

COMM 390/590: FROM ANCIENT CAMPFIRES TO TOUCH SCREENS: THE EVOLUTION OF
COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - STEVENS POINT, FALL '15
(Th 11:00– 1:50; CAC 236)

Professor: Dr. Tamás Bodor
Office: CAC 325
Office Hours: M 11:00-12:00PM; W 10:00AM – 11:00AM; - and by appointment
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Course Description

Once upon a time it was not the bluish light of smartphones or flat screen TVs that human faces were immersed in at night. Instead, people gathered around the campfire where not the Internet but ancient stories – sung since the dawn of time- connected them. Since then communication technologies have reshaped the world and helped us build increasingly complex civilizations. Commonly we view the emergence of writing, the printing press, the radio, TV, and most recently digital communication technologies as some glorious “progress” toward the betterment of humanity. Yet, evidence may also exist that with the rise of every new communication technology something valuable, essentially human dies forever...

This course therefore weaves together the threads of the past, the present, and the possible future to explore:

- How communication technologies have shaped our civilization?
- How we, our intellectual faculties and self-concepts, all are the “product” of communication technologies of our age?
- What bright and bleak developments the future of ever advancing communication technologies might bring about?

Readings

There are two required books assigned to this course:

Ong, W. (2005) *Orality and Literacy*. New York: Routledge

Carr, N. (2011) *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. New York: Norton.

The books are available at the university bookstore. Additional required readings (short articles) and study materials shall be made available on the course website (D2L).

Class Activities and Grading

Your final grade will be contingent upon the following activities and assignments taking place over the course of the semester:

I. Quizzes & Homework: 25%

II. Term Project: 30%

-Presentation of term paper 10%
-Term paper 20%

III. Exams 40%

-Exam1 10%
-Exam2 15%
-Take-home final 15%

IV. Participation in class: 5%

Grading scale for final grade:

95 – 100% = A	84 – 86% = B	74 – 76% = C	60 – 66% = D
90 – 94% = A-	80 – 83% = B-	70 – 73% = C-	< 60% = F
87 – 89% = B+	77 – 79% = C+	67 – 69% = D+	

Attendance

In this class I do not regularly take formal attendance. Therefore, should you be unable to attend class for any reason, you don't need to email / contact me. It is your best interest however, to maintain strong attendance: you must be present in class in order to understand the assignments and carry them out effectively. Also, if you are absent you cannot participate in class discussions and take the in-class quizzes, which could be detrimental to your final grade.

Missed/Late Assignments

You are expected to give your research presentation on the class day when you are scheduled. If you miss your presentation, it will be impossible to make it up.

Written assignments must be handed in via D2L or at the end of the class as specified by the assignment. Late assignments receive a failing grade.

If you miss a quiz, an exam or an assignment, unless you are granted an excused absence, you will not be permitted to make it up.

Academic Honesty

When completing your assignments, you are expected to do original work. That is, you must avoid any form of plagiarism. I consider plagiarism - as defined by *Dictionary.com* – the “use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one’s own original work.” A student caught on plagiarizing shall receive a failing grade for his/her assignment. Further academic misconduct shall be sanctioned in accordance with the *UWSP Chapter 14 – Student Academic Standards and Disciplinary Procedures*.

Conduct in Class

To provide a fruitful experience and an effective learning environment for all of us, I expect each of you to conduct yourself with respect for your fellow students. Also,

- Students are to be seated in class by 11:00AM, by which I will be ready to teach. I consider lateness disruptive and an emergent pattern of lateness will be treated as equivalent to absences.
- Any use including the visual display of **cell phones** is not tolerated in this class. By the beginning of class, all cell phones must be **turned off and put away** until the end of class. I consider any use of cell phones, including text messaging, as disrespectful and disruptive.
- Use of **laptop** computers and **tablets** is **not allowed** in class. Exception is made in case of students who are unable to take paper notes due to some documented physical condition.

Course Schedule

(Note: This schedule is subject to change. Should changes occur, they will be announced in class)

Date	Topics & activities	Task due
3-Sep	Course introduction; Research questions workshop	
10-Sep	McLuhan & media ecology; The orality of language	Sparks ch12, Ong intro & ch1
17-Sep	Primary oral cultures	Ong ch2
24-Sep	Psychodynamics of orality	Ong ch3
1-Oct	Writing systems as communication technology	Ong ch4; Havelock
8-Oct	The Print Revolution; Paper as communication technology	Ong ch5; Gladwell
15-Oct	The Electronic Revolution	Carey; McLuhan; Carpenter; Stephens
22-Oct	New Media 1	Carr prologue, ch1, ch2
29-Oct	New Media 2	Carr ch3, ch4, ch5
5-Nov	New Media 3	Carr ch6, ch7, ch8
12-Nov	New Media 4	Carr ch9, ch10, epilogue

19-Nov	Research project workshop	
26-Nov	Thanksgiving: No Class	
3-Dec	Case study video for take-home final	
10-Dec	Term project presentations	
21-Dec	Make-up presentations (?) 10:15AM-12:15PM	