

ENGL 280: Introduction to Digital Culture
Fall 2019
TTH 8:30am – 9:50am, Mason 1359
Office number: (734) 647-2843

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Office: Angell Hall 4200
Office hours: T 1:30pm-2:30pm
(and by appointment)

Computers and the Novels that Read Them

This course examines how writers have variously represented the meaning of computer technologies during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. What were the cultural and social connotations of digital computers (as opposed to analog and human computers)? How did perceptions of computational technology change across the twentieth century? And what even is a computer? These are some of the questions we'll discuss as we analyze novels, short stories, and scholarly essays. Along the way, we'll also survey the history of the computer and consider recent scholarship that uses computational methods to analyze novels. These methods include the "distant reading" of large collections of texts and the linguistic analysis of individual novels.

In terms of our scholarly output as a class, the main writing assignment will be an individual essay on medium.com, an online publishing community that we'll use to practice writing as public intellectuals. In this assignment, you will sharpen your analytical and writing skills by communicating academic content to non-academic audiences. Together, the assignments and readings of this course will improve your abilities as a writer, reader, thinker, and media user.

Course texts:

- Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (ISBN 978-0345404473)
- Malka Older, *Infomocracy* (ISBN 978-0765392367)
- Marge Piercy, *He, She, & It* (ISBN 0-449-22060-5)
- Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano* (ISBN 9780385333788)

(Kindle or other electronic versions of these texts are not allowed in the classroom. I strongly discourage you from buying digital copies of the course texts. Additional readings will be posted to Canvas.)

Course Assignments	%
Reading Quizzes	30
Medium.com essay	20
Exam on Key Terms and Contexts	20
Final Response Paper	10
Course Participation	20

Attendance and Late Arrivals:

Attendance is mandatory. If you must miss class, let me know in advance. With few exceptions, I will deduct the following from your Participation grade for every absence after the second: if you miss three classes, the highest you could earn for your Participation grade would be 95%, four classes would be 85%, and ten percentage points will be deducted for every subsequent absence. You should attend every class from the beginning of the semester in the event that emergencies arise or you need to be gone for college events. Also, arriving late is disruptive to everyone in the class and can frustrate discussion, lectures, and quizzes. As a result, every three "late arrivals" counts as one absence.

Note on Late Assignments:

Late submissions will be penalized by 5 points. Assignments submitted the day after the due date will be penalized 10 points, and submissions 48 hours after the due date will not be accepted. Of course, if there is a health-related emergency (including psychological health), please discuss your situation with me.

Religious Accommodations for Students:

Please look carefully at the syllabus during the first week of class. If any of the assignments or course meetings conflict with a major religious holiday for your faith, please let me know. I will make every effort to make the necessary accommodations.

Other Accommodations:

If you have a disability and need an accommodation to participate in this class or to complete course requirements, please ask Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to provide documentation of the accommodations that you need. Then, please share this documentation with me as soon as possible, preferably within the first few weeks of class.

Electronic technology:

Please bring a laptop to each course meeting. The reading quizzes will be accessible via Canvas at the start of class. You will be required to use the Respondus LockDown Browser to access the quiz. Some tablets can use this Browser, but it's much easier on a laptop.

Cellphone use is prohibited during class. Using a laptop or tablet during lectures and class discussions is also prohibited. Please take lecture notes by hand, unless you have a university-approved accommodation.

I will print out the readings not included in the four required texts, so there should be no reason to read the course texts on a tablet or laptop during class unless you have an accommodation documented by the university. If this policy creates hardship, please speak with me.

Participation:

Your grade for "Participation" will be determined according to the following criteria:

- Attendance (per Attendance Policy)
- Quality and quantity of contributions to class discussion. I would like you to contribute each class meeting, but please do not offer cursory contributions.
- Active listening during lectures, presentations, and class-wide discussion.
- I will occasionally assign brief writing exercises in addition to the readings listed in the Course Schedule below. Completion of "ungraded" homework assignments will count toward your Participation grade. These include the assignments already listed on September 12 and December 5.

The following will negatively affect your participation grade:

- Using a laptop, phone, iPad, or any other electronic device in a way not permitted by course policies.
- Interrupting the instructor or one of your peers.
- Showing disrespect or indifference toward your peers.
- Not reading an assignment in its entirety.

