



Course Syllabus: The Internet & Society
Lamar D. Fain College of Fine Arts
MCOM 2523 Section 101
Fall 2024 M/W 11:00-12:20 | Fain Fine Arts Center D101

Contact Information

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and by appointment—just ask and we will find a time that works for you!
and by "stopping by"—I am in my office a lot!

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- NOTE: If you make the email subject line look like this:
INTERNET & SOCIETY: Subject of Message
it will be easier for me to see the email sooner and get back to you sooner.
 - Please do not forget to include your name in the body of the email so that I know who the email is from.
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Course Description

Prerequisite: none

The Internet is profoundly affecting how we live our lives. It has changed the way we work, play, and interact with other people. There are (at least) two sides to almost all of the questions we will consider in this course. We will spend much of our class time discussing the issues and exploring different points of view.

We will examine personal, academic, media, and business uses of the Internet. We will apply practical and theoretical concepts to study the mutual interaction of computers and other new technologies, the Internet, society, and the struggles for control/ownership of the World Wide Web and its content.

Learning Outcomes

This course satisfies MSU's Cultural & Global Understanding core curriculum requirement. Students of any major can benefit from this course because it will help them become better-informed Internet consumers.

No previous technical knowledge is presumed other than your personal experience with computers, the Internet, and mobile phones.

After successfully completing this course, you should be able to:

- understand some of the social, legal, philosophical, political, constitutional, economical, and ethical issues related to the Internet
- discuss benefits offered by the Internet as well as risks and problems associated with it
- explore arguments on multiple sides of a controversial issue
- understand and value multiple sides of an issue—look for common ground
- have an increased awareness of current social and legal developments related to the Internet
- evaluate accuracy of information on the Internet
- identify communication tools available on the Internet
- utilize communication tools available on the Internet
- compare communication tools available on the Internet

We will do this through attention, flexibility, experimentation, and critical thinking, abilities that will serve you well beyond this class.

The knowledge, attitudes, and skills you gain by successfully completing this course can help you in almost any career. Becoming a life-long learner and analyzing information you receive will be essential to your success as a professional and can also greatly impact your personal life and your life as a citizen of the world.

Textbook

A Gift of Fire: Social, Legal, and Ethical Issues for Computing Technology (5th edition) by Sara Baase and Timothy M. Henry

(note: this book covers many Internet issues and also some non-internet issues; for this class, we will focus on internet-specific issues)

Teaching and Learning Philosophy

A class is a process, an independent organism with its own goals and dynamics. It is always something more than even the most imaginative lesson plan can predict. --Thomas P. Kasulis

We are starting with this syllabus and tentative schedule. Our class will evolve based on our work together, driven by curiosity, experimentation, and discovery.

What's most important to me is that you are able to show up fully to our work together.

- As we collaborate, I trust you to make decisions about what feels safe for you, and we all want you to do what you can to keep others safe.
- I encourage you to connect with me and your classmates. This is a community, and there are lots of different ways we can each contribute.
- I look forward to getting to know you better, as a student, a creator, and a person.

Core Values

In this class we will strive to uphold the same shared core values that unite all Midwestern State University faculty, staff, and students:

- Engage others with respect, empathy, and joy (people-centered)
- Cultivating a diverse and inclusive campus environment (community)
- Always doing the right thing (integrity)
- Adopting innovative ideas to pioneer new paths (visionary)
- Valuing relationships with broader communities (connections)

See the [Values Journey web page](#) for more details.

I consider the classroom to be a place where ALL students will be treated with respect as human beings, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexuality, ability, class, religious affiliation, political beliefs, age, and other cultural identities and material circumstances. Moreover, diversity of thought is appreciated and encouraged, provided we can agree to disagree.

Think of your peers as an audience for your work, as well as a source for feedback and encouragement. Draw on their expertise. This class will be as much (or more) about you teaching yourselves and each other as it is about me teaching you. Because of this, it's important that we create a community of belonging that is respectful of our differences and offers space for the boundary-setting necessary for positive relationships to form.

We are all responsible to ensure the classroom is a safe environment. This includes not posting classroom activities or materials to social media without the consent of everyone involved.

Academic Integrity and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Overarching principle:

In all academic work, the ideas and contributions of others must be appropriately acknowledged and work that is presented as original must be, in fact, original.

-- from the University of Iowa

Creators should be able to control what we create; appropriating others' ideas or labor without credit or attribution is theft; no creators want their stuff stolen. The entire scholarly enterprise depends upon an adherence to those norms. Citation and attribution are also important ways to ensure that scholarly discourse is open to all voices and does not silence marginalized or minority perspectives. In that regard, plagiarism can be a form of censorship, in that it removes someone's voice (and by extension, scholarly identity) from the conversation.

