SOCI 220 CYBERSPACE & SOCIAL RELATIONS

SYLLABUS

Cyberspace & Social Relations
323 King Building
09:30—10:50 (TR)*
SOCI-220-01 (CRN #14121)
http://www.steward.net/oberlin/soci220/syllabus.html (this page) †

Dan Steward
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14:00—16:30 (W) ‡
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http://www.steward.net

Description

We will study the networks that constitute 'cyberspace' and the ways that they are embedded in the older worlds of 'meatspace'. We will address such topics as social networking, virtual reality, panopticism, anonymity and accountability, identity construction, intellectual property regimes, electronic democracy, telecommuting, digital divides, distributed knowledge, and online learning.

Requirements

Students are expected to attend class regularly, to participate actively and courteously, to abide by the rules of Oberlin College (especially the Honor Code) and the instructor.

Students should purchase the following text: Lessig, Lawrence (2006) Code v2.0 (Basic Books; ISBN-13: 978-0-465-03914-2). In addition, various other printed texts, films, recordings, and other media (referred to generally as "texts") will be assigned and made available during the term. Students should engage these texts critically, assessing their validity against personal experience, common sense, and the methods of research and interpretation modeled by the sociologists and other scholars who author such texts. Various exercises may be assigned from time to time over the course of the term to guide students in practices of research, writing, oral presentation, and critical interpretation. Such exercises may take the form of homework, in-class assignments, or small group projects. As a general rule, these exercises will not be graded; they may, however, be converted into graded assignments (e.g., pop quizzes) if and when this seems pedagogically appropriate to the instructor.

Each student will be graded on the basis of his/her: class participation, hypermedia project, and performance on each of two examinations. Details are provided below, and will be discussed in class.

Graded Assignments
025% Midterm Examination
025% Final Examination
040% Hypermedia Project
010% Class Participation

 Participation

Students should attend class regularly and well-prepared, should participate actively in our discussions, and should complete assignments in a timely fashion.

Attending class regularly means missing no more than two or three sessions over the course of the term. We are all adults, and I will not be taking attendance as a regular matter—but I will be paying attention to it. If your personal circumstances give rise to a chronic failure of attendance, you should discuss it with me (or expect a substantially lowered grade as a consequence).

Being prepared means doing the assigned readings (or viewings, or listemings) before the class sessions in which
they are to be covered, and giving some thought to them. What is most intriguing? What is most confusing? Can you 
think of examples from your own life, or from your knowledge of the world, that bolster an author's argument? Can 
you think of counter-examples that challenge the argument, inviting us to refine or reject it? Can you think of 
alternative theories and concepts that offer us a better grasp of the topics we are studying?

Participating actively means speaking up, but it means more than that—it also means paying attention to others, 
listening to the instructor and to the other students, and staying on-task when we are doing in-class exercises. We all 
get bored or distracted sometimes, but we can work together to make this an invigorating class. If you find yourself 
feeling alienated from the class or the texts, please speak with the instructor. He can't fix everything, but he will try 
to help.

**Grading:** Class participation will be graded as follows: At the end of the term, a modal score will be assigned to 
everyone in the class, reflecting the overall quality of class participation over the course of the term. For each 
student, this score will be adjusted upwards or downwards to reflect his/her own contributions. The instructor will 
be able to determine a student's participation because he will be keeping track of individual levels of active 
participation in discussions and timely completion of various assignments in-class or online. (Late submissions of 
assignments may be accepted by the instructor, but subject to a grading penalty, so this may affect more than a 
student's participation score.) Participation scores will range between 0-10 points (of a total of 100 points used for 
determining final grades). Although participation is only 10% of the points determining grades, please bear in mind 
that this can make a difference of an entire letter-grade.

