

**INLS 490.151 Computer Mediated Communication**  
Fall 2008

**Instructor**

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**Meeting Place and Time**

Monday, 6:00PM – 8:30PM, Manning Hall 307

**Office Hours**

Tuesday, 1:00PM – 2:00PM, SILS Library  
Other times by appointment

**Course Website**

[http://ibiblio.org/fred/inls\\_490/](http://ibiblio.org/fred/inls_490/)  
Authentication credentials: Username: inls490, Password: inls490

**Course Network**

The class network is located at <http://inls490.ning.com>. To access the network, create a Ning account and request to join. The network is private and for class members only.

**Course Description**

The Internet is a place of communication, interaction and relational management. From Ray Tomlinson's first email in 1971, to the iChats, Wall Posts and Twitters of today, we have consistently turned to this vast network to find one another for communication and collaboration. This course is an exploration of the tools and practices of technologically mediated relationships; that is, *why and how* do we use network tools to start, build and sustain interpersonal relationships.

The use of technology as a relational intermediary is as old as technology itself. From the earliest inscribed works to the electrified telegraph, technology has played a role in allowing us to discover, remember and communicate with others. Technology provides us the goods, means and rationale for exchange, and it allows us to imagine the communities we inhabit. Arguably, the Internet is the most profound relational technology, but technology and social process have long been intertwined.

Utilizing interdisciplinary perspectives, we will explore the role networked communications tools play in the relational process. The course will be structured around four thematic areas. They are: Historical Perspectives, Theoretical Concepts, Internet Relationships and Group Dynamics. The first area, historical perspectives, will contextualize our analysis through the exploration of early communication tools and practice. This area will be followed by theoretical concepts, which explores theorization of computer-mediated communication. We will then explore Internet relationships; how we're using modern technology to mediate our personal relationships. The course will conclude with an analysis of how the Internet enables "ridiculously easy group formation," in the words of Clay Shirky.

Students who successfully complete this course will develop critical perspectives on networked communication and relational management, better preparing them to develop tools of participation, social support and group collaboration.

### **Reading**

There is no required textbook for this course. Readings are organized by week in the syllabus, and are available online via the course website. In addition to the syllabus readings, each week you will be required to complete a “prompt” reading, which will be a topical story from the popular or technology press.

### **Format**

This class will employ a mixture of lecture and seminar formats, with a focus on participation and discussion. The first part of class will feature news and notes, student presentations, media exploration and discussion assignments. The second part of class will feature a directed lecture and continued discussion of the material.

### **Expectations**

First and foremost, participation and active discussion are essential to the success of this class. To this extent, I expect you to come to every class, ready to think critically about the issues presented. Be bold, be imaginative, find ways to relate what we’re studying to your life, don’t be afraid to take and *defend* your opinions. It is likely that these technologies will continue to impact your social, professional and academic life for quite some time – so come ready to explore, share and question.

In addition to active participation in class, there are a number of assignments you will be expected to complete this semester. First, you will be expected to contribute a question, observation or enhancement to our online forum each week. Second, you will be expected to produce a topical issues presentation once this semester, as well as act as a discussion facilitator on your presentation day. Third, you will be required to complete and turn in four short assignments. Finally, you will be asked to complete a term project; as part of this term project you will be expected to submit a proposal, outline and bibliography. Further instructions on your assignments follow.

### **Assignment: Class Questions, Observation or Enhancement**

By **noon** on the Monday of each week, you will be expected to pose a question, observation or enhancement to our online discussion board, located in our class social network. This Q, O, or E should arise from our reading (either syllabus or topical), and generally be one or two paragraphs long (if you’re especially inspired, feel free to go longer). Why not just a question? I’d like for the fora to be conversational, so if someone asks a question that you can build on, or draw on your personal experience to enhance, feel free.

Each week, I will start a new thread (the thread name will correspond to the upcoming week), and I ask that you try to keep your discussions inside the thread if possible. However, feel free to contribute links, photos, videos and wall postings to our group, have fun with it.

**Assignment: Presentation and Discussion Facilitation**

You will be expected to present class material and facilitate the discussion once during the semester. Your presentations should outline the general themes in the reading, and bring in your personal perspectives and analysis. Therefore, simply bullet-pointing the reading is insufficient – your presentation should apply the reading to your experience, interests or career goals. Presentations should be no more than 20 minutes in length, and you may use Powerpoint. I encourage you to be creative and find interesting or novel connections between your topical presentation and the class material.

On the day you deliver your topical issues presentation, you will also be expected to be a facilitator of discussion in the second half of the class. Prepare a few questions about the material to get the discussion rolling, but again feel free to be creative in your facilitation.

