Course Description

There is no doubt that the transmission speed, reach and quantity of information have increased dramatically over the past decade. Drawing from several sources, Luciano Floridi paints an apt portrait:

"To have some simple, quantitative measure of the transformations experienced by our generation, consider the following findings. In a recent study, researchers at Berkeley's School of Information Management and Systems estimated that humanity had accumulated approximately 12 exabytes of data in the course of its entire history until the commodification of computers, but that it had produced more than 5 exabytes of data just in 2002: 'print, film, magnetic, and optical storage media produced about 5 exabytes of new information in 2002. Ninety-two percent of the new information was stored on magnetic media, mostly in hard disks. [...] Five exabytes of information is equivalent in size to the information contained in 37,000 new libraries the size of the Library of Congress book collections' (Lyman and Varian [2003]). In 2002, this was almost 800 MB of recorded data produced per person. It is like saying that every newborn baby came into the world with a burden of 30 feet of books, the equivalent of 800 MB of data on paper. This exponential escalation has been relentless: 'between 2006 and 2010 [...] the digital universe will increase more than six fold from 161 exabytes to 988 exabytes.'"

This course will examine some of the cultural, social and ethical implications of this transformation from a philosophical perspective.

Required Text


Assignments

Each student will be required to read the assignments by the day they are listed on the schedule below, write 5 600-word, reflection papers, take an in class essay exam and a final.

Papers should be double-spaced with one-inch margins on all sides. Include your name in the top, left corner, a title, and a page number at the bottom, center of each page. Submit them to Turnitin.com (instructions to be discussed in class). Print one copy, staple it in the top, left corner and bring it to class on the day it is due. Papers will be collected at the very beginning of class. Late papers will NOT be accepted. Early ones will.
Grading

Reflection Papers = 10% Each (50% Total)
In Class Exam = 10%
Final Exam = 20%
Class Participation = 20%

Policies and “Rules”

It would be a wonderful world, if classrooms could run without rules, but experience has repeatedly taught me that they are necessary. The following stem primarily, but not exclusively, from two sources. The first is a matter of maintaining respect for honest students with a genuine desire to know. Being fair makes it imperative that they have every opportunity to learn and that they are not lost among the students who take a class only to meet a requirement and who, as a consequence, may only be looking for the highest grade in exchange for the least amount of learning.

The second is to help me maintain my concentration in the classroom. Most of my difficulty with this latter issue derives from the fact that class lecture is a form of conversation. Once I perceive that my interlocutor is no longer listening, my priority automatically shifts from delivering a message to re-establishing contact, and I lose my train of thought. One student in a class can easily throw me off.

It is my hope that the following will respond adequately to these issues and that we will be able to conduct class at a level befitting an institution of higher learning. (In other words, we’re not in high school anymore!)

Academic Honesty

All work submitted in this course must be prepared by the student expressly for this course. A student who submits work that is plagiarized, bought, borrowed from the archives of a fraternity, copied from another student, etc., will fail the course. (If you don’t believe me, ask around.) I fully support the University’s Academic Honor Code. To avoid confusion, students should keep in mind that plagiarism occurs not only when someone copies an author word for word, but also when someone uses another's ideas without giving credit, even if the ideas are paraphrased. Always document your sources!

Attendance Policy

I do not have an attendance policy per se. However, this course is structured in such a way that students who do not show up regularly may (will?) have trouble passing it. After all, it is difficult to participate if you’re not present, and I frequently test on material that is not in the reading. (Since I do not have an attendance policy, there is no reason to send excuses for missing class, whether by email or by phone. Your reasons for missing class are private and do not concern me. Please, in other words, keep them to yourselves.)

Course Participation

Course participation grades are not automatic. They are based on oral contributions to the collective learning experience of the class as a whole in terms of asking pertinent questions, answering questions correctly or, at least, provocatively, making insightful observations, and offering other meaningful expressions of interest in the material that help encourage learning. I begin by assuming a C for each student’s course participation grade and move from there. Students should realize that it is possible to talk a lot in class and receive a low grade for course participation.
Electronic Technology in the Classroom (Cell Phones, Laptops, Etc.)

The use of laptops, cell phones, gaming devices and other electronic contraptions is not permitted in class. Students caught using them will be asked to leave. (You can wear a watch, if you must, but please don’t sit staring at it during my lectures.)

