Mid Semester Wrap-Up

October 6: Mid-Term Exam

Reading(s): **In-class mid-term:** covers weeks 1–7.

VIII Silicon Valley 1.0

October 11: Simulations, Simulacra, and the Matrix

October 13: Silicon Valley 1.0

Reading(s):

Fred Turner, "Where the counterculture met the new economy: The WELL and the origins of virtual community," *Technology and Culture* (2005).

Assignment: The Game of Life

IX Great Myths in the History of Computing

October 18: Visions of Personal Computing from Videotext to Videogames

October 20: From Hippies to Hackers

Reading(s): Turkle, Sherry. "Hackers: Loving the Machine for Itself." In *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (Simon Schuster, 1984).

De Lacy, Justine. "The Sexy Computer." In *Computers in the Human Context*, edited by Tom Forrester. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989.

Assignment: The Computer Nerd in Popular Culture

X The Social Construction of the Personal Computer

October 25: The Importance of Platforms ...

October 27: ARPAnet to Internet

Reading(s):

Cringely, Robert X. *Accidental Empires: How the Boys of Silicon Valley Make Their Millions, Battle Foreign Competition, and Still Can't Get a Date* (Addison-Wesley, 1992). Selected chapters. chapters.

Assignment: Primary Source Assignment: The History of The PC

XI Origins of the Internet

November 1: The Architecture of the Internet

November 3: The Materiality of the Virtual

Reading(s):

Abbate, Janet. *Inventing the Internet* (MIT Press 1999), Chapters 1–2.

Assignment: Packet Analysis Assignment

XII Cyberspace(s)

November 8: Internet Korea (guest lecture)

November 10: Living the Virtual Life

Reading(s):

Lessig, Lawrence. *Code, and other Laws of Cyberspace* (Basic Books, 1999). Chapters 4–5.

Assignment: Virtual Ethnography

XIII Convergence

November 15: Code is Law

November 17: The Social Construction of the Cell Phone

Reading(s):

Goldsmith, Jack and Wu, Timothy. *Who Controls the Internet?: Illusions of a Borderless World* (Oxford University Press, 2006). Selected excerpts.

Assignment: I think X should be banned from the Internet...

XIV Post-Modern, Post-Industrial, Post-Information?

November 29: Information Overload

December 1: Digital Globalism?

Reading(s): Various short online articles: “How Sticky Is Membership on Facebook? Just Try Breaking Free”; “Facebook can ruin your life ...”; “Oh Crap. My Parents Joined Facebook”; “Psychologist finds Wikipedians grumpy and closed-minded”; “Angry online divorcee ‘kills’ virtual ex-hubby”; “SEXTORTION AT EISENHOWER HIGH”; “Judges fear dangers of online ‘rat’ database”; “Teen Tests Internet’s Lewd Track Record”; “E-Mail Surveillance Renews Concerns in Congress”; “Stop the Internet, I want to get off!”; “How Google Earth Ate Our Town”; “China’s All-Seeing Eye”; “U.S. corporations massively read employee e-mail”; “The Invasion of Privacy Through Your Mobile Phone”

Assignment: Digital Diary: Social Media at IU

XV Red Pill, Blue Pill ...

December 6: The Information Revolution Revisited

December 8: Big Finish

Reading(s): No readings.

Final Exam Information:

The final exam for this class has been scheduled by the Registrar’s office and is set for Monday, December 12 from 2:45-4:45pm.