Politics of the Internet

This course is about how the Internet changes politics and how politics shape the Internet. The Internet will be our main focus, but other new media will also be considered. ‘Politics’ will be broadly defined to include identity, organization, and power. We will take a close look at how the Internet changes the distribution of information and social organization and how governments and other interests seek to regulate the Internet. We start with theoretical and historical introductions. Subsequent topics include: the impact of the Internet on the economy, society, and politics and the problems of international property, privacy, censorship, the global digital divide, and security and crime. Many topics will entail careful examination of one or more well-known websites. This will be a seminar-style course requiring students' active participation in classroom discussions. Students are also required to undertake and present original research. The learning objectives for this class are: 1) Gain an understanding of how media in general and the Internet in particular have shaped politics; 2) Gain an understanding of the major issues involved in regulating the Internet; 3) Become more effective at finding and evaluating information and ideas found the Internet; 4) Become more effective at using Internet and new media tools; and 5) Improve liberal arts skills of critical thinking, research, and communication.

Assignments and Assessment

1. Present an effective and/or an ineffective web page to the class (10%). Each student will be assigned to a two person group and each group will be allowed 10 minutes for their presentation. The main criteria for evaluating presentations will be the extent to which you engage the class in a persuasive analysis of what makes the chosen website(s) effective or ineffective and the general lessons that we can learn.

2. Group Project Proposal (15%). Each student will write a 2-3 page proposal for a group project and present it to the class. Projects may involve research, community service or organization for other purposes, but must involve the Internet or new media as a key component. Proposals should include a description of the project, an explanation of why it is interesting and important (preferably with reference to readings and lectures), and a description of what will be required to make it happen including but not limited to the number of people required, what sorts of skills will be needed, expenses and a time line. Whether or not your project is approved by the instructor and attracts the needed participants will be considered in its evaluation. Due at midterm.

3. Group project (25%). All students will join a group to implement one of the proposed projects. Each group will write a five page paper explaining what they did and what they learned and present it to the class during the last week of class.

4. Write a term web page or paper (no more than 10 pages) on a topic relevant to the politics of the Internet. (20%). A paper proposal will be due April 15. This paper may not be on the same topic as the student's group research project. Grading criteria are the same as for the group research project.

5. Short essays and quizzes on topics covered in readings and lectures (20%). Students will write four short essays (no more than 3 pages). Due dates appear below. Questions will be distributed approximately a week before they are due. Topics will be taken from lectures and readings. Essays will be assessed based on 1) mastery of information presented in lectures and readings; and 2) persuasive answers to the question. Quizzes will cover weekly reading assignments, but will not be given if students show good knowledge of assigned readings.

6. Class Participation (10%). As this is a seminar-style class, students' critical engagement in class discussion is important. This requires regular attendance, completing readings in a
timely manner and, on occasion, some additional exercises.

notes

Students should pay attention to the email account listed under their name on D2L as updates on assignments and requirements may be sent to that account. Students who miss deadlines will only be allowed to make-up the work if the circumstances are truly exceptional, tragic and/or beyond their control. Some leniency may be shown if problems are discussed in advance. Regular attendance is expected as specified by university policy and failure to attend regularly may be sanctioned as specified by university policy. Academic dishonesty may receive the harshest sanctions allowed by university policy. Students who would like to improve their grade may do extra assignments or revise their papers, but must first consult with the instructor. Students seeking honors credit and graduate students will be required to complete additional assignments and should consult with the instructor.

Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings:

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are recommended. All others are required. Students should note that from time to time there may be additional assignments involving on-line or in-person research.

1. January 19 & 21  Technology and Politics

2. January 26 & 28  Thinking and Communicating in a Digital Age
   Palfrey and Gasser, Born Digital op. cit. 155-84.

3. February 2 & 4  History of Media

4. February 9 & 11  History of the Internet  First Short Essay due Feb. 11
5. February 16 & 18 From Open Source to Wikipedia

   *David Bollier, Viral Spiral op. cit. 229-52.


8. March 9 & 11 Project Proposals Second Short Essay due Mar. 11

   *R. Sophie Statzel, “Cybersupremacy: The New Face and Form of White

10. March 30 TBD

11. April 6 & 8 Internet, Newspapers & Democracy

12. April 13 & 15 Privacy & Facebook 3rd Essay & Proposal due April 15


14. April 27 & 29 Censorship: the Great Firewall?

15. May 4 & 6 Project Reports & Conclusion

Final Papers and Last Short Essay Due 5:00 pm Friday, May 14.