The History and Philosophy of Internet Technology

The rapid diffusion and seeming ubiquity of internet technology hides the historical pressure to develop information networks and the immense governmental and social infrastructure behind this technology. In this course, we will investigate some early visions of the internet and lessons learned from its first developers in order to better understand where we are now. Using perspectives from historical documents and polemical statements, we will examine the founding premises of the internet, uncovering the assumptions about culture, policy objectives, and ideals of practitioners, both before and after the worldwide web. We will consider the ethical implications of Web 2.0 and decide if it is an innovation or simply a continuation of the original dream. We will wonder what kinds of individuals are hailed by particular internet configurations, especially paying attention to the claim that the internet can transform society. Our aim here is to decide what cultural policy considerations lie behind the current implementation of network technologies and what alterations could or should be made based on earlier aspirations.

Course Grade

Discussion board posts 30%
Final exam on last day of class 70%

As in the American system, a grade of A (1.0) is awarded for a score greater than 92%. An A- (1.3) is awarded for 90%-92%, and so on. Less than 60% is failing (5.0/nicht bestanden).

Discussion Board
A few times during the semester, you must make a post to one of our discussion board forums on Moodle. One group will make preliminary comments about the reading assignment the day before class. A second group will make follow-up responses to the week’s lecture. I will assign groups in the second week of class – if you do not know your group, please contact me.

Final Exam
The final exam for this class is cumulative, covering all lectures and reading assignments. Questions will be multiple choice and matching. If you would like to practice for the exam, I will provide three short, ungraded quizzes during the semester using Moodle. I encourage you to use these quizzes to monitor your progress and if you do badly on them, please see me.

Textbooks
There is no textbook for this class because most of the material we read this semester is available online. Please see Moodle for links.

Course Standards
In order for this classroom community to function, all members must adhere to these guidelines:

Attendance – On-time attendance for the entirety of the class meeting is required. Please avoid leaving the room during class.

Decorum – Please limit your comments and questions to the material at hand, helping to progress the matter of discussion without distracting the class from it. You should not hold side conversations. All electronic devices must be turned off (silenced is not sufficient); this includes phones, pagers, games, laptops, handhelds, players or recorders. You must pay attention; eating and sleeping are not permitted. Visitors need the advance approval of the instructor.

Honesty – Cheating and plagiarism are not tolerated and may result in punishment that includes failure of the course. You may not use notes or other materials during quizzes or exams. Please be
advised that a person who allows someone to cheat (by allowing someone to see a test paper or communicating test questions, for instance) is just as guilty as the person who does the cheating and will be equally punished.

Originality – By handing in work for this class (assignments, quizzes, exams, or other projects) you attest that they are your own original effort. The work you hand in must never have been handed in to fulfill the requirements of another class.

Plagiarism – Plagiarism is a serious offense to the instructor and the university that at the least will be punished by failure of the course. By handing in assignments, quizzes, or exams, you attest that they are your own original work. You are reminded that to best combat plagiarism, you should close all source materials when writing. In addition, you must cite all sources outside of your own experience. You must never use someone else’s words in your own document unless you use quote marks and an appropriate citation system. Further information will be provided in class.

Tentative Schedule

22 April. Overview of the Course
29 April. Networks of Paper, Wood, Iron, and Copper (and Air!)
6 May. The Analog Internet, 1920–1950
13 May. Vannevar Bush and Scientific Culture at Midcentury (Quiz 1 available on Moodle)
   Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think.”
20 May. Computers and Computer Networks in the Cold War
   Paul Edwards, from Chapter 3 of *Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America.*
27 May. Xanadu and Other 1960s Visions
   J. C. R. Licklider, “Man-Computer Symbiosis.”
3 June. Building the ARPANET (Quiz 2 available on Moodle)
   Jante Abbate, from “The Most Neglected Element” in *Inventing the Internet.*
10 June. From Internetworking to the Internet
   Katie Hafner and Matthew Lyon, from “A Rocket in Our Hands” in *Where Wizards Stay Up Late.*
17 June. Before the Web was Worldwide: To Germany, Then China
   Werner Zorn, “How China Was Connected to the International Computer Networks.”
24 June. Internet Contemporaries: Minitel, Usenet and BBS (Quiz 3 available on Moodle)
   John Naughton, “The Poor Man’s Internet” and “The Great Unwashed” in *Brief History of the Future.*
1 July. India and the United Arab Emirates Say Yes, Lybia, North Korea and Oman Hold Back
8 July. How the Web Became a Platform for Art, Activism, and Identity
   Lee Salter, “Democracy, New Social Movements, and the Internet.”
15 July. Getting Back to the Future: The Portable, Personal Web 2.0
   Howard Rheingold, “Smart Mobs: The Power of the Mobile Many” from *Smart Mobs.*
22 July. Final Exam