-- by Kevin Gannon in The Chronicle of Higher Education

Plagiarism is (1) the use of source material of other persons (either published or unpublished, including the Internet) without following the accepted techniques of giving credit or (2) the submission for credit of work not of the individuals to whom credit is given. If a student in the class is caught plagiarizing, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken.

The Student Creed developed and adopted by the MSU Student Government reinforces the discouragement of plagiarism and other unethical behaviors. The first statement of the Creed reads, "As an MSU student, I pledge not to lie, cheat, steal, or help anyone else to do so." Plagiarism is lying, cheating, and stealing.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In 1967, the first modern handheld calculator was introduced. Adults worried that people would lose their ability to compute or to think logically. Society had to change the way it thought about math and logic and how it was taught.

In 1990, we got the first search engine and progressed through to Google. Adults worried that people would lose their ability to memorize anything. Society had to change the way it thought about information, memorization, and the nature of truth.

In 2022, ChatGPT was publicly released. Adults are worried that college students are now able to go through their degree programs without writing or thinking anything for themselves. Society is going to have to change the way it thinks

about communication and the ways in which students can demonstrate understanding.

ChatGPT and other AI tools can help to free up bandwidth in our currently traumatized and overloaded brains.

Using AI tools responsibly is an emerging skill that involves awareness of AI's capabilities and limitations.

Developing this awareness can support our using AI tools purposefully and ethically. Here are a few questions to help:

What is ChatGPT/AI good for?

What is it not good for?

What can we trust?

How can we check?

To uphold quality and transparency, we will start with these guidelines.

- We won't type a question into ChatGPT/AI, exactly copy and paste its response, and turn it in/represent it as our own.
- We will evaluate AI-generated text critically.
- We will fact-check claims and watch for factual errors or omissions; we are responsible for content we submit.
- We won't use ChatGPT/AI on an assignment without disclosing somewhere in the assignment that we have done so and how we have done so.
- For example, we might describe using a tool to help brainstorm ideas or check grammar. This promotes transparency.
- We will focus prompts on clarifying our own thinking rather than outsourcing it. High-quality prompts elicit outputs that aid our learning and original analysis. Make sure to save the prompt language that we use, and include this language in your disclosure of AI use statement.
- If you are ever unclear, or if you are unsure about anything AI, please ask. Your asking will help us all with clarity and learning.
- Again, our focus is on using ChatGPT/AI in ways that are intentional, accurate, ethical, and useful.

So, when you turn in assignments, include a sentence at the end that says either:

- 1. "I worked alone on this assignment.", or**
- 2. "I worked with _____ [person or tool] on this assignment." Provide a brief description of how you worked with that person or tool.**
- 3. "I received assistance from _____ [person or tool] on this assignment." Provide a brief description of the assistance you received.**

Below are some examples, modified from samples given in *Teaching with AI* by Bowen & Watson.

- I did the first draft. Then I asked friends/family/AI/ChatGPT/paraphrase/grammar/plagiarism software to read it and make suggestions. I made the following changes:
 - List the changes here
- I got stuck on problems and called a friend went to the TASP Center. They helped me by...
- I used AI/Copilot/friends/a tutor to help me generate ideas. Here is how that process went: ...

Note that providing this information will only serve to help me understand you better. I strongly endorse collaborative learning when it increases your ability to succeed in this class and when it enhances your education and learning.

As a general rule, if you do not understand what you are handing in, you are probably cheating. If you have given somebody the answer, you are probably cheating. In order to help you draw the line, here are some examples of clear cases of cheating:

- Copying files from another person, source, or tool, including retyping their files, changing descriptive names, copying code without explicit citation from previously published works, etc.
- Allowing someone else to copy your code or written assignment, either in draft or final form.
- Getting help from a peer or AI tool which you do not acknowledge on your solution.
- Copying from another student during quiz. This includes receiving quiz-related information from a student who has already taken the quiz.

I'm assuming we won't have a problem in this regard but want to make sure that expectations are clear so that we can spend the semester learning things together—and not worrying about the origins of your work.

Telling the truth is important, and I want to support you in the ways that I can. I have a lot of respect for people who are honest about their mistakes even when it's difficult. It is much easier for current and past unethical situations to be handled in honest, non-judgmental conversations, and I hope you'll feel safe engaging in those with me if ever needed.

For instances in which we cannot agree, or are unsure of a norm, we'll consult the "University Policies and Procedures" section of the [Student Handbook](#).

Please be aware that other classes may have different policies and that some may forbid AI use altogether.

Policies: Classroom/Conduct

You are expected to adhere to the Standards of Conduct as published in the [Student Handbook](#).

