

WEB 2.0 IN TECH COMM

Contact

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Overview and Objectives

This class explores the impact of Web 2.0 applications in Scientific and Technical Communication. We'll be working as a team to create an extensive informational wiki on scientific, technical, and social aspects of the 35W bridge collapse. Our team development, project design, and development will include a variety of applications, including blogs, wikis, IM, Facebook, Twitter, social tagging, Basecamp, Picasa, and Moodle. We'll also do some basic work with podcasting and vlogging applications.

Our work here is not just about fiddling with new and interesting web applications, though. We're going to think critically about them and build things with them: both a community and a multi-modal text. By the time we wrap things up in May, you should have gained the following experience and skills:

1. **You'll have worked with a wide range of established and emerging technologies relevant to the field of Scientific & Technical Communication.** You'll understand what they are, what to do with them, and how they might be used in various projects. Ideally, you'll also have gained the confidence to continue evaluating, learning, and incorporating future technologies as they emerge.
2. **You'll have learned techniques that allow you to critically examine the impact technologies have on the manner and form in which we communicate.** This includes not just various forms your textual product might take, but also the ways in which virtual teams communicate and function.
3. **You will have strengthened your writing and composition skills.** Specifically, you will have gained experience in communicating scientific and technical topics to variable, non-expert audiences. You will also understand basic principles of information architecture and gain basic experience with composing audio or visual texts.
4. **You will have developed or increased your ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical, workplace projects.** We will cover the theory and practice of creating a professional

digital identity, of successfully working with team members you never see, of designing and building a navigable web resource, and of revising text into rich media.

All of you should walk away from this course with a broad vocabulary and understanding of these ideas and with a sense of how different workplace environments are coping with the challenges of technical information in our time of complex products, multiple audiences, and fast-changing tools and hardware.

Masters-level students (and interested undergrads) will also do some extensive reading, thinking, and writing about the variable nature of information architecture on the web. Among other topics, we'll cover:

- A brief history of information organization
- Some philosophical implications of the ways we organize information
- Fundamentals of information architecture and site planning
- The chaos of folksonomies
- The ways those last two elements intersect to create the wonderful, messy Internet

Texts and Materials

Required for everyone:

Aoki, Boyle, and Jenkins. *Bound By Law: Tales From the Public Domain*. Duke Law School, 2006. (Amazon: \$5.95)

Tapscott and Williams. *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*. Portfolio Hardcover, 2006. (Amazon: \$15.57)

Zelenka and Sohn. *Connect!: Web Worker Daily's Guide to a New Way of Working*. Wiley, 2008. (Amazon: \$16.49)

Required for MS students, optional for others:

Rosenfeld, Louis. *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web: Designing Large-Scale Web Sites*. 3rd ed. O'Reilly, 2006. (Amazon: \$26.39)

Weinberger, David. *Everything Is Miscellaneous: The Power of the New Digital Disorder*. Times Books, 2007. (Amazon: \$16.50)

Other required readings will be distributed via our course site. You'll need to make sure you have the most recent version of Adobe Reader so you can view them. (It's linked on the "Resources" page.)

You'll also need to make sure you're set up to consistently and fully participate with us. This means that you have access to a reliable Internet connection -- and it's even better if it's a relatively fast one. (If you don't have broadband and live in an area that is not served by Time-Warner Cable, you can get a discounted rate with Comcast through the UMN TechMart. Check the link on the "Resources" page.) You should familiarize yourself with Moodle, the blog, and the wiki and find a way to remind yourself to check in regularly.

Getting Things Done

Work Load: This is a four-credit, senior-level, writing intensive course with both undergraduate and masters-level students in it. That means we're going to read a lot and write a lot. (I strongly suggest that you take a look at the piece "How to Read in College," listed as optional reading in the Week 1 module. It'll give you useful pointers on managing our reading load.) It also means we're going to be spending time on revising your work, since revision is a required component of writing-intensive courses. We will work with a variety of applications that may be new to you, so you'll need to build in time for accessing and figuring out basic functions. Be prepared to deal.

There are some corresponding benefits to our general work flow, though. This course emphasizes the value of consistent, steady work rather than the sort of binge-writing we normally do when we produce academic papers and projects. This means that, while you are expected to be doing a fair amount of work each week, you will not have the mid-semester and final work crunches that you normally experience. (Okay, unless you are a masters student. If you're one of those, you still have to write a final paper in accordance with department policies for graduate credit hours. But you can choose to work on that incrementally throughout the semester.)