**Projects**

Here are my basic expectations for your hypermedia projects. We will go into more detail (including technical 
details) as the semester unfolds:

- Do something fun and interesting.
- Do it well.
- It may...
  - be as conventional as a standard term paper that you save/post as html.
  - be unconventional as you want it to be, provided that it clearly evidences some critical thinking on your 
    part.
  - be an individual or a joint endeavour.
  - be shared with others in the class, or even the rest of the world.
  - emphasize your opinions rather than just the facts (though you should have and share reasons for the 
    opinions you hold).
  - emphasize research that you have done, or it may emphasize your analysis of texts/artifacts we have studied 
    together as a class (provided you do more than just rehash what others have said).
  - be created with whatever tools you like, from a simple text editor and ftp program, to a word processor, to 
    Dreamweaver, to flash animations, ..., to whatever -- provided that I can read/view/ experience it without 
    acquiring highly-specialized equipment/software. (In other words, somebody using a browser like Firefox, 
    Safari, or Internet Explorer should be able to view your site with conventional plugins -- or with no plugins at 
    all.)
- It should...
  - be readable/viewable on the web, either at your Oberlin College website or any other cyberspace location of 
    your choosing that I can access to evaluate your work and give you a grade.
  - be connected to topics/issues we have covered in this course, or that we *should* have covered; if you are 
    worried about going out-of-bounds, then just run your topic by me first.
  - reflect about the same level of time-commitment and critical thinking that you would typically devote to a 
    ten-to-twelve page term paper (double-spaced); that's something like researching/thinking/writing a 3000-
    word piece.
  - respect netiquette as well as the privacy and property interests of others (try to interpret this reasonably and
humane, which is not the same as being anal about rules).
  o ...connect to artifacts outside itself, whether in the old-fashioned form of references/bibliography or in the
    new-fangled form of hyperlinks (and ideally in some combination of old and new).
  o ...be completed by the end of April.

**Examinations**

There will be two examinations in this class: a midterm and a final. The midterm will be due by the beginning of the
last class before Spring Break (2009.03.19), and the final will be due by the end of our assigned exam period
(2009.05.14). The final will be cumulative.

Both exams will be take-home, distributed a week before they are due, and subject to time limits once started (75
minutes from the time you open the exam). They will be open-book and open-note, but *not* collaborative (i.e., you
must complete them alone). You may use a computer to review your notes and/or texts during the exam, and to
write/print any essay questions, but *not* to research your answers. (Googling and wikipedia are cheating so far as
exams are concerned.) You will have the option of writing your essay question in a blue book, or typing it on a
computer.

These exams typically will include an essay question (students will be given several questions from which they must
select one). They will also include non-essay questions (matching, short answer, fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice,
etc.). Students will be expected to select the best answers to such questions, bearing in mind that they are designed
to test your understanding of the texts and class lectures/discussions, and not your beliefs or the way things really
are.

**Exam Grading:** Each exam question will be assigned a point value and this will be indicated on the exam; students
should have a good sense of how much time to devote to each question. The non-essay questions are generally all-
or-nothing, but sometimes partial credit is given for well-reasoned answers (and there is often an opportunity to
justify your answer on a question). The essay questions are graded comparatively. For any given essay question,
more points will be awarded for answers that are well-reasoned, well-written, and responsive to *all parts* of the
*essay question*; fewer points are awarded for answers that are sloppy, incoherent, incomplete, or poorly-written.
Point totals for exams will be adjusted downward for annoyances such as: deciphering illegible writing, tracking
down unstapled pages, suffering eye strain from answers written in pencil, etc. *Please read and follow the
instructions on the examinations.*

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### Schedule

The assignments for this course are divided into seven units. Details are
provided below for each unit, subject to modification by the instructor on
the basis of various considerations—where the class interest lies, what
transpires outside of the bubble of our class, etc. You will always have
plenty of notice regarding your obligations, so don't worry about the plasticity of the schedule, but please do pay
attention to announcements in-class and through email.

Each unit is typically broken down into lists of texts that you should *peruse*, questions/notions that you should
*ponder*, and various works that you should *produce*. For each unit, there are target-dates indicating when we will be
covering the unit.

