



Course Syllabus: The Internet & Society

Lamar D. Fain College of Fine Arts

MCOM 2523 | Spring 2023

M/W 1:00-2:20 | Fain Fine Arts Center D202

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Mitzi Lewis

Office: Fain Fine Arts Center D203

Student Office hours:

*Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2-4:30 p.m.

**and by appointment—just ask and we will find a time*

**and "walk in"—I am in my office a lot!*

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NOTE: If you make the subject line look like this:

INTERNET & SOCIETY: Subject of Message

it will be easier for me to see it and get back to you sooner. Please do not forget to include your name in the email so that I know who the email is from.

Course Description

This course examines the personal, academic, media, and business uses of the Internet. Applying practical and theoretical concepts, students will 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.

Course Objectives

The Internet is profoundly affecting how we live our lives. It has changed the way we work, play, and interact with other people. In this course, we will examine the personal, academic, media, and business uses of the Internet. We will also look at 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. 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.

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 social, legal, philosophical, political, constitutional, and economical issues related to the Internet and the historical background of these issues
- discuss the benefits offered by the Internet in many different areas as well as the risks and problems associated with it
- explore the arguments on all 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
- understand how the Internet gives rise to social issues and ethical dilemmas
- 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. However, they have particular relevance in the rapidly-changing field of mass communication. 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

Baase, Sara (2018). *A Gift of Fire: Social, Legal, and Ethical Issues for Computing and the Internet* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall. (note: this book covers many Internet issues and also some non-internet issues; for this class, we will focus on the internet-specific issues)

Technology

Use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. You can log into D2L through the MSU Homepage.

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 feel able to show up fully to our work together. I'm human first. Students are humans first. Not all of us are encountering this moment in the same ways, so each of us will have to make decisions about how we can engage. I want to be clear about several things:

- 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 in whatever ways make sense and are safest for you. Ultimately, this is a community, and there are lots of different ways we can each contribute.
- I look forward to getting to know you as a student, a creator, and a person.

Grading

The most important work you'll do in this course is to reflect on your own learning process. Ultimately, this course is about helping you find new ways into your work as a life-long learner.

Final grades will be based on the following.

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

Total percent for final grade.

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

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.

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.

If emergencies arise or your circumstances change, **please communicate with me**. This will help us work together to find a solution for your situation.

Please:

- behave professionally
- arrive on time
- be prepared
- pay attention

- actively participate
- stay for the full class
- treat others with courtesy and respect
- use 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

- 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.
- 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.

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). This requirement is a part of MSU's reaccreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and is non-negotiable. Through the portfolio, you are required 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.

Policies: Classroom/Conduct/Academic Dishonesty

Students are expected to adhere to the Standards of Conduct as published in the Student Handbook, which includes a Student Honor Creed and University policies on academic dishonesty, class attendance, student's rights, and activities.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Electronic devices are welcome (encouraged) in class, to support learning. Please be mindful that they do not serve as a distraction to you or those around you.

Plagiarism

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. (Kevin Gannon)

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.

COVID-19 – Vaccinations and Face Coverings

Scientific data shows that being fully vaccinated is the most effective way to prevent and slow the spread of COVID-19 and has the greatest probability of avoiding serious illness if infected in all age groups. Although MSU Texas is not mandating vaccinations in compliance with Governor Abbott's executive orders, we highly encourage eligible members of our community to get a vaccination. If you have questions or concerns about the vaccine, please contact your primary care physician or health care professional. Given the recent rise in cases, individuals are also strongly encouraged to wear facial coverings when indoors among groups of people, regardless of vaccination status. Although MSU Texas is not currently requiring facial coverings, they have been an effective strategy in slowing the spread.

Social Justice / Inclusive Community

Social justice is one of Midwestern State University's stated core values, and I consider the classroom to be a place where 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.

While some of the work for this course will be done independently or with a small group, think of all 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 an inclusive community 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.

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. There are numerous campus resources available to you including:

- Psychology Clinic (940-397-4791 or psychology.clinic@msutexas.edu)
<https://msutexas.edu/academics/libarts/psychology/clinic>
- MSU Counseling Center (940-397-4618)
<https://msutexas.edu/student-life/counseling/>
- Vinson Health Center (940-397-4231 or vinson@msutexas.edu)
<https://msutexas.edu/healthcenter/>
- Bruce and Graciela Redwine Student Wellness Center (940-397-4206)
<https://msutexas.edu/student-life/wellness-center>
- Online resources
<https://msutexas.edu/student-life/counseling/online-resources>

- Self-help apps

<https://msutexas.edu/student-life/counseling/self-help-apps>

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: 1-800-621-8504.

Additional mental-health resources are available at

<https://msutexas.edu/student-life/counseling/mental-health-resources>.

Furthermore, 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, 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.

Please note that all information provided to me remains confidential.

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.

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 at <https://msutexas.edu/eureca>.

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 at <https://msutexas.edu/ugrow>.

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 https://www.cur.org/engage/undergraduate/student_resource_center.

Topics/Schedule

Course topics support achieving our course objectives. Course topics include:

- Week 1: Introductions, building community
- Week 2: Change, themes, and ethics
- 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: Spring Break
- Week 10: Crime and security, cont'd
- Week 11: Work
- Week 12: Evaluating the Internet
- Week 13: Errors, failures, and risks
- Week 14, 15: Professional ethics & responsibilities
- Week 15: Wrap-up
- Week 16: Finals week

Please note this is a TENTATIVE schedule. This schedule is likely to change.

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!

In closing:

In the words of our chair, Dr. Jim Sernoe,

- Do not hesitate to contact me with questions, concerns and, even better, great suggestions. I go out of my way to be fair to all.
- By accepting this syllabus and staying enrolled in this course, you are indicating that you understand and accept the terms of this syllabus.

My work has by influenced by many people. Specifically, I have used and adapted some of Dr. Jesse Stommel's work in this syllabus. I am grateful for his advocacy and sharing.