Attendance and General Attitude: You should be participating fully and consistently each week. Since this class relies so heavily on collaboration, it is not possible for you to make up missed work or to work ahead. Do not disappear in the middle of the semester with the intention of coming back later, and do not plan on finishing early. This requirement may be difficult for you, depending on your personality. **Let me be very frank: if you are taking this class because you need an easy four hours of credit, you may want to reconsider now.** Online courses can be more difficult than face-to-face ones for the simple reason that there is no place you have to be and no time you have to be there. It's up to you to make yourself show up and do the work. This one also requires you to do more writing than many of your other classes and as well as some technology wrangling.

Participation: To succeed in any class, you need to make a point of showing up and participating. The same is true here, but our definition of "showing up" is a bit different. Because we can't see you, you need to be blogging and otherwise contributing consistently in order to make sure the rest of us know you're there. That means keeping up with Facebook and Twitter as well. It's the only way we have of getting to know each other, developing ideas, and figuring out answers to our questions.

Because this is so important, discussion participation points make up nearly half (48%) of your total grade. (Actually, overall participation counts for more than that, as you'll see in the section below on discretionary points [pg 5].) You should plan on writing at least one substantive blog post each week. There are several requirements here:

- It should have a good title. "Good" means descriptive and original. "Week One Post" is not a good title.
- It should be insightful, articulate, on-topic, and clearly demonstrate an understanding of the readings and/or work of the week, depending on what we're up to.
- It should substantiate assertions and contain citations as appropriate. Parenthetical citation is fine. Ex: (Brady, 2006, p. 2).
- It should be at least 250 words long if you are an undergraduate and 500 words long if you are a graduate student.
- It should be posted by midnight on Thursday. Posts made on Friday will receive half credit; posts from 1 a.m. Saturday on will receive zero points.

Additionally, you should plan on making thoughtful comments to at least two of your colleagues' posts. "Thoughtful" means articulate and helpful; comments like "Absolutely!" and "Woo-hoo!" do not count. If your contributions meet these basic requirements, you'll receive up to 40 points each week. (These points apply only to comments on the blog, unless we have moved our discussion elsewhere that week.)

You can feel free to post more, of course. Extra work (either in posts or comments) means up to three additional points per week. If you see something interesting and pertinent to the course in the news, on YouTube, or elsewhere, post a link and let us know about it!

Do not flame each other. Even if you're working at home in your bunny slippers, you're still at work when you're dealing with this class. Remain professional at all times. Disagreements will inevitably pop up as we talk through our topics, but they should be handled respectfully -- don't ever vent your frustration by ripping someone apart. If your behavior does not meet these guidelines, you and I will have a discussion and your grade will be drastically affected. See the Collaboration Policy further on down the syllabus for more information regarding expected behavior.

Respect works both ways. I do my best to be courteous and fair in all situations and at all costs. If you ever feel that you've been treated otherwise, please come and talk to me about it.

Criteria	Points
Post meets or exceeds length requirements	5
Post substantiates assertions and contains appropriate citations	5
Post is insightful, articulate, on-topic, and demonstrates understanding of the readings	10
Comments on at least two other posts are helpful and appropriate	10

Rhythm: Our discussions will span the entire week, beginning on Monday morning and ending on Sundays at midnight. **Do not plan on doing your entire week's work on Sunday afternoons. If you do, your grade will be substantially less than you hoped for: submissions posted after the deadline will receive reduced or zero points. (Also, it is practically impossible for you to accomplish the assigned amount of reading and writing in one afternoon.)** As I said above, our initial posts should be up by midnight on Thursday. Don't dally -- it's rude to wait until the last minute because it robs your classmates of time to read, reflect on, and respond to your thoughts. **Posts published between 1 am and midnight on Friday will receive half credit; posts made after that will receive no credit at all.** You should plan on checking in on our discussions and projects at least three days each week, which is no different than if you were enrolled in a class that meets MWF. If we all make this work right, there will almost always be something new for you to see.

Readings: Because you don't get the great joy of showing up to listen to me lecture each week, you'll need to be sure to do the readings. This is particularly important because your final grade will reflect your ability to understand and implement the ideas we're covering. These readings range from the very simple to the theoretical and abstract, but you should make a point of push-

ing through even if you find the material difficult. If you don't understand something, talk to me about it or ask the rest of us on the blog. (Chances are that if you have a question, someone else does too. This means that everyone can benefit from the discussion.)

Major assignments: You will complete two major assignments over the course of the semester.

Assignment #1, 250 points: You will contribute 5,000 words of text on a unified set of topics to the wiki. This make take the form of 5 longish pieces or a larger number of short pieces.