Moffett Library

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support student's studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Get started on this [Moffett Library webpage](#) to explore these resources and learn how to best utilize the library.

Grading

Our work together in this course will include reflecting on your own learning process and supporting the learning process of others. Final grades will be based on the following.

Table 1: Percent allocations.

Assignments	Percent
Discussions	35
Activities	35
Quizzes	15
Final reflection	10
Professionalism	5
Total Percent	100

Table 2: Grading scale.

Grade	Percent
A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	Less than 60

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Each student is expected to be familiar with this program as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU Homepage.

If you experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program or contact your instructor.

Class Participation and Attendance

This course will be a cooperative learning experience, a true intellectual community. You and your work are, in a very real sense, the primary texts for this course. In order for us to work together as a community, we all have to come prepared to participate. If you can't finish work for any reason, chat with me (and your collaborators) in advance.

Class meetings are our main opportunity to create knowledge together and practice the skills you are learning this semester. Your attendance is crucial to your and your peers' learning as everyone misses out on your contributions if you are not present. However, sometimes life happens.

Over the course of the semester you can miss 3 class sessions without penalty. Please note that this does not include the last day of class or the day that you are scheduled for a presentation. If any other days end up not being eligible, you will be notified ahead of time. Please email me as soon as you can if you know that you will be missing class or, in the case of an unexpected emergency, as soon as possible after missing class.

If you do not use these absences, then extra points will be added to your lowest assignment score when computing your final grade (i.e., extra credit).

If there are extenuating circumstances that require you to miss class repeatedly or for an extended period, please come and discuss this issue with me so I can assist in connecting you with the appropriate support.

Additionally, our class meetings will include activities; they will not be straight lecture. The activities are designed to be interesting and to help you learn. These activities will often have a credit/grade component to them. Therefore, your attendance and active participation will affect how much you learn and how well you do in the course.

You are expected to respect yourself and your learning community by:

- behaving professionally
- arriving on time
- being prepared
- paying attention
- actively participating
- staying for the full class
- treating others with courtesy and respect
- using language thoughtfully

If you miss class, you miss the chance to participate in your education and the education of others in class. Your peers are counting on you to be in class and to participate. You are responsible for all material presented in every class period, whether present or not.

Professionalism

1. You are in this class to prepare for the professional world. Treat this class like the professional world. Build habits that will support your professional success!
2. In the professional world, you do not pull out your phone for non-meeting activities (e.g., texting friends, getting on social media, etc.). If you do, there are consequences. Some of those consequences may be explicit and obvious. Others may not be obvious but can still be significant. The same goes for this course.

Again, build habits that will support your professional success; don't build habits that will get in the way of your professional success.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices

Electronic devices are welcome (encouraged) in class *to support learning*.

Two things to remember for this:

1. Please be mindful that electronic devices do not serve as a distraction to you or those around you.

Research on learning shows that unexpected noises and movement automatically divert and capture people's attention, which means you are affecting everyone's learning experience if your cell phone, pager, laptop, etc. makes noise or is visually distracting during class.

2. I want our classroom to be free to have an open discussion. It's hard to have an open discussion when you know you are being recorded for everyone to see forever. Therefore, no one is to use any recording devices or recording media during the class unless we all decide, as a class, that this is okay. If recording class is needed as a learning accommodation, please see me so that we can discuss privacy guidelines.

Accommodations

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information that needs sharing, or if you need special accommodations in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. Please also contact [Disability Support Services](#) at 940-397-4140 in Clark Student Center, room 168, to document and coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities if you have not already done so.

I want to work together to make sure the course meets your needs. You do not need to divulge any personal information in order to have these conversations or to receive accommodations. I trust you. Learning is something we do together. And, of course, I will hold information you do share with me in confidence unless you give me permission to do otherwise.

If you do not require accommodations due to a disability, understand that some of your fellow students might, and it is important to me that you do not make assumptions about where, when, or how they learn.

Privacy

Federal privacy law prohibits me from releasing information about students to certain parties outside of the university without the signed consent of the student.

Managing Stress

You may experience situations or challenges that can interfere with learning and interpersonal functioning including stress, anxiety, depression, alcohol and/or other drug use, concern for a friend or family member, loss, sleep difficulties, feeling hopeless or relationship problems.

An important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is almost always helpful.

There are numerous campus resources available to you including:

- [Psychology Clinic](#) (940-397-4791 or psychology.clinic@msutexas.edu)
- [MSU Counseling Center](#) (940-397-4618)
- [Student Wellness Center](#) (940-397-4206)
- [Online resources](#)
- [Self-help apps](#)
- [Additional mental-health resources](#)

If you are experiencing an emergency, call 911 or the MSU Police Department at 940-397-4239. If you or someone you know is in a domestic violence or sexual assault crisis situation and wants information on what to do, call the 24 Hour Crisis Hotline at 1-800-621-8504.

