

Science and Technology Studies 6614
Culture, History, and Politics of the Internet

Virginia Tech Northern Virginia Center, Falls Church
Spring 2008, Tuesday 7:00-9:45

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Computer networks pervade American life and increasingly structure the way we work and socialize. As we adopt these technologies and use them to create new forms of cultural expression, we also raise a host of new social and policy questions. This course will explore a variety of social factors, past and present, that have affected the way we make, use, and think about computers and the Internet. We will begin with the origins of the Internet and the people who shaped this technology, from military strategists to hackers. We will consider how the “laws” of technology and governments intersect, comparing political responses to the Internet around the world. Examining the ways diverse groups interact and build communities online, we will also ask how cultural norms about race and gender have shaped the ways women and men participate in the world of computing. Requirements include class discussion of readings, short papers, and collaboration on building a course wiki.

Required Books

Abbate, Janet. *Inventing the Internet*. MIT Press, 2000.

Goldsmith, Jack. *Who Controls the Internet?: Illusions of a Borderless World*. Oxford University Press, 2006. [184]

Lessig, Lawrence. *Code: Version 2.0*. Basic Books, 2006. [Note: Full text can be downloaded in PDF form at: <http://codev2.cc/>]

Kalathil, Shanthi and Boas, Taylor C. *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA, 2003. [153]

STS 6614: Culture, History, and Politics of the Internet

Janet Abbate / Spring 2008

Week 1, January 15 /

Introduction

Reading: Darnton, Robert. 2000. "An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris." *American Historical Review* 105 (1):1-35.

Langdon Winner. "Mythinformation." From John Zerzan and Alice Carnes, eds. *Questioning Technology*. New Society Publishers, 1991.

Assignments: Short paper #1. Begin building course wiki.

Week 2, January 22 /

History of the Internet, part 1

Reading: Abbate, Introduction and chapters 1–3

Assignments: Wiki

Week 3, January 29 /

History of the Internet, part 2

Special guest speaker: Dr. Steve Lukasik, Deputy Director/Director of ARPA, 1967-1974

Reading: Abbate chapters 4–6

Assignments: Short paper #1 due **Friday, February 1 at noon**

Week 4, February 5 /

Discussion of short paper #1

Reading: Short papers

Assignments: Wiki

Week 5, February 12 /

Internet Governance, part 1

Reading: Goldsmith and Wu, Preface and chapters 1-5

Assignments: Wiki

Week 6, February 19 /

Internet Governance, part 2

Reading: Goldsmith and Wu, chapters 6-11

Assignments: Wiki

Week 7, February 26 /

Freedom and Control Online in the United States, part 1

Reading: Lessig chapters 1-8

Assignments: Wiki

***** SPRING BREAK *****

Week 8, March 11 /

Freedom and Control Online in the United States, part 2

Reading: Lessig chapters 9-18

Assignments: Short paper #2 due Friday noon

Week 9, March 18 /

Discussion of short paper #2

Reading: Short papers

Assignments: Wiki

Week 10, March 25 /

Freedom and Control Online in Authoritarian Regimes, part 1

Reading: Kalathil and Boas, 1-3

Assignments: Wiki

Week 11, April 1 /

Freedom and Control Online in Authoritarian Regimes, part 2

Reading: Kalathil and Boas, 4-6

Assignments: Wiki

Week 12, April 8 /

Cyberculture, part 1: Theories and Examples

Reading: Kitchin, Rob. 1998. *Cyberspace: The World in the Wires*. New York: Wiley. Chapter 3: "Theoretical Perspectives: Approaching Cyberspace." 55-72; Chapter 4: "Cyberspace, Culture and Society." 74-97.

Rheingold, Howard. "Daily Life in Cyberspace." From *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. HarperCollins, 1993. 38-43, 56-64.

Gibson, William. "Academy Leader." From Packer, Randall, and Ken Jordan, eds. 2001. *Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality*. New York: W. W. Norton. 247-251.

Miller, Daniel, and Dan Slater. 2000. *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*. Chapter 1, "Conclusions," 1-9 only; Chapter 4, "Being Trini and Representing Trinidad" 85-115.

Assignments: Wiki

Week 13, April 15 /

Cyberculture, part 2: Policies for Improving Cyberculture

Reading: Zorn, Isabel. "Vifu: Virtual Community Building for Networking among Women." *Gender, Technology and Development* 2004 8: 75-95.

Sandvig, Christian. "The Structural Problems of the Internet for Cultural Policy." In David Silver and Adrienne Massanari, eds. 2006. *Critical Cyberculture Studies*. New York: New York University Press. 107-118.

Schneier, Bruce. "Computer Security: It's the Economics, Stupid." Economics and Information Security Workshop, Berkeley, CA, 2002.

Assignments: Short paper #3 due Friday noon

Week 14, April 22 /

Discussion of short paper #3

Reading: Short papers

Assignments: Wiki

Week 15, April 29 /

Wrap-up

Reading: TBA

Assignments: Wiki