Reading Quizzes

You'll take reading quizzes on Canvas at the start of each class meeting, beginning September 5. I give these quizzes for two reasons. First, quizzes **prompt you to read deeply and to take notes while reading**. They encourage a particular kind of reading. Second, the quizzes **reward students who consistently meet the demands of the reading schedule**. The quizzes benefit the course grades of most students, although it is also the case that the first few weeks of quiz grades can be low. If you follow the "Tips for reading a book" below, you will do well on these quizzes. As the largest portion of your course grade, quizzes should be a simple way to perform well in this course.

You will be required to take the quiz via Canvas using the Respondus LockDown Browser. The quiz will become available promptly at 8:30am; it will close at 8:45am. You must take the quiz during this period. Once you enter the quiz, you'll have five minutes to complete it. (I've created a five-minute cushion in the event that someone is running a few minutes late. If you arrive after the class has started the quiz, please check in with me and then take the quiz in the hallway.)

On days when you are absent, you are welcome to take the quiz. The quizzes will only be available during the period indicated above. **Late or "make up" quizzes are not allowed**, except in health-related emergencies. I'll drop the two lowest quiz scores of each student.

Medium.com Article:

Each student in the course will write one article (between 1100 and 1300 words), to be published on medium.com. Together, our articles will become an exhibition of critical thought on the intersections of culture and computers. You might think about this assignment as a semester-long conversation—maybe even a debate—about the meaning of computers, at least according to the critics, historians, writers, and theorists who "read" them. Our class will publish articles to a "Publication" (a group of stories that share a subdomain) on medium.com. We will set up accounts and our class's Publication on September 12.

Your article will begin as a response to an "Associated Text," most often a historian or theorist of computer technology. (See the Appendix below for a list of these texts). You will select your due date and associated text in class on Sept. 12. Essays should be **submitted by 8:30am** on the due date. Your essay has two goals: (1) present the associated text to your readers, and (2) use this text as a window for analyzing a present-day phenomenon on the intersection of culture and computers. For example, you might use one of these readings to analyze a recent Apple product, *Wired* article, or cultural phenomenon in EECS here at U-M. Some of the associated readings are critical or theoretical, while others will focus on a historical event in the history of the computer. In either case, I am happy to consult with you on a present-day connection or application.

You are encouraged to incorporate multimedia elements into your submission, including images, embedded maps, or audio files. This article should be thoroughly researched and present a thesis, argument, or at least a focused appraisal of a problem. You should have no fewer than **four credible sources for the article**, in addition to the associated text. I also want you to view this assignment as **an opportunity to take an intellectual risk**—pursue a tough problem, make an earth-shattering connection, express a strong and informed opinion.

I will serve in an editorial role for our class's Publication, reading at least one draft of your article before you upload it to medium.com. **A draft of your article is due two days before its publication deadline.** Please submit your draft as a Word document via email. I will use the "Commenting" and "Track Changes" functions in Word to suggest edits.

Exam on Key Terms and Contexts

This exam will take place in class on November 21. The exam will be available on Canvas, and you will be required to use the Respondus LockDown Browser. I will distribute a study guide on November 14. The exam will ask questions about key terms, ideas, movements, and theories presented in the assigned readings and lectures. While the daily quizzes will focus on your comprehension of the assigned readings, this Exam will evaluate your grasp of the course's analytical terms and critical thinking skills.

Final Response Paper

There will not be a final exam in this course. Instead, you will submit a short response paper to the readings on November 26, December 3 and 5. This response paper will be due by 12:30pm on Thursday, December 19 (the exam period assigned to our course by the University). The specific essay prompt and parameters will be distributed near the end of the semester. You are welcome to submit the paper before the due date. A hard copy of your submission is not required; you only need to submit your paper to Canvas.

How to Format Your Final Essay and Homework Writing Assignments:

In addition to the specific parameters of an assignment, your writing should conform to the following formatting (violation of which will be penalized at my discretion):

- Double-spaced
- Times or Times New Roman font only – 12-point in size
- 1-inch margins on all sides
- Last name and page number in the upper-right hand "Header" of every page
- For multi-page submissions, staple your paper in the upper left-hand corner
- In addition to your name, my name, and the course number, please also include **a word count at the top of the first page**

Tips for reading a book:

As a college student, you obviously know how to read. However, my experience has been that busy schedules and competing demands often lead many students to read in cursory ways. I invite you to be a deeper thinker than a "busy-driven" culture often demands. Here are a few practical tips for retaining more of what you read and concentrating on analyzing assigned texts.