Assignment #2, 150 points: You will re-vision one of our textual topics as either audio or video. There are several available options for this assignment: podcasting, video, or various hybrid applications. You will be able to choose according to your interests and the technologies available to you.

You'll receive detailed instructions about both of these as we move along in the semester.

An important point to note about citation in this class:

Your projects should cite a wide variety of sources, both print and digital. Google Scholar is a wonderful tool, but you should also be taking advantage of our Libraries' rich resources. (The UMN Libraries rank in the top 15 in the country!) There will be more specifics on this aspect in the assignment details.

I have also reserved 120 discretionary points, as you'll see in the table below. These points are earned by your participation in our various weekly non-writing projects: workstreaming, project planning, information tagging, etc. In other words, you earn these points by showing up and pitching in consistently.

The final point allocation looks like this:

Assignment	Points
Blogging/Discussion Participation	480 (30 pts per wk x 16 weeks)
Wiki Writing & Research	250 points
Multimedia Revision	150
Discretionary Points	120

Graduate students will be graded on a 1250 point scale which allocates 250 points to the final research paper. Everyones' final course grade will be calculated according to the usual university criteria:

A	940 – 1000	Represents work that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	900 - 939	
B+	880 – 899	Represents work that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B	840 – 879	
B-	800 - 839	
C+	780 – 799	Represents work that meets the basic course requirements in every aspect.
C	740 – 779	
C-	700 - 739	

D	600 - 699	Represents work that is worthy of credit even though it does not fully meet the basic course requirements.
F	599 and below	Signifies that the work was either completed but at a level that was not worthy of credit or else was not completed at all.

I do not give incompletes. If you are in the D or F range at midterm, you and I will schedule a conference. This may be a time for you to withdraw from the class or sign a contract with me stating that we've discussed the matter and you intend to continue the class.

Technology: The work you do for this class will require familiarity with the basic uses of computers to compose documents; to save and backup your work; to send files as email attachments; to upload and download documents; to download, install, and launch applications; and to participate in various social applications on the web. None of the things we'll be working with require you to do any programming or have any special knowledge, but they do require that you be prepared to push yourself and ask questions when you need to. This means keeping an open mind, being willing to read help files and fiddle a bit on your own, and being willing to call Tech Support when you need to. (Please remember that I am the instructor, not a technical support specialist. I am always willing to help you as much as I can, but there will be specific quirks for your machine that you may need to address with someone else.)

All course materials will be posted on or linked from Moodle. All of our discussions will be on the external blog. The bulk of our writing will be done on the wiki. Your identity will be shielded there through the use of pseudonyms, but you should remember that the blog and wiki are public documents, and the social applications we will use are also public. Never forget that *anyone* can read them.

If you have any concerns about the role of technology in this course, you should contact me within the first week of the semester. You should also plan to take advantage of email, IM, and face-to-face appointments for questions that come up along the way.

Grade Disputes: If you have a question about your grade, please wait 24 hours before you discuss it with me. Take some time to think about the situation and carefully formulate your argument. When we talk, you should have a specific rationale for why you deserve a higher grade. Then schedule a time to meet with me and we'll discuss it.

Collaboration Disputes: This is perhaps the most collaborative course you will ever take, since we will all be working on one central text. While the course is set up to allow you responsibility for contributing individual texts and work, you will also interact with and develop projects together. As in the workplace, this sort of work means that you will have to find ways to get along. I expect for you to be able to use your social skills to resolve your basic differences on your own. However, if you find a particular collaborative situation to be unreasonable or unresolvable, please notify me so that I can help you resolve it. If you find yourself considering taking this step, use this test: in a real job, would this be an issue worth taking to your boss and soliciting managerial intervention? If so, then it's time to let me know. If not, then find ways to work it out yourselves.

Late work: I do not accept late work, and I will not accept technology problems as an excuse. If your home system becomes unusable for some reason, you should go to one of the many labs on campus or a local library to complete your assignments. The only acceptable technology-related excuse is a city-wide blackout.

Academic Dishonesty: If you have a question about documentation and/or plagiarism as you complete your work, just ask me. I'll be more than happy to discuss it with you. That said, all students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities

with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own will result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Bottom line: if you engage in academic dishonesty, you will most likely fail the course.

Special Needs and Accommodations: Students who need special consideration because of any sort of documented disability should make an appointment to discuss it with me right away. The information you share with me will remain confidential. You should also contact the Office of Disability Service for information and/or assistance.