**Assignment: Analyzing a Relational Technology**

In this assignment, choose a pre-Web 2.0 technology and explore its history and use in relational processes. You should use both academic and popular literature, exploring how the technology was invented (its original purpose), how discourse around its use was framed and re-framed over time, and how the technology was used in interesting ways (how it was hacked or repurposed). In addition, you should explore its legacy impacts (how does this technology continue to live in our use of modern technology) and generative effects of the innovation. You may turn this in as a webpage, a 3-5 minute video, a 3-5 page paper, or in another form with my approval. Please include sources and attribution.

**Assignment: Your Use of Relational Technology**

In this assignment, you should reflect on your use of technology in the creation and maintenance of personal relationships. To complete this assignment, choose a few of your personal relationships and keep a log of how you maintain these relationships. Do you use your cell phone, email and Facebook? Or Skype and Twitter? Once you've completed the log, reflect on the following: 1) The tools/sites you use for relational management. 2) The strategies for relational management you've developed. 3) How you overcome physical distance with these technologies. 4) How technology has affected the relationships. I encourage you to use this as an opportunity to think critically about the tools you've adopted and strategies you've developed for relational management. You may turn this in as a webpage, a 3-5 minute video, a 3-5 page paper, or in another form with my approval. Please include sources and attribution.

**Assignment: Digital Traces**

In this assignment, you will explore your online identity and digital traces, thinking critically about how you are represented online. You should focus on the following aspects: 1) Your creation: the identity you've built/projected online. 2) Representation by others: how others have shaped your online identity. 3) Your traces: other information, such as search logs or analytics, that construct a machine-representation of your identity. You should then look forward and discuss emergent strategies for identity management – be they changes to the law or societal norms, new technologies, or modifications to current practice. You may turn this in as a webpage, a 3-5 minute video, a 3-5 page paper, or in another form with my approval. Please include sources and attribution.

**Assignment: Community Analysis**

In this assignment, select an online community you frequent or are interested in (sorry, Facebook is excluded) and explore relational aspects of this community. Your work should include an overview of the community and its users, what motivates and drives use of the community, processes of socialization and community building, and how the community provides support for its participants. For this assignment, community is widely defined – you may explore an explicit virtual community such as the WELL, or you may look at something like Flickr or an illness-support community. You may turn this in as a webpage, a 3-5 minute video, a 3-5 page paper, or in another form with my approval. Please include sources and attribution.

### **Assignment: Term Project**

The term project will be a substantive original piece of research, literature or a topical project in the area (research proposals acceptable as well). I encourage you to develop a project that is relevant to your area of interest; to this extent I am quite flexible in the types of projects I'll approve. The final project should be professional, written in academic tone and style, and *should not include any typographic errors*. Suggested word count is 2,500-3,000. The instructor is flexible in terms of fitting the project to the student's discipline or interests. I would strongly suggest that you talk to me early and often about your project; if you keep me in the loop, I'm happy to provide feedback and guidance.

Prior to approval of the final project, you are required to turn in a proposal/outline. The proposal/outline should contain a 1-page project proposal, and a 1-page outline of the project's structure. You will be asked to deliver a short description of your project concept to the class twice during the semester.

Project presentations will occur on the last day of class, December 1. On this day you will be expected to deliver a 5-7 minute presentation or demonstration of your term project. Term project writeups will be due at 5PM on Monday, December 8.

### **Rules and Guidelines**

All assignments should be submitted **via email by noon** on the day they are due. This will allow me to read and integrate the assignments into our class, as our meeting time is at a premium. Due to the fact our class meets once a week, attendance and participation is mandatory and critical. Students who miss an unacceptable amount of class will be counseled to withdraw. I reserve the right to modify or amend this syllabus.

### **Grading Policy**

Participation and Attendance: 10%  
Presentation and Discussion Facilitation: 15%  
Weekly Questions, Comments or Enhancements: 10%  
Analyzing a Relational Technology: 10%  
Community Analysis: 10%  
Your Use of Relational Technology: 10%  
Digital Traces: 10%  
Term Project: 25%

### **Grading Scale**

High Pass: 95% - 100%  
Pass Plus: 90% - 94%  
Pass: 85% - 89%  
Pass Minus: 80% - 84%  
Low Pass: 70% - 79%  
Fail: 0% - 69%

### **Statement on Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to conform to the Honor Code in all academic manners. For more information about the Honor Code, please visit the following URL:  
<http://honor.unc.edu/honor/index.html>.

## Course Schedule

### 8/25 – Introduction and Course Overview

Introductions, expectations and discussion of the syllabus.

### 9/1 – No Class Meeting, Labor Day Holiday

Please read the following by 9/1.

