

## **COMM 635: The Political Economy of Information**

**Fall 2006**

**Thursday 2:00-5:00pm, Annenberg Center**

This is the syllabus as of August 24, 2006. For latest updates, check the online version at <http://www.socialtext.net/comm635/> email [fbar@usc.edu](mailto:fbar@usc.edu) for access)

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**Office hours: by appointment**

### **Course Description:**

Like earlier communication revolutions, the on-going digital transformation represents a joint and radical transformation of (1) how information is created and exchanged and (2) information-based socio-economic processes. Such revolutions are moments when critical choices are made about the architecture of information systems, that define how they are built and used, by whom and for what purpose. This advanced graduate seminar offers an opportunity to explore the political and economic forces that shape these choices, as well as the implications for political economies that rely on the resulting information networks.

This seminar aims to foster student research on the political economy of information, based on critical thinking about past and current policy debates surrounding the deployment of information systems. Each participant will choose a research topic, in consultation with the instructor, which will be the focus of their class presentation and of the research paper they will produce in the class. The seminar's success requires a shared grounding in the basic issues at hand. Readings assigned during the first part of the course aim to build that basis. The seminar also requires active engagement by all participants in this joint exploration, and the ability of each to engage the group's interest in their chosen topic.

### **Course Requirements:**

Readings: Four books are required reading for the course:

- Gerald Brock, *The Second Information Revolution* (2003) ([0674011783](#))
- Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media* (2004) ([0465081932](#))
- Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks* (2006)
- BRIE/Brookings, *Tracking a Transformation* (2001) ([0815700679](#))

These books can be purchased from the USC Bookstore (or, probably cheaper, from on-line stores accessible by clicking on the ISBN numbers)

Benkler's *Wealth of Networks* is also available on-line as html/PDF/Wiki:

[http://www.benkler.org/wealth\\_of\\_networks](http://www.benkler.org/wealth_of_networks)

BRIE/Brookings (2001) is available on-line in the USC e-brary:

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/uscisd/Doc?id=10026245>

Additional Readings will be made available on-line.

In addition, participants will assemble a collection of readings on their chosen research topic, to be distributed in advance of their presentation.

### Assignments:

Students will make two presentations:

- initial presentation framing their research projects (identify the project, establish its relevance, describe theories and methods to be used)
- full presentation of their research paper draft (participants will then have an opportunity to revise their research paper before handing in the final version at the end of the semester)

### Grading:

First presentation	10%
Second presentation	20%
Research paper	50%
Participation	20%

### **Academic Integrity:**

The University is committed to maintaining the highest standards of ethical conduct in all academic pursuits. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers, or other assignments, will receive a failing grade in the course and may be suspended or expelled from the university. For more information, see the [USC Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards web site](#), in particular the statement on [Graduate Academic Integrity](#). The complete university rules are available in [SCAMPUS: University Governance](#) (see in particular [section 11](#))

### **Students with Disabilities and Academic Accommodations:**

Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to Professor Bar as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday, 8:30-5:00. The office is in Student Union 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776. For additional information, see the Web page of the Disabilities Services Program at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/asn/DSP>

### **Tentative Course outline:**

**Week 1 (24-Aug) Introduction**

**Week 2 (31-Aug) Special Presentation by John Hagel and John Seely Brown**

This week only, the class meets in the Annenberg School (NOT the Annenberg Center), ASC240

- Hagel and Seely Brown, “Creation Nets: Harnessing the Potential of Open Innovation”
- BRIE-IGCC, Ch 1: Bradford DeLong, “How New Is Today’s Economy?” also available at [http://econ161.berkeley.edu/Comments/How\\_New.html](http://econ161.berkeley.edu/Comments/How_New.html)

**Week 3 (7-Sep) Setting the stage: "what information economy?"**

- Bradford DeLong and Lawrence Summers, "[The New Economy: Background, Questions, Speculations](#)," in Economic Policies for the Information Age (Kansas City: Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, forthcoming).
- James Boyle, The Second Enclosure Movement and the Construction of the Public Domain, available at <http://www.law.duke.edu/pd/papers/boyle.pdf>
- Yochai Benkler, [Freedom in the Commons, Towards a Political Economy of Information](#), 52 Duke L.J. 1245 (2003)
- Brock, Ch 1.

**Week 4 (14-Sep) Telegraph and telephone**

- Starr, Intro, part I (skim), part II
- Brock Chs 1,2

**Week 5 (21-Sep) Television / Radio**

- Starr, part III

**Week 6 (28-Sep) Telecom transformation and the Internet**

- Brock, Chs 3-12, 14-16
- BRIE-IGCC, Part III
- Kahn, Robert and Vinton Cerf. "What Is the Internet (And What Makes It Work)." December 1999 (revised May 2004). pp. 17-39 of Marc Cooper, ed. [Open Architecture as Communication Policy](#) (Center for Internet and Society, Stanford Law School, 2004)

**Week 7 (5-Oct) Wireless spectrum**

- Brock, Ch 13
- Economist Special Report, "[On the same wavelength](#)", (August 12, 2004)
- Benkler, Yochai, [Some Economics of Wireless Communications](#), Harvard Journal of Law & Technology (Winter 2002-03)
- *Thomas W. Hazlett*, [The Wireless Craze, The Unlimited Bandwidth Myth, The Spectrum Auction Faux Pas, and the Punchline to Ronald Coase's "Big Joke": An Essay on Airwave Allocation Policy](#). (AEI-Brookings Joint Center for Regulatory Studies Working Paper 01-02. January 2001)

**Week 8 (12-Oct) Economic transformation: Structural change in the information sector**

- Bar, François, and Christian Sandvig, "[Rules from Truth: Post-Convergence Policy for Access](#)", paper presented at the *28th Annual Telecommunications Policy Research Conference*, Arlington VA, Sept 23-25, 2000.

**Week 9 (19-Oct) Economic transformation: Users**

- BRIE-IGCC Ch 2., selection TBD of 3-14
- Bar, François, John Richards, and Christian Sandvig, "[The Jeffersonian Syndrome: the Predictable Misperception of the Internet's boon to Commerce, Politics, and Community](#)" (Draft)

**Week 10 (26-Oct) initial presentations**

**Week 11-13 (2-Nov, 9-Nov & 16-Nov) final presentations**

(23-Nov) Thanksgiving - no class

**Week 14 (30-Nov) conclusion / wrap-up**