**Perusals:** To *peruse* a text means that you have spent some time trying to understand it, to make sense of it in
relation to other texts, and to criticize it. If there are materials that you need only skim, the instructor will tell you.
The texts that are assigned for your perusal in each unit will generally be available online (and sometimes the
instructor will also provide paper copies in class). Many of these texts are publicly available, and also available in a

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**Key Dates**

- 2009.03.19 Midterm Examination Due
- 2009.05.14 Final Examination Due
- 2009.04.30 Hypermedia Project Due

(See Requirements for details.)
class cache (in case the public links die). You will need a login id and password to access the texts in the class cache (at http://www.steward.net/oberlin/cache/), and these will be provided to you in-class. Please contact dan.steward@oberlin.edu if you find a broken link. Thanks.

**Ponderables**: The texts for each unit are chosen to enable and stimulate critical discussions in-class, and the ponderables are offered to get all of us thinking about some of the same problems/issues—in the hopes that we will all be "on the same page" for our class discussions. We will not necessarily discuss every ponderable, but you should have started thinking about each of them before the relevant class session.

**Productions**: To keep you on track with your project, and to help monitor/reward your participation, you will be expected to complete various written assignments over the course of the term. Sometimes these will be submitted on paper, and sometimes through email or other online tools. Please try to keep up with these assignments: This will help make the project a good learning experience rather than a chore.

**HIDE DETAIL**

### 220.01: The Once & Future Internet

**Target Date/s:** 2009.02.03—2009.02.10

**peruse...**

  - public link: [http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_TYP_Typology.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_TYP_Typology.pdf)
- National Science Foundation. 2005 [2003]. "Fact Sheet: A Brief History of NSF and the Internet."
- National Science Foundation. ND. "The Internet: Changing the Way We Communicate."
- Bush, Vannevar. 1945. "As We May Think."
  - public link: [http://www.w3.org/2005/01/timelines/timeline-2500x998.png](http://www.w3.org/2005/01/timelines/timeline-2500x998.png)
- Further Reading
  - NSF and The Birth of the Internet
    - (Nice video/audio coverage of the topic.)
    - An online version of the NSF pamphlet entitled "The Internet: Changing the Way We Communicate."
    - "Long Description of W3C10 Timeline Graphic."
      - [http://www.w3.org/2005/01/timelines/description](http://www.w3.org/2005/01/timelines/description)
    - Markoff, John. 2009. "Do We Need a New Internet?"
    - (Just some recommendations...)
    - [http://www.steward.net/oberlin/soci220/syllabus.html](http://www.steward.net/oberlin/soci220/syllabus.html)

3/2/2009
  o public link: http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Future_of_Internet.pdf
  o class cache: http://www.steward.net/oberlin/cache/pew_pialp_20050109_future1.pdf
  o public link: http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Future_of_Internet_2006.pdf
  o class cache: http://www.steward.net/oberlin/cache/pew_pialp_20060924_future2.pdf
  o public link: http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_FutureInternet3.pdf
  o class cache: http://www.steward.net/oberlin/cache/pew_pialp_20081214_future3.pdf

ponder...

• 220.01.01. What, if anything, surprised you about the variations in internet-usage by age cohort?
• 220.01.02. To what extent does the internet serve as a realization of Bush's dreams?
• 220.01.03. What, on the basis of your readings and your own knowledge of our culture, are the key events in the development of cyberspace to date?
• 220.01.04. What type of internet user are you? Do you feel that the typology developed by the Pew Internet & American Life Project accurately captures the kinds of users you know?
• 220.01.05. What do you find most intriguing/disturbing among the predictions and prognostications you've read about the future of cyberspace?

produce...

• Complete the Pew Internet Typology Survey, have them calculate/typify you, and email the result to dan.steward@oberlin.edu.
• Start thinking about hypermedia project ideas... Our introductory readings should inspire you...

