

# CMN 529: Communication, Technology, & Social Change

Fall 2015

Professors: Sally Jackson & William Barley  
Meetings: Tuesdays 2:00 – 4:50 pm in Lincoln Hall 4103  
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Office Hours: by appointment

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## COURSE OVERVIEW

We begin with the premise that “new media” refers not just a set of specific artifacts (devices, applications, infrastructures) but to a dramatically changed communication environment in which we should expect meaningful shifts at both the social-behavioral and societal levels. This seminar will introduce students to significant bodies of theorizing in communication and allied disciplines, each of which attempts to explain the relationship between technological and social change. As a broader structure for the course, we will position each body of theory along two axes with regard to how they treat the relationship between technology and change: first, on whether the theory attends more closely to artifacts or to human interpretation, and second, on whether the theory attends more closely to the immediate influences or to durable, irreversible changes in how human social life is organized. It is our hope that this structure will facilitate a meta-conversation about how one’s theoretical positioning may influence data collection, methods, analysis, and conclusions.

Upon completing this course, students will:

- Command a broad array of theoretical views of communication systems and technology
  - Know that the study of communication technology is *not* the property of Communication, or any single discipline
  - Be capable of mining useful insights from theory, even if that theory may be outdated or flawed
  - Have applied the theoretical frameworks we discuss to develop their own research interests
  - Have experience developing the work ethic necessary to succeed in a professional environment
  - Be members of a community of peers that values diverse epistemological perspectives
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## COURSE RESOURCES

### Moodle

Login to <https://learn.illinois.edu> using your userid and password. CMN 529 should appear in your course list. Note that your Moodle role is “teacher,” which means you can edit.

We hope to appropriate Moodle as a useful tool for managing bibliographic information and links to documents. By contributing to this resource as a group, we may amplify its value for each individual.

## **Required Textbooks & Other Readings**

Crowley, D., & Heyer, P. (Eds.). (2007). *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, and Society* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson. (ISBN-13: 978-0205483884; ISBN-10: 0205483887)

[Amazon Link for Crowley & Heyer 5<sup>th</sup> edition](#). Note that the 5<sup>th</sup> ed. is out of print and not available at the bookstore, but it can be ordered at very reasonable cost from Amazon or other sellers.

MacKenzie, D., & Wajcman, J. (Eds.). (1999). *The Social Shaping of Technology* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw Hill Education. (ISBN-13: 978-0335199136; ISBN-10: 0335199135)

[Amazon Link for MacKenzie & Wajcman](#); also available at bookstore.

Other readings will be available through our course Moodle (<https://learn.illinois.edu>).

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## **MAJOR COURSE COMPONENTS**

### **Class Session Participation.** (20% of final grade)

This course is designed as a seminar and as such, preparation, attendance, and participation are essential. Students are expected to attend **all class meetings and to enhance their own and others' learning through class discussions and exercises**. Participation grades will be based on the extent to which students are engaged in class and contributing appropriate, high quality comments, questions and insights. High quality participation may also be demonstrated by contributing interesting content on Moodle (comments, links, references, etc.). We have designed the weekly writing exercises to stimulate thinking prior to discussion. Be sure to read all of the assigned materials prior to class, and be prepared to discuss both the readings and your own writing in class.

We value participation that demonstrates the following collegial norms:

- Being respectful of one another.
- Learning from one another and build on one another's contributions.
- Taking responsibility for your own learning.
- Being willing to disagree and to entertain disagreement.
- Being prepared.

Around the mid-point of the semester, we will provide each student with an indication of their participation grade to that point, along with comments about how to improve or maintain participation.

### **Weekly Writing Exercises (15% of final grade)**

Before most sessions, you will be required to complete one or more exercises related to that week's topic. Our motives behind these assignments are two-fold:

- Completing the writing assignment will help you come to class prepared to contribute to that week's discussion. We have worked hard to ensure that these assignments will be closely related to each week's themes and will incorporate your responses into our in-class discussion.

- We believe that it is important for you to develop a regular writing routine. By requiring you to share your work each week, we hope to help you build comfort with composing your thoughts to the page and sharing your ideas, even when they may not be completely polished.

Weekly writing is due by 9am the day of class. Please submit your writing via an email to **both** instructors ([sallyj@illinois.edu](mailto:sallyj@illinois.edu); [barley@illinois.edu](mailto:barley@illinois.edu)). Include your last name and the words “writing exercise” in your email’s title. We will grade each assignment using a 5 point scale. Late assignments cannot be accepted, since there is no point prepping once the discussion has already moved on.

### **Discussion Leadership (15% of final grade)**

We will assign three discussion leaders each week who will share responsibility for a portion of the day’s agenda. You should expect to play this role for about 3 sessions. Most typically, this will involve developing discussion questions on readings that should be posted to Moodle before class. During class, you should provide discussion context to get conversation started (e.g., by situating the readings within their broader position in the literature, by suggesting strengths and weaknesses, etc.). After discussion, designated leaders will also be responsible for summarizing key points from discussion and adding them to the appropriate folder in the “discussion leadership” section on Moodle.

### **Final Project (50% of final grade)**

Your major assignment for the semester will be to develop a piece of scholarly work integrating and extending course themes in a manner connecting with your own research interests. The default for this project is a 20-25pp conference quality research paper. Please approach the instructors if another mode of production (e.g. an art installation, or a system design) would better fit the mode of scholarship in your discipline.

Professional research is an iterative process. To reflect this process, we designed the structure of the project to include a series of deliverables:

- 5% - Project Proposal (due Tuesday 9/29)
  - Submit a 500 word proposal outlining the project you wish to pursue
- 5% - Annotated Bibliography (due Tuesday 10/20)
  - 15-20 academic sources related to your project
  - For each include a short paragraph outlining how the source relates to your work and how it will inform your argument
- 10% - Rough Draft (due Friday, 11/13)
- 5% - Peer Reviews
  - Provide your peers with written comments on their drafts that they may use to refine and develop their work. We will devote an entire class session to discussing these reviews.
- 10% - Final Presentation (due in class on 12/1 & 12/8)
- 15% - Final Project (due 12/11)

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**SEMESTER SCHEDULE**

*What follows is a schedule of topics to be covered during the semester. Please note that this represents our current plan, but we may need to adjust as our discussion develops. If changes are necessary, we will notify you in class and update the syllabus on Moodle. We will post the specific details for readings and assignments in the “Weekly Preparation” section on Moodle.*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
8/25	Week 1: Course Introduction	3 Photos of Technology
9/1	Week 2: Medium theory	Writing Exercise 1
9/8	Week 3: Media ecology	Writing Exercise 2
9/15	Week 4: Mediatization	Writing Exercise 3
9/22	Week 5: Sociohistorical approaches	Writing Exercise 4
9/29	Week 6: Social construction of technology – SCOT	Writing Exercise 5; Project Proposal
10/6	Week 7: Actor network theory	Writing Exercise 6
10/13	Week 8: Systems theory	Writing Exercise 7
10/20	Week 9: Features	Writing Exercise 8; Annotated Bibliography
10/27	Week 10: Affordances	Writing Exercise 9
11/3	Week 11: Structuration	Writing Exercise 10
11/10	Week 12: Sociomateriality	Writing Exercise 11; Paper Draft (due Fri.)
11/17	Week 13: Peer review day	Peer Reviews
<b>Thanksgiving Break</b>		
12/1	Week 14: Presentations	
12/8	Week 15: Presentations	Final Paper Due <b>Friday</b>