

Writing in the Digital Economy

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Course Description:

This course examines the role of writing in an information and attention economy from a globalized digital perspective. Along with brief introductions to economic theory, we will discuss and debate the role of writers and content producers within the context of digital delivery and distribution. We will touch on a variety of topics, including habits, attention, algorithms, and virality. Students will have a mid-term and a final, along with a project about their own role in the production of digital data. NO PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH ECONOMIC THEORY NEEDED.

Course Goals & Student Outcomes:

- To learn concepts of economics (production, distribution, circulation, use value, exchange value) and their application to digital frameworks and the world wide web
- To compare and contrast the physical economy of writing with its digital counterpart
- To learn surveillance techniques and self-surveillance techniques, as well as critique those techniques from a rhetorical perspective
- To create a electronic project, using a design program of your choice, that examines the digital economy in terms of writing and rhetoric
- To synthesize authors' perspectives for use in future writing studies scholarship and professional, economic contexts

Attendance Policy:

Attendance is required. Missing class requires a valid, university excuse. Missed work must be made-up, regardless of excuse.

Assignments and Grade Breakdown:

- 1) Attendance (10%).
- 2) Leading in-class discussions (2x5%).
- 3) Reading synthesis (20%).
- 4) Self-monitoring project (20%).
- 5) Final project (40%).

Classroom Community Policy:

- 1) You are expected to submit all assignments, readings, and writings by the announced due date. Late assignments and lack of preparation will be marked down. This includes bringing any texts to class if we are using them. You are responsible for printing them out, which I believe is a fair trade for not making you buy certain books.
- 2) Cell-phone *use* is not allowed in class. If your phone rings, you will be asked to leave class and marked absent.
- 3) If you are called on, I expect you to answer to the best of your ability. It is perfectly acceptable to be unsure of your answer—that is the goal of higher education: to take risks. I reward risk-taking. It is encouraged to think and venture an answer.
- 4) Everyone in class has different levels of comfort. I expect all members of our community to respect one another. **For those individuals who are more comfortable talking, I expect you to ask your fellow classmates questions to encourage them to add to our discussion.** For those less comfortable, I expect you to make an attempt to add your thoughts to the discussion, even if it is a brief statement. Further, for those less comfortable talking in class, there will be other types of participation, which includes emailing me ideas to bring up in class, peer review, group work, and so forth. I expect everyone to listen actively to another. In this way, participation includes more than talking; it also includes listening, posing questions, and completing all in-class assignments to the best of your ability. Respect

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means listening, taking notes, and joining/enhancing conversations that challenge each other and your instructor using civil language and tone.

- 5) We all come from different lives and have different journeys, so we should expect and embrace vibrant disagreement and productive dissent. A democratic society cannot thrive otherwise. Therefore, I expect us to continually strive for a spirit of grace, compassion, and respect in our learning journeys (both in agreements and disagreements) for the short time we are together in this course. If at any time you feel that these expectations are not being met, please let me know as soon as possible.

Plagiarism/Academic Integrity

The University of Illinois has high standards of academic integrity set out in Article 1, Part 4 of the University Student Code (copied below), which I uphold.

(1) Policy Statement. The University has the responsibility for maintaining academic integrity so as to protect the quality of education and research on our campus and to protect those who depend upon our integrity.

(2) Expectations of Students. It is the responsibility of each student to refrain from infractions of academic integrity, from conduct that may lead to suspicion of such infractions, and from conduct that aids others in such infractions. Students have been given notice of this Part by virtue of its publication. Regardless of whether a student has actually read this Part, a student is charged with knowledge of it. Ignorance is not a defense.

(3) Expectations of Instructors. It is the responsibility of each Instructor to establish and maintain an environment that supports academic integrity. An essential part of each Instructor's responsibility is the enforcement of existing standards of academic integrity. If Instructors do not discourage and act upon violations of which they become aware, respect for those standards is undermined. Instructors should provide their students with a clear statement of their expectations concerning academic integrity.

Students Requiring Accommodations:

If you have a disability that requires accommodation in order for you to be successful in this class, please let me know immediately. If you haven't already, you should contact the Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) for accommodation support. Their website is <http://www.disability.illinois.edu/>

Emergency Response Recommendations:

In an emergency in this building, we'll have three choices: **RUN** (get out), **HIDE** (find a safe place to stay inside), or **FIGHT** (with anything available to increase our odds for survival). Take time to familiarize yourself with the University's emergency response recommendations at <http://police.illinois.edu/emergencyplanning/general/>

Teaching Procedures:

This class is structured in three ways. First, I generally pose a question or activity at the beginning of class (typically a free-write that is done individually or collaboratively). Second, I lead class discussion about that day's topic, often about 15-20 minutes that involves a particular reading, vocabulary, or assignment. Lastly, we practice the writing skills involved from that day's lesson. Many times, I will walk around, chat, and help you in any way I can. This way, you receive as much individualized/group attention as you need. You can also talk with your peers.

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Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1: Attention & Information in the Economy

Eyman's *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice* (2015) (theory section)
Webster's *The Marketplace of Attention* (2014)
Marx's *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (selections)

Week 2: Attention & Information in the Economy (continued)

Piketty's *Capital in the 21st Century* (p. 39-139)
Marx's *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (selections)

Week 3: Attention & Information in the Economy (continued)

Wu's *The Attention Merchants* (2016)
Marx's *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (selections)

Week 4: Habits in the Digital Economy

Mary Ann Doane "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe" (available online)
Wendy Chun's *Updating to Remain the Same* (2016)

Week 5: Algorithms

Pasquale's *The Black Box Society* (2015)
Ezracli and Stucke's *Virtual Competition* (2016)
Raley's "Algorithmic Translations" (2016)

Week 6: Online Publishing

Laquintano's *Mass Authorship and the Rise of Self-Publishing* (2016)

Week 7: User Data

Arola's "The Design of Web 2.0: The Rise of the Template, The Fall of Design"
Jessica Reyman's "User Data on the Social Web: Authorship, Agency, and Appropriation"
Rebecca Tarsa's "Upvoting the Exordium" (2015)
Kelly Ritter's *Reframing the Subject* (2015) (chapter 6: "The Rhetorical Economics of Mass Literacy")
Gallagher's "Challenging the Monetized Template"

Week 8: Surveillance

Barney's *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age* (2016)
Franklin's *Control: Digitality as Cultural Logic* (2015)

Week 9: Circulation

Gries' *Still Life with Rhetoric* (2015)
Beer's *Metric Power* (2016) (chapter 3: circulation)

Week 10: Meetings with John to discuss final project

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Week 11: Textual Communities

Krista Kennedy's *Textual Curation* (2016)

Quinn's "Contextual social capital: linking the contexts of social media use to its outcomes"
(2016)

Week 12: Virality

Nahon and Hemsley's *Going Viral* (2013)

Week 13: Thanksgiving (no class)

Week 14: Rethinking Ecologies and Situations from within a Digital Economy

Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation"

Vatz' "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation"

Edbuer's "Unframing Models of Distribution"

Week 15: Poster Presentations of final project