Email / Office Hours

I do not read my UE email at home and, as a consequence, I will only answer student email during my scheduled office hours. Even then, I am not apt to sustain long, academic dialogues in this forum. (For extended discussion, please come visit me in person. Office hours are posted above.) Furthermore, during office hours, I will defer to students who show up in person, and this means that I may not be able to answer your email in the short term. In addition to the office hours listed above, I am available by appointment, either in person or by Skype.

Food in the Classroom

No eating in class.

Packing Up to Go

Often the most critical minutes in a class session are the last five, where conclusions are drawn and assignments are made. Please do not start to pack up your belongings before the end of class.

Stay at Home Policy

I easily lose focus when students aren’t paying attention, whether because they are talking to each other, passing notes, studying for another class, etc. If you do not wish to pay attention, please take advantage of my lack of an attendance policy and stay at home. After all, you get nothing for just showing up without paying attention, and I’m probably going to dock your participation grade just the same as if you had stayed at home.

Phil 111 Calendar

Week 1:

August 24 – Syllabus Review / CalPoly Facebook Presentation
August 26 – Wittkower, pp. xxi - xxxvii

Week 2:

August 29 – Grimmelmann, The Privacy Virus
August 31 – Meikle, It’s Like Talking to a Wall
September 2 – Bogost, Ian Became a Fan of Marshall McLuhan …

Week 3: Reflection Paper #1, due 9/5

September 5 – Losh, With Friends Like These …
September 7 – Sarachan, Profile Picture, Right Here, Right Now
September 9 – Marinucci, You Can’t Front on Facebook
Week 4:

September 12 – Thalos, Why I Am Not a Friend
September 14 – Wandel & Beavers, Playing Around with Identity
September 16 – Vejby & Wittkower, Spectacle 2.0?

Week 5:

September 19 – Condella, Why Can’t We Be Virtual Friends?
September 21 – Tadesco, The Friendship That Makes No Demands
September 23 – Hamington, Care Ethics, Friendship, and Facebook

Week 6: Reflection Paper #2, due 9/26

September 26 – Bloor, What Are Friends For?
September 28 – Briggle, Dear Facebook
September 30 – Cuonzo, Gossip and the Evolution of Facebook

Week 7:

October 3 – Lattimore, Facebook as an Excess of Seeing
October 5 – Fairweather & Halpern, Do Status Updates Have Any Value?
October 7 – Butera, Gatekeeper, Moderator, Synthesizer

Week 8:

October 10 – Fall Break / No Class
October 12 – Doyle & Fraser, Facebook, Surveillance, and Power
October 14 – Bar-Tura, Wall to Wall or Face to Face

Week 9: Reflection Paper #3, due 10/17

October 17 – Scholz, Facebook as Playground and Factory
October 19 – Morgan & Clulow, The Proles and Cons of Facebook
October 21 – Muhr & Pedersen, Faking It on Facebook

Week 10:

October 24 – CalPoly Facebook Presentation (Revisited)
October 26 – No Class / See “The Social Network”
October 28 – In Class Essay Exam
Week 11:

October 31 – Floridi, Chapters 1 & 2

November 2 – Floridi, Chapter 3

November 4 – Floridi, Chapter 4

Week 12: Reflection Paper #4, due 11/7

November 7 – Floridi, Chapters 5 & 6

November 9 – Crick Lecture 4pm in KC 100; No 2pm class.

November 11 – Floridi, Chapters 7 & 8

Week 13:

November 14 – Ess, Chapter 1: Central Issues in the Ethics of Digital Media

November 16 – Ess, Chapter 2: Privacy in the Electronic Global Metropolis?

November 18 – Ess, Chapter 3: Copying and Distributing via Digital Media

Week 14:

November 21 – Ess, Chapter 4: Citizenship in the Global Metropolis

November 23 – Thanksgiving Break / No Classes

November 25 – Thanksgiving Break / No Classes

Week 15: Reflection Paper #5, due 11/28

November 28 – Ess, Chapter 5: Digital Sex and Games

November 30 – Denmark Presentation / No Reading

December 2 – Denmark Presentation/ No Reading

Week 16:

December 5 – Course Wrap Up

Final Exam

Tuesday, December 13th, 2:45-4:45