**HIDE_DETAIL 220.02: Code & Cyberspace Puzzles**

Target Date/s: 2009.02.12—2009.02.19

peruse...

  o class cache: http://www.steward.net/oberlin/cache/rheingold_howard_1993_01.html
  o class cache: http://www.steward.net/oberlin/cache/dibbell_julian_19931223_01.html
• Lessig, Lawrence. 2006. pp. ix-xvii ("preface to the second edition", "preface to the first edition") in Code v2.0. (Note: Optional reading, but recommended.)
• Lessig, Lawrence. 2006. pp. 1-8 ("code is law") in Code v2.0.
• Lessig, Lawrence. 2006. pp. 9-28 ("four puzzles from cyberspace") in Code v2.0.
• Barlow, John Perry. 1996. "A Declaration For the Independence of Cyberspace."

Further Reading

The Kevin Mitnick Story:

WWII as an Online Game:
http://blinkynet.net/wwii/wwiirts.html
(Just some recommendations...)

http://www.steward.net/oberlin/soci220/syllabus.html
public link: http://w2.eff.org/Censorship/Internet_censorship_bills/barlow_0296.declaration
class cache: http://www.steward.net/oberlin/cache/barlow_john_1996_02.txt
This will be distributed, read and discussed in class once we get underway with the ponderables.

ponder...

- 220.02.01. In light of the stories recounted by Rheingold and Dibbell, how does the net/web promise to make life better?
- 220.02.02. In light of such stories, how does the net/web threaten to make life worse?
- 220.02.03. To what extent do such stories reveal profound differences between meatspace and cyberspace? Similarities?
- 220.02.04. What other stories have you heard/read/made about life in/with the net/web that raise interesting questions?
- 220.02.04. To what extent does Lessig open your eyes to different promises and threats?
- 220.02.05. True or False: Lessig’s thesis is that we must pursue libertarian policies to protect the internet/web. Explain your answer briefly.
- 220.02.06. Lessig tells four stories and identifies four themes. Which story/ies illustrate/illuminate which themes? How? (You may find a table, Lessig’s Four Puzzles, helpful in organizing your notes/thoughts.)

produce...

- Complete the "Pixels vs. Trees" Survey and return a copy to Dan Steward by the due date. (Note: This is not designed to be submitted online, but you can print it out and turn it in.)

HIDE DETAIL 220.03: "Regulability" & Regulation by Code

Target Date/s: 2009.02.19—2009.03.05

peruse...

- Lessig, Lawrence. 2006. pp. 31-37 ("is-ism: is the way it is the way it must be?") in Code v2.0.
- Gibson, William. 1994. "I Don't Even Have A MODEM." (Interview with Dan Josefson.)
- public link: http://josefsson.net/gibson/index.html
- class cache: http://www.steward.net/oberlin/cache/gibson_william_1994_01/gibson1.html
  (Please bear in mind that "cyberspace"—as well as cyberspace—is really quite plastic.)

ponder...

- 220.03.01. What is a "meme"? What synonyms do sociologists use to convey this idea? How are memes (by any other name) un/like genes? To what extent is the distribution of memes/genes a function of selection or design? How does the evolution/development of memes in cyberspace differ from similar processes in meatspace?
- 220.03.02. How does "is-ism" (aka "false necessity") contrast with the "social construction of reality"?
220.03.03. The WELL is to LambdaMOO as Harvard is to ____________?
220.03.04. What does Lessig mean by "identity," "authentication," and "credential"? How are they related to trust and confidence?
220.03.05. How does the "end-to-end" principle (e2e) facilitate coding for anonymity?
220.03.06. What are "mouse droppings"? How are they related to cookies and logs?
220.03.07. Lessig organizes chapter four around this comment: To regulate, the state needs a way to know...
'Who did what, where? How/why is the Net changing
  o ...to identify who is using particular data?
  o ...to identify what is the content of particular data?
  o ...to identify where the users are located in meatspace?
220.03.08. Consider Lessig's list (pp. 68-69) of legal rules that might foster use of "digital IDs." Do any of these strike you as utterly implausible? Do any strike you as "no-brainers" that should have been implemented years ago? How is "the principle of bovinity" important here?
220.03.09. Were you surprised/amused by any references to The Godfather in the reading for this unit?
220.03.10. Compare Lessig's definition of "cyberspace" with the definition offered by William Gibson (who actually coined the term). How do these compare with common usage? Which is closer to the way you have previously used the term?
220.03.11. To what extent do you share Gibson's concerns about cyberspace? How does his assessment (in 1994) compare with the predictions/trends described in the three recent Pew studies we read?
220.03.12. What four modalities of regulation does Lessig identify in his discussion of AOL? Which of them do you associate with "East Coast" code? Which of them do you associate with "West Coast" code?
220.03.13. Consider Lessig's discussion of the Mr. Bungle case. Does he do it justice? Are other issues raised that we should discuss further?
220.03.14. Consider Lessig's discussion of IBEX. Have you ever been in an online environment affected by flaming? How did you and other participants in that cyberspace-niche handle the problem?
220.03.15. Give an example of "West Coast" code in meatspace.
220.03.16. Why is Lessig concerned about indirect regulation?
220.03.17. What is the difference between "open" and "closed" code? How does this distinction apply to GPL and ASP? What kind of code are books?
220.03.18. Throughout Code, Lessig compares four modes of regulation: law (East Coast code), code/architecture (West Coast code), markets, and norms. These interact and overlap, but remain distinct forms of collective regulation. In his appendix, Lessig draws our attention to two important distinctions:
  o How do these modes differ in terms of "agency"?
  o How do these modes differ in terms of temporality?

