

CSU Stanislaus
Intellectual Methods in the Humanities (HONS 3000), the course formerly known as:
Human Interests & the Power of Information (PHIL4350) - Spring 2011

Instructor: Dr. Chris Nagel

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NOTE: If you intend to communicate electronically with me, put my email address in your address book!

Information has become the key term for describing the purposes of education and research. While advancing technology allows for ever greater accumulation and dissemination of information, what is easy to ignore is the purposes information serves, and at a still more fundamental level, what it means to pursue information. The course will focus reflective, critical attention on the connection between pursuit of information and the broader context of the human interests served by information. We will examine corporate capital and the information economy, the culture of information described by contemporary theorists, and especially our own situation within this culture, and in our everyday lives.

Texts:

Plato, *Meno* (I don't care what edition, but it helps to have the marginal page numbers)

Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information* (either edition)

Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (2nd or 3rd edition)

Course reader,

Other texts, links, items of interest, things, and all manner of amusements (honest!) will be available through Blackboard.

Course Requirements:

1. Regular, informed, active class participation. / 10%

Participation is much more than simply showing up to class. The course is discussion-based as well as text-based. Reading the assignments for each class is a must. Participation in small-group and full-class discussions will be judged not just according to its frequency, but more importantly also on its relevance, informativeness, and insightfulness. Participation will also include brief, informal writing tasks.

2. Three Short Papers. / 60%

These will be mainly textual explication of course material, but will also include interpretation and analysis of texts. I expect you to focus on *one* text in each of these papers, but you may introduce other material as part of your explication, interpretation, and analysis. I will assign the first 2 upon completing the first two parts of the course.

3. Final Project. / 30%

This will be an original essay, bringing together themes, texts, topics, and concepts from this course and Tom Carter's Information of Meaning course. Generally, this has involved the option of an in-class presentation of the project, as a sort of rough draft. More to follow.

Grading criteria for papers:

Papers will be evaluated on a 100-point scale divided into five categories, as noted in this chart.

<p>A. Up to 20 points for <i>argument</i>. Good arguments are clear, concise, lead from point to point, and give cogent reasons for a conclusion.</p> <p>C. Up to 20 points for establishing and articulating the <i>context</i> of the discussion.</p> <p>I. Up to 20 points for demonstrated <i>insightful</i> and thoughtful approach to the issue.</p> <p>R. Up to 20 points for <i>responding</i> relevantly and accurately to assigned readings, and other resource material.</p> <p>G. Up to 20 points for grammatical clarity, including paragraph structure. Grammatical errors and poor paragraph structure make papers difficult to understand.</p>
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Overall Course Grade Calculation:

I will assign grades on a +/- scale, as follows (percentages are always rounded up): A=91% or more; A-=90%; B+=89%; B=81-88%; B-=80%; etc.

Some general rules:

1. *Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated!* Cheating or plagiarizing in the fulfillment of an assignment will result in no credit whatsoever for that assignment. I will also, at my discretion, report your act of academic dishonesty to appropriate university officials.
2. *Late assignments* will be subject to penalty, 2 points per day for the first week, 4 points per day thereafter.
3. *Courtesy* is expected. Avoid interrupting fellow classmates; listen carefully to their arguments and respond thoughtfully. However please do feel free to make your own arguments in turn. I try to keep class informal and discussion open, but talking out of turn or dominating discussion, or making irrelevant comments, is not permissible.
4. *Tardiness* to class is strongly discouraged.
5. *Missing classes* is also discouraged. If you must miss a class, kindly contact me beforehand. At my discretion, I may excuse you when an absence is unavoidable and legitimate. In any event, it would be helpful to know if there were any announcements made in class (these will also usually be posted on my web page).
6. *Electronic communication* is not acceptable during class. This means no cell phones, text-messaging, emailing, etc. Accessing course materials on Blackboard is acceptable.
7. *Audio- or video-recording class sessions* is prohibited without permission of the instructor.
8. *Beverages* are acceptable in class (in case you were wondering). Please avoid eating in class; popcorn is expressly forbidden.

Student rights, responsibilities, and expectations

You have the right:

- to have and to express your own opinions on issues discussed in class
- to your own interpretation of texts
- to ask questions
- to think critically
- to fair evaluation of your performance in the course, according to the grading criteria specified

You have the responsibility:

- to give a rational account for your opinions
- to read and be prepared to discuss assigned texts and course issues
- to seek answers to questions
- to be reflective (that is, to be self-critical)
- to stay up-to-date on assignments, their due dates, and material missed due to absences
- to fulfill assignments as specified (and to ask questions if you do not understand the assignments)

You are expected:

- to be honest regarding your opinions and reasoning
- to come to understand the assigned texts
- to enter into the search for answers to questions (i.e., to take part in discussions)
- to be critically rigorous (i.e., to subject opinions, interpretations, and answers to rational scrutiny, regardless of whose opinions, interpretations, and answers they are)
- to engage in class discussion in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue

Course Outline

Activities/Theories/Themes	Part One: Everyday Life in the Information Age - Information, Being Informed, Being In-formed
Orientation Disorientation Phenomenology Aporia Nooz Media Whoop!	Dates (approximate): January 31-February 31 (Disorientation starts now!) Texts include Plato, Schutz, Borges What is information? What is knowledge? What distinguishes them from one another? What gives information its value? Is American electoral politics <i>really</i> all about hair?
	Part Two: Information, Culture and Interpretation - Critical Social Theory, Postmodernism
Post-structuralism Post-modernism Hyperreality Media saturation Advertising Efficiency Paralogy	Dates (approximate): March 1-April 10 Texts include Poster, Baudrillard Is there a postindustrial society? If there is, what does it mean and what are its implications? What is the relationship between information and advertising, television, databases, and computers in general? Are we, in fact, doomed? Given that we are doomed, what can we do about it?
	Part Three: The Global Informational Society - Praxis
Cross-cultural sociology Analyzing trends Terrorism Environmentalism Fundamentalism Ism-ism-ism	Dates (approximate): April 10-April 52 Texts include Castells and possibly others What structural changes in society have been wrought by the so-called informational economy? What do these systemic, systematic changes mean for us in our lived experience?

Important Dates

Spring break: March 21-15
Final Project due date: May 9

Note: All provisions of this syllabus are subject to revision, including this sentence. Any major changes will be announced in class, in advance. Minor schedule changes may occur with little or no advance notice.

Troubled? Confused? Lost your syllabus/luggage/place in line/mind? Want to slap that dork Mark Poster?

Please, don't hesitate to get in touch with me to discuss anything about the course, or about anything else, especially anything that is getting in the way of your success and your learning. I hope that at least some of the course material and themes are very demanding, intellectually and otherwise. The demands are only worthwhile if you have the opportunity and resources to face them, however, and I want to do anything I can to provide what you need to have both opportunity and resources.