Online Communities

*DRAFT* SYLLABUS FOR:
COMM 648: Online Communities and Networks

Meeting:
12:30-3:20 Thursday, ASC 240

Instructors:
Professor Janet Fulk, 324E ASC, 740-0941
Professor Douglas Thomas, 321 KER, 743-1939

Introduction:

Online communities have arisen across a diverse array of arenas. For example, in the health field there are forums for preventive health and support groups centered on specific maladies and challenges. Social worlds such as MySpace, Facebook and Orkut, and dating sites support social network creation and maintenance. Political communities support dialog and collective action. Gaming communities coalesce around games, from console-based to massive multiplayer online role plays. Commercial ventures also support online communities, such as chat rooms for movies, groups centered on specific retail toys and robots, and brand communities. Mobile technology also creates new and interesting opportunities for community-building. Online communities are also converging across these boundaries, with communities offering many different applications, such as social networking on health sites. The applications to date only hint at the potential for creative use of the Internet and mobile technology for networking people and building culture.

Key questions often heard in relation to such ventures is how online communities may or may not change the contemporary sense of community and how such changes are affecting our social, political and economic lives. In turn, we can ask how such communities are being changed by and also drive changes to communication and networking technologies. Theory and research to address these core questions is a critical need. Academic research and theory also are needed to help users, technology providers, regulators and community leaders to make informed decisions about the increasingly important social, cultural, political and economic phenomenon of online communication and communities. Just a few of the many relevant topics include privacy issues, regulation, hacking, vandalism, ID theft, and questions such as why do people open
spam, what difference does sound make in an online environment, how does design affect user satisfaction and retention, the role of open platforms in supporting user involvement in shaping community infrastructure, and how do users react to different forms of technology when they access their online community.

In approaching the emergent field of study in online communities, this course will rely on a handful of common threads:

- What are and how do we make distinctions between notions of the real and the virtual?
- What are the dynamics of online communities and in what ways do they manage change?
- How do attachment, belonging, and connectivity manifest in online communities?
- In what ways do online communities create a local/global connection?
- What is the relationship between new technologies, new media, and online community?
- How do you research online communities?

Course Assignments

- Pairs of student participants will be responsible leadership of each different topic in the course. Leadership involves more detailed reading and investigation of the particular topic and preparation of a summary overview of key research themes on that topic.
- Each student participant will bring to class testable hypotheses directly related to the readings for the week.
- Each student participant will be responsible for preparing a written summary of the key ideas in several of the readings throughout the semester.
- Each student will prepare a final research paper or external research proposal

Evaluation

Topic Leadership 30%
Written Article Summaries 20%
Final Research Paper 50%
Seminar Participation and Hypotheses 10%
# Topic Schedule

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**Reading List (subject to minor modifications)**

**Conceptualizing Online Communities and Networks**


Robert Hanneman and Mark Riddle, selections from *Introduction to social network methods*. [http://faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/](http://faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/) In chapter 1 read only these four sections: 1. Introduction, 2. Nodes, 3. Modality and levels of analysis, and 4. Relations. (Be sure to select the correct book—there are three different books at this site.)


**Conceptualizing Social Media**

danah boyd & Nicole Ellison, “Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship”

David Beer, “Social network(ing) sites…revisiting the story so far: A response to danah boyd and Nicole Ellison”

Judith Donath, “Sociable media”

Eszther Hargittai, “Whose space? Differences among users and nonusers of social network sites”

Jan Schmidt, “Blogging practices: An analytical framework”

**Cultural and Social Scientific Research Methods Challenges and Opportunities**

Tom Boellsdorf, Introduction to *Coming of Age in Second Life*

Thomas Malaby, “Parlaying value”

Constant Steinkuehler, “The mangle of play”

Introduction to studying networks--powerpoint TBD
Robert Hanneman and Mark Riddle, selections from Introduction to social network methods. [http://faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/](http://faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/)

Article TBD on “Big Data”

Guest discussion on collection and analysis of Twitter feeds

**Collectives, Communities and Play**

Doug Thomas and John Seely Brown, *A New Culture of Learning*

Dmitri Williams, “From tree house to barracks: The social life of guilds in World of Warcraft”

**Privacy and Publicity: Leaks, Copyrights and Digital Rights**

Cory Doctorow, selections from *Content*

Larry Lessig, selections from *The Future of Ideas*

danah boyd and Eszther Hargittai, “Facebook privacy settings: Who cares?”

Anders Albrechtslund, “Online social networking as participatory surveillance”

**Redefining Knowledge: Wikis and Online Knowledge**

Don Tapscott, selections from *Wikinomics*

Andrew Lih, *The Wikipedia revolution*


Sheizaf Rafaeli and Yaron Ariel, “Online motivational factors: Incentives for participation and contribution in Wikipedia”

**Contribution and Economics of Online Communities**

Caly Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus*

James Surowieki, selections from *The Wisdom of Crowds*
Jahna Otterbachder, “Being heard in review communities: Communication tactics and review prominence”

**Politics and Activism**

Leda Adamic and Natalie Glance, “The political blogosphere and the 2004 U.S. election: divided they blog”

John Arquila and David Ronfeldt, selections from Netwar

Maria Garrido and Alexander Halavais, “Mapping networks of support for the Zapatista movement: Applying social-networks analysis to study contemporary social movements”


Recent paper on Occupy movement TBD

**Open Source: Community and Development**

Rajdeep Grewal, Gary Lilien and Girish Mallapragada, “Location, location, location: How network embeddedness affects project success in open source systems”


Cuihua Shen and Peter Monge, “Who connects with whom? A social network analysis of an online open source software community”

Eric Raymond, “The cathedral and the bazaar”

Steven Weber, “Explaining open source: Macro-organization.” Chapter from The success of open source.

**Convergence Culture**

Henry Jenkins, Convergence Culture

**Mobile Online Community and Being Online Face to Face**

Sherry Turkle, Alone Together

Giuseppi Lugano, “Mobile social networking in theory and practice”