produce...

- Complete the application for a student web account at: http://www.oberlin.edu/cit/accounts/pacct.html; send the instructor an email with your webpage address (URI/URL).
- Include (in the same email) a list of three topics that you are considering for your hypermedia project.
- If you are thinking of doing a group project, provide (in the same email) a list of the other students with whom you will be collaborating.

HIDE DETAIL 220.04: Intellectual Property & the Web of Human Creativity

Dan will be filling in the details here over the next few days—we are still a few weeks away from this unit.

Target Date/s: 2009.03.05—2009.03.19

peruse...

http://www.steword.net/oberlin/soci220/syllabus.html
ponder...

- 220.04.01. [ ]
- 220.04.02. [ ]
- 220.04.[]. [ ]

produce...

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**220.05: Privacy & Panopticism**

Dan will be filling in the details here over the next few days—we are still a few weeks away from this unit.

**Target Date/s: 2009.[].[]—2009.[].[]**

peruse...

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ponder...

- 220.05.01. [ ]
- 220.05.02. [ ]
- 220.05.[]. [ ]

produce...

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**220.06: Free Speech & Public Discourse**
Dan will be filling in the details here over the next few days—we are still a few weeks away from this unit.

Target Date/s: 2009.[].[]—2009.[].[]

peruse...

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ponder...

- 220.06.01. []
- 220.06.02. []
- 220.06.[]. []

produce...

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HIDE DETAIL 220.07: Competing Sovereigns & Competing Futures

Dan will be filling in the details here over the next few days—we are still a few weeks away from this unit.

Target Date/s: 2009.[].[]—2009.[].[]

peruse...

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ponder...

- 220.07.01. []
- 220.07.02. []
- 220.07.[]. []

produce...

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Notes

Dates are expressed yyyy/mm/dd, and times are expressed on a 24-hour clock. Days of the week are coded:
=Monday; T=Tuesday; W=Wednesday; R=Thursday; F=Friday; A=Saturday; U=Sunday. Thus, office hours from
00pm until 4:30pm on Wednesdays are expressed as 14:00..16:30 (W).

Please note that the online headquarters for this course is the web address (also known as a "uniform resource
identifier/locator"—a "URI"/"URL") for this Syllabus (given above), and not Blackboard. If you are unable to read the
tails in this Syllabus, please try enabling Javascript in your browser; if that fails, contact dan.steward@oberlin.edu.

Unless otherwise announced, office hours will be held in Azariah's Cafe in Mudd Library. Don't waste your time
wasting me down in my office. Meetings will be first-come, first-served unless we set an appointment ahead of time. I
prefer email messages to phone calls, but I strongly recommend face-to-face meetings at Azariah's Cafe if you want to
communicate with me outside of the classroom. I encourage every student to drop by for a chat early in the semester.