1. Don't read late at night. While a lot of what you're reading will be fascinating, don't think of it as entertainment before bedtime. You'll retain less and engage more superficially with the material if you're tired.
2. Don't read lying down or in a reclined position. It's a law of physics that if you read a course text while lying on your couch, you will fall asleep. Instead, read while sitting upright at a desk or table.
3. Read by yourself, or at least where the movement and noise of others won't distract you. You may also want to use headphones and listen to white noise by using websites such as simplynoise.com.

4. Read in bright light. Bright light is a substitute for caffeine.
5. Set reading goals. It's really tempting to use Snapchat in the middle of a long reading assignment, but don't do it! Set goals such as, "I won't text, check my email, or tweet until I finish this chapter."
6. Write out definitions of unknown words. If you don't know the definition of a word, look it up and write in the margins of the page.
7. Read with a pencil and notebook. In addition to underlining in the books themselves, try creating a reading notebook in which you write questions you'd like to raise in class or copy passages you find difficult/interesting. Past students have found that this reading notebook pays big dividends for papers and final exams.

Day-by-Day Schedule:

	Tuesday	Thursday
Week 1	<p>September 3 Syllabus, introductions, etc.</p> <p>Fredric Brown, "Answer" (to be read in class)</p>	<p>September 5 Hugo Gernsback, "After Television" (Canvas); excerpt from Gernsback, <i>Ralph 124C 41+</i> (Canvas)</p>
Week 2	<p>September 10 Isaacson, "The Computer" (Canvas); Cheever, "The Enormous Radio" (Canvas)</p>	<p>September 12 <i>Media day</i> In preparation for your medium.com essays, read the following examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The Racial Shape of Atlanta" • "The Wheels on the Bus..." • "What's so Addictive About Smartphones?" <p>Based on these essays, create a list of characteristics for this type of writing (250 words or so). How do medium.com essays differ from other types of college writing? What makes one essay better than another? What are the essays' formal features? Please print your response; you will submit it during class. We will use your responses to create a rubric for this assignment during our class meeting.</p>
Week 3	<p>September 17 Vonnegut, <i>Player Piano</i>, chs.1-9 (pp.1-105); 1950s <i>New Yorker</i> articles on computers (Canvas)</p>	<p>September 19 Vonnegut, <i>Player Piano</i>, chs.10-18 (pp.106-185); Elizabeth Borgese, "For Sale, Reasonable" (Canvas)</p>
Week 4	<p>September 24 Vonnegut, <i>Player Piano</i>, chs.19-27 (pp.186-270)</p>	<p>September 26 Vonnegut, <i>Player Piano</i>, chs.28-35 (pp.271-341)</p>
Week 5	<p>October 1 Kit Reed, "The New You" (Canvas); Nocks, "That Does Not Compute" (Canvas); Turkle, "Simulation and Its Discontents" (Canvas)</p>	<p>October 3 Philip K. Dick, <i>Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?</i>, chs.1-5 (pp.3-57)</p>
Week 6	<p>October 8 Dick, <i>Do Androids Dream</i>, chs.6-11 (pp.58-119)</p>	<p>October 10 Dick, <i>Do Androids Dream</i>, chs.12-22 (pp.120- 224)</p>