- Bargh, J. A. and McKenna, K. Y. A. (2004). The Internet and Social Life. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55(1), 573-590.

### 9/8 – The Technologies of Friendship

Surveying and situating the technologies of friendship.

- DiMaggio, P., Hargittai, E., Neuman, W. R., and Robinson, J. P. (2001). Social Implications of the Internet. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27(1), 307-336.
- Ling, R. (2000). Direct and mediated interaction in the maintenance of social relationships. In Sloane, A. and Rijn, F. (Eds.), *Home informatics and telematics: Information, technology and society* (pp. 61-86). Boston: Kluwer.

### 9/15 – Historical Perspectives, Early Technologies

Introducing historical analysis of relational technologies.

- Standage, T. (1998). *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's Online Pioneers*. New York, NY: Berkley Trade.
- Fischer, C. S. (1992). *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

### 9/22 – Historical Perspectives, Internet Technologies

Analyzing relational mediation in the Internet Age.

*Assignment due: Analyzing a Relational Technology*

- Herring, S. C. (2002). Computer-mediated communication on the Internet. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, 36(1), 109-132.
- Barley, S. R. (1998). What can we learn from the history of technology? *Journal of Engineering and Technology Management*, 15(4), 237--255.

### 9/29 – Theories of Internet Communication

Exploring Computer-Mediated-Communication.

- Herring, S. C. (2002). Computer-mediated communication on the Internet. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, 36(1), 132-168.
- Thurlow, C., Lengel, L., and Tomic, A. (Eds.), *Computer Mediated Communication: Social Interaction and the Internet* (pp. 45-57). London: SAGE Publications.

### 10/6 – Relationships on the Internet

How we manage and form relationships in mediated space.

*Assignment due: Your use of Relational Technology*

- Parks, M. R. and Floyd, K. (1996). Making Friends in Cyberspace. *Journal of Communication*, 46(1), 80-97.
- Cummings, J. N., Butler, B., and Kraut, R. (2002). The quality of online social relationships. *Communications of the ACM*, 45(7), 103-108.

- Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., and Lampe, C. (2007). The Benefits of Facebook "Friends:" Social Capital and College Students' Use of Online Social Network Sites. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communications*, 12(4). <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue4/ellison.html>

### **10/13 – Transitions and Information Needs**

Exploring relational management and information needs from the transitions perspective.

- Shklovski, I., Kraut, R., and Cummings, J. (2006). Routine patterns of Internet use and psychological well-being: coping with a residential move. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on Human Factors in computing systems, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.
- Quan-Haase, A. (2007). University Students' Local And Distant Social Ties: Using and integrating modes of communication on campus. *Information, Communication & Society*, 10(5), 671 – 693.

### **10/20 – Networks, Personal and Portable**

Exploring the role of hyperconnectivity in social life.

*Assignment due: Project Proposal/Outline*

- Wellman, B. (2001). Physical Place and Cyberplace: The Rise of Personalized Networking. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 25(2), 227-252.

### **10/27 – No Class Meeting, ASIST Conference**

Please read the following by 10/27.

- Solove, D. J. (2007). *The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor and Privacy on the Internet*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

### **11/3 – Traces**

Exploring the identities created in relational technologies.

*Assignment due: Digital Traces*

- Solove, D. J. (2007). *The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor and Privacy on the Internet*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Dourish, P. and Anderson, K. (2006). Collective Information Practice: Exploring Privacy and Security as Social and Cultural Phenomena. *Human-Computer Interaction*, 21(3), 319--342.

### **11/10 – Groups and Technologies of Mediation**

Group dynamics in the age of communication.

- Shirky, C. (2008). *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. New York, NY: Penguin Press
- Haythornthwaite, C. and Hagar, C. (2005). The social worlds of the Web. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, 39(1), 311-346.

### **11/17 – Community and Communication**

Analyzing mediated community.

*Assignment due: Community Analysis*

- Ellis, D., Oldridge, R., and Vasconcelos, A. (2004). Community and virtual community. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, 38(1), 145-186.
- Boyd, D. (2006). Friends, Friendsters and Top 8: Writing community into being in social network sites. *First Monday*, 11(12). [http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue11\\_12/boyd/index.html](http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue11_12/boyd/index.html)

**11/24 – Organization, Collective Action and Engagement**

Imagining some next steps for mediated relationships.

- Rheingold, H. (2002). *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*. Basic Books.
- Rasielj, A. et. al. (2008). *Rebooting America: Ideas for Redesigning American Democracy for the Internet Age*. Personal Democracy Press.

**12/1 – Project Presentations**

Final projects must be submitted electronically by 5PM on Monday, December 8.