Schedule of Events (subject to change)

(Undergraduate readings are in plain text. **Additional graduate readings are in bold.**)

Week One (1/22 - 1/27)	Distributed Text, Distributed Teams, Distributed Work	<i>Connect</i> , xii - 32 (Intro + Towards a Web Working World) <i>Wikinomics</i> , 1-33 (Intro + Wikinomics) O'Reilly, "What is Web 2.0?" (link) Kelly, "We are the Web" (link) Carr, "The Amoral of Web 2.0" (link)
Week Two (1/28 - 2/3)	Workstreaming Apps of the Week: Facebook & Twitter Guest: Jenny Spadafora, Intuit	<i>Connect</i> , 141 - 171 (Connect, Communicate & Collaborate) <i>Wikinomics</i> , 183-212 (Platforms for Participation) Skellie, "Workstreaming with Microblogs" (link) UMN Guide to Living in Online Communities (link) <i>Wikinomics</i>, 34-64 (The Perfect Storm) Licklider & Taylor, "The Computer as a Communicative Device"
Week Three (2/4 - 2/10)	Mining the Web App of the Week: deli.cio.us	<i>Wikinomics</i> , 97-123 (Ideagoras) <i>Connect</i> , 113-139 (Surf Waves of Info) Sturz, "Communal Categorization: The Folksonomy" (link)
Week Four (2/11 - 2/17)	Information Architecture: Initial Planning App of the Week: Thinkature <i>Preliminary Research Deadline</i>	<i>Information Architecture</i> , 3-52 (PDF) <i>Information Architecture</i>, 231-291
Week Five (2/18 - 2/24)	Info Arch, Pt 2: Yet More Planning App of the Week: Basecamp <i>General Planning Deadline</i>	<i>Information Architecture</i> , 53-81 (PDF) Brown, et al, "Project Planning & Tracking" (PDF) <i>Information Architecture</i>, 82-114, 340-344
Week Six (2/25 - 3/2)	Wikis App of the Week: pbWiki	Cunningham, <i>The Wiki Way</i> , Ch 2 (PDF) <i>Wikinomics</i> , 239-267 (The Wiki Workplace) <i>Wikinomics</i>, 268-290 (Collaborative Minds) Bush, "As We May Think" (link) Lanier, "Digital Maoism" (link)
Week Seven (3/3 - 3/09)	Creating Usable Digital Text	Web Style Guide, "Page Design" (link) Web Style Guide, "Typography" (link) Web Style Guide, "Editorial Style" (link) Bernard, et al, "A Comparison of Popular Online Fonts" (link)

Week Eight (3/10 - 3/16)	Standards and Usability 1st Production Deadline	Nielsen, "Usability 101: Intro to Usability" (link) Web Accessibility 101: Policy, Standards, and Design Techniques (link) Everett, "Web 2.0: A step backwards for accessibility?" (link)
Week Nine (3/17 - 3/23)	Spring Break	
Week Ten (3/24 - 3/30)	Intellectual Property App of the Week: Creative Commons 2nd Production Deadline	Aoki, et al, <i>Bound By Law Wikinomics</i> , 65-96 (The Peer Pioneers) Wikinomics, 124-182 (The Prosumers + The New Alexandrians)
Week Eleven (3/31 - 4/6)	Incorporating Usable Graphics App of the Week: Flickr Optional App: Picasa	Web Style Guide, "Graphics" (link) Optional, "Getting Started With Adobe Photoshop" (link) Additional readings TBA
Week Twelve (4/7 - 4/13)	Harnessing Search Engines: Indexing and Keywords App of the Week: TagCloud 3rd Production Deadline	Info Arch, 193-227 Everything Is Misc, 1-45 McArthur, excerpt from Worlds of Reference (PDF)
Week Thirteen (4/14 - 4/20)	Editing / Review Textual Revisions Deadline	White, excerpts from "The Elements of Style" (PDF) Brown, et al, "Conducting Reviews" (PDF) Everything is Misc, 46-106 McArthur, excerpt from Worlds of Reference (PDF)
Week Fourteen (4/21 - 4/27)	Podcasting App of the Week: VoiceThread or Odeo	Web Style Guide, "Multimedia" (link) CNet, "Insider Tips: Podcasting 101" (link) CNet, "Podcasting 101 series" (link) Merle, "Podcasting 101" (link) Everything is Misc, 107-172
Week Fifteen (4/28 - 5/4)	Digital Video Media Re-visions Deadline	Felix & Stolarz, "Video Blogging Case Studies" (PDF) Additional readings TBA Everything is Misc, 173-234
Week Sixteen (5/5 - 5/09)	Wrap Up Usability Testing Deadline	<i>Connect</i> , 257-285 (Blend Your Work and Your Personal Life + The Future of Web Work)