Week 7	October 15 <i>No class – Fall Break</i>	October 17 <i>No class – Professor Mangrum will be at a conference in Toronto</i>
Week 8	October 22 Marge Piercy, <i>He, She, & It</i> , chs.1-15 (pp.1-131)	October 24 Piercy, <i>He, She, & It</i> , chs.16-26 (pp.131-228)
Week 9	October 29 Piercy, <i>He, She, & It</i> , chs.27-39 (pp.229-347)	October 31 Piercy, <i>He, She, & It</i> , chs.40-49 (pp.350-429)
Week 10	November 5 Eglash, “Race, Sex, and Nerds” (Canvas); Winner, “Do Artifacts Have a Politics?” (Canvas)	November 7 Malka Older, <i>Infomocracy</i> , chs.1-9 (pp.13-118)
Week 11	November 12 Older, <i>Infomocracy</i> , chs.10-17 (pp.119-207)	November 14 Older, <i>Infomocracy</i> , chs.18-26 (pp.208-306) <i>Distribution of Exam Study Guide</i>
Week 12	November 19 Older, <i>Infomocracy</i> , chs.27-33 (pp.307-380)	November 21 <i>Exam on Key Terms and Contexts</i>
Week 13	November 26 Moretti, “Style, Inc.” (Canvas); Eve, “Reading Genre Computationally,” from <i>Close Reading with Computers</i> (Canvas)	November 28 <i>No class – Thanksgiving Break</i>
Week 14	December 3 Archer and Jockers, ch.1 from <i>The Bestseller Code</i> (Canvas); Piper, “Fictionality (Sense)” (Canvas) <i>Distribution of Final Essay prompt</i>	December 5 So, Long, and Zhu, “Race, Writing, and Computation” (Canvas) <i>Skype discussion with Prof. Richard Jean So. Please read the assignment for today and come to class with at least two questions about the article. These questions should be typed out and printed in advance; you will raise your questions during our conversation with Prof. So. You will then hand in your questions at the end of class.</i>
Week 15	December 10 Final Essay Workshop <i>This is an optional workshop for final essays. If you choose to participate, you will circulate a draft of your final response essay within a small group of peers. I will give prompts for workshopping these drafts. Ideas and incomplete drafts are welcome.</i>	

Appendix: Associated Texts and Due Dates for Medium.com Articles

Each of the following associated texts may be found under the “Associated Texts” folder on Canvas (see the Readings tab). Essays must be posted to medium.com by 8:30am on the due date. Please remember to include your post within our class’s “Publication.”

September 16: Campbell-Kelly, “Inventing the Computer”

September 18: Campbell-Kelly, “The Computer Becomes a Business Machine”

September 20: Campbell-Kelly, “The Maturing of the Mainframe”

September 23: Karl Marx, “The labour process and alienation in machinery and science”

September 25: R. Arvid Nelsen, “Race and Computing”

September 27: Campbell-Kelly, “Software”

September 30: David Tomas, “Feedback and Cybernetics”

October 2: Steven Usselman, “From Sputnik to SCOT: The Historiography of American Technology”

October 4: Lev Manovich, “What Is New Media?”

October 7: Jean Baudrillard, “The Vanishing Point of Communication”

October 9: Masahiro Mori, “The Uncanny Valley”

October 11: Lev Manovich, “What New Media Is Not”

October 16 [*after fall break*]: Dourish and Mainwaring, “UbiComp’s Colonial Impulse”

October 18 [*after fall break*]: Edmond Couchet, “The Screen Overtaken by Computation”

October 21: Lev Manovich, “Synthetic Realism and Its Discontents”

October 23: Kim Toffoletti, "Feminism, Technology, and the Posthuman"

October 25: Clay Shirky, "Gin, Television, and Social Surplus"

October 28: Lev Manovich, "Illusion, Narrative, and Interactivity"

October 30: Benjamin Woolley, "Virtuality"

November 1: Felix Stalder, "Between Democracy and Spectacle: The Front-End and Back-End of the Social Web"

November 4: Dery, "Wired Man's Burden"

November 6: Kendall, "'White and Nerdy': Computers, Race, and the Nerd Stereotype"

November 8: Lisa Nakamura, "Measuring Race on the Internet"

November 11: Philip, et. al., "Postcolonial Computing: A Tactical Survey"

November 13: Donna Haraway, "Technoscience in hypertext"

November 15: Lev Manovich, Introduction to *Software Takes Command*

November 18: Seb Franklin, "Cloud Control, or The Network as Medium"

November 25: Chris Anderson, "The Long Tail"

December 2: E. Gabriella Coleman, "Phreaks, Hackers, and Trolls: The Politics of Transgression and Spectacle"

December 4: Geert Lovink, "Theses on Distributed Aesthetics; Or, What a Network Is Not"

December 6: Ashley Dawson, "Cognitive Capitalism, Humanist Scholarship, and the Digital Transformation"