If you have outside circumstances that may affect your performance in this class – including but not limited to difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, inadequate housing, and family issues – please contact me if you are comfortable in doing so.

I may be able to refer you to on-campus resources that will help you address the situation. Two examples include:

- [Canan Food Security Program](#)
- [Mustangs Pantry](#)

Please note that all information provided to me remains confidential.

Portfolio Requirement

Please note that all mass communication majors are required to submit a portfolio as part of their Internship course (Internship is a prerequisite to Senior Production, the mass communication capstone project course). The portfolio requirement is a part of MSU's reaccreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The portfolio helps you to demonstrate communication

competence through the written word and visual communication; two examples of each competency are required.

As you go through this and other classes, you are responsible for saving course work that could be included in your portfolio.

Please see me, your adviser, the department chair, or any mass communication faculty member for handouts with more information ("Mass Communication Portfolio Competencies" and "Mass Communication Portfolio FAQ"). These handouts are also available on our department web page.

Research and Creative Activity Opportunities at MSU

Enhancing Undergraduate Research Endeavors and Creative Activities (EURECA) is a program that provides opportunities for undergraduates to engage in high-quality research and creative activities with faculty. EURECA provides incentives and funding through a system that supports faculty and students engaged in collaborative research and creative works. For more information contact the Office of Undergraduate Research at (940) 397-6274 or by email at eureca@msutexas.edu. You can also stop by the UGR office located in the atrium of the Clark Student Center, room 161. Information and resources are also available at the [EURECA web page](#).

Undergraduate Research Opportunities and Summer Workshop (UGROW)

Like EURECA, UGROW provides opportunities for students to conduct research with faculty. However, the research occurs in the summer. For five weeks UGROW students experience the authenticity of scientific research as well as research and creative activities in art, music, theater education, business, health and social sciences, English, history, etc. in a highly interdisciplinary environment. Students work on projects of their choice and present their findings at the end of program and the MSU Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity Forum. If you have any questions, call (940) 397-4253 or by email at ugrow@msutexas.edu. More information and resources are available at the [UGROW web page](#).

Council on Undergraduate Research

To support undergraduate research and creative activities, Midwestern State University holds an enhanced institutional membership with the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR). This institutional membership includes unlimited memberships for any interested faculty, staff, and students. Students may find information on benefits and resources at the [CUR Student Resource Center web page](#).

Suggestions

- Attend class regularly.
- Remember I am available to help you. Ask for help immediately if you don't understand something. Waiting to "get it later" doesn't always work and could get you into trouble.
- Back up your work. Have two backups.
- Consider saving your work under different names literally each time you work on a project. It just takes one click and could save you lots of time and frustration.
- Expect the unexpected.
- Try to do work for this class ahead of time. This will give you some cushion in case you have problems.
- Sometimes things will go smoothly, other times they won't – the important thing is to have fun and practice thinking and working with both sides of our brains.
- This is **your** class; we can do (or try) almost anything you want; be creative!

NOTE: Please remember that we are starting with this syllabus and tentative schedule. Our class will evolve based on our work together, driven by curiosity, experimentation, and discovery. This means that there may be changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule.

By accepting this syllabus and staying enrolled in this course, you are indicating that you understand and accept the terms of this syllabus.

Topics/Schedule

Course topics support achieving our course objectives. Please note this is a TENTATIVE schedule. This schedule is likely to change.

Week 1: Introductions, building community

Week 2: Change, themes, and ethics (includes Labor Day)

Week 3: Privacy—business and social sectors

Week 4: Privacy—government systems

Week 5: Freedom of speech—First Amendment, controlling speech in cyberspace

Week 6: Freedom of speech—anonymity, global issues

Week 7: Intellectual property

Week 8: Crime and security

Week 9: Crime and security, cont'd

Week 10: Work

Week 11: Evaluating the Internet

Week 12: Errors, failures, and risks

Week 13: Professional ethics & responsibilities

Week 14: Professional ethics & responsibilities, cont'd (includes holiday break)

Week 15: Wrap-up

Week 16: Finals week

Academic Calendar

- University closed in observance of Labor Day: Monday, September 2
- Final deadline for Dec. graduates to file for graduation: Monday, September 23
- Priority deadline for May graduates to file for graduation: Friday, October 4
- Last day to drop with a grade of "W": 4 p.m. on Wednesday, November 25
- Holiday Break: Wednesday-Friday, November 27-29
- Last day of classes: Friday, December 6
- Undergraduate commencement: Saturday, December 14