

Digital Rhetoric and Contemporary Politics

ATEC 4372

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TR 10:00-11:15 ATEC 1.104

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<http://profoundheterogeneity.com/ATEC4372>

Office Number: 1.502

Office Hours: T 12:00-1:00, R 9:15-10:00

Course Description:

Mass media plays a crucial role in politics and, more specifically, in how we elect our presidents. In the latest election cycles, citizen-generated media has played an increasingly important role. Digital networked communication has undeniably shifted not only the form but the content of political messages. Against the backdrop of the 2008 presidential election cycles, we will analyze the role that “New Media” has on contemporary politics. However, we will not only analyze this contemporary political rhetoric but produce it as well, seeking to insert the class in the larger national political discussion. Students will be required to produce various media formats (text, video, audio) which engage with contemporary politics.

Required Texts:

The following are available at the Off-Campus Books.

Democracy and New Media, ed. Jenkins and Thorburn

Smart Mobs, Howard Rhiengold

We the Media, Dan Gillmor

In addition there will be texts available online or via eReserve, which you will need to print out and bring to class.

Course Website:

The course website for this class can be found at <<http://profoundheterogeneity.com/ATEC4372>>. You should get in the habit of checking this regularly as I will post suggestions and thoughts about the readings here, as well as links to other things that might interest the class. The syllabus can be found here as well, and any changes to the syllabus will be posted here. If you forget the web address you can always find it from <<http://www.outsidethetext.com>>, an easier url to remember.

A Note on Politics:

Obviously a course which is centered around politics, and election politics no less, will have a range of opinions and views. *To be clear your grade will not be determined by your political opinions, or viewpoints, but rather on your ability to use the digital sphere to convey those viewpoints.* Students should feel free to blog from the left, from the right, from the middle, from nowhere on the left/right spectrum. Effective participation is far more important than the specific angle of said participation. That having been said I do expect all the participants in the class to respect their peers, even as they express disagreement.

Course Requirements:

Primarily I intend this course to be a “project” based course. That is, much of our focus will be in participating in the political rhetoric of this presidential election cycle. Already we have seen the internet have a profound effect on the primaries, and I suspect this trend will only continue to the general election. So, our primary goal is going to be to insert ourselves into this discourse, to participate in the political, to see what “works,” what gets attention, and to see what is less effective. Expect to do a great deal of “writing” for this class, but not in the traditional sense. Rather you will will blog, comment on blogs, produce video clips etc.

Attendance and Participation (30%): This is a crucial part of class. Students are expected to come to class on time, prepared, having completed the assigned reading and writing, and ready to contribute their thoughts to class discussions, to listen seriously and respectfully to the thoughts of others, and to participate in all in-class group work and writing activities. I strongly urge you to attend every class, as most of the work done in class is necessary for successful completion of the course. Only three absences are permitted, and these should be used for illness or emergencies (i.e. this does not mean three absences plus absences for illness etc.). Missing more than three classes will affect your grade. More than five absences will result in failing the course. If you need to miss class for religious reasons, please speak to me ahead of time. Absences for religious purposes do not count against the permitted number (as long as prior notification is given). Lateness is also unacceptable; if you arrive late to class you will be marked as absent.

Blogging (40%): As indicated above this is the focus of the class. All students will be required to produce content for the political “blogsphere.” This will require writing several posts every week, and at times posting daily.

Political Events (15%): There are six “national” events leading up to the election on November 4th, four debates and two conventions. You will be required to “participate” in some of these (your choice) for the class. This will include watching the events and “liveblogging.”

Final Project (15%): For the final you will need to write a short paper 1,160-1,740 words (4-6 pages), reflecting on what you have learned about the semesters experience. This will not require outside research, instead the “research” will be the work you have already done throughout the class.

Grading: As per the undergraduate catalog students will be graded on a range of A-F.

A Note on Technology:

Because at its core this class is about how technology changes our culture, we will necessarily engage with a range of computer tools and web based applications. You do not need any prior skill, however, merely a willingness to engage and learn. I am more than willing to take extra time; all you need to do is ask.

A majority of the tools we will be using in class are web-based, thus you will not need any special software. You do however need an up-to-date version of Firefox (a free web browser)

as well as current versions of various plugins (for example flash, and a video player). Don't worry though, we will cover this in class. You should have an email address that you check regularly for this class.

One further note about technology. As much as technology makes life easier, at times it can also be difficult (computer crashes, deleted work, unavailable internet connections, etc). Plan accordingly: "the computer ate my homework" or "the internet was down" are not reasons to forgo doing the assigned work. It is in your best interest to leave extra time, especially at first, to ensure that technology does not get in the way of your class work.

Two Notes on the Class Schedule:

First this class is "front loaded," by this I mean I will be asking extra work of you leading up to the election on November 4th. But, in return the class will be less demanding after the election, after all the focus of this class is the election. Second, you will notice that the class schedule only covers the first few weeks this is for two reasons: 1) We will need to remain flexible to respond to the political climate. 2) I expect students to help drive the direction and content of this course, while I have broad ideas in mind (the books on the reading list) the specific way we approach these issues will be developed by those in the course.

How to Reach Me:

The best way to reach me though is by email <dparry@utdallas.edu> or you can find me online at <<http://www.outsidethetext.com>>. I check email frequently throughout the day. If you email me and do not receive a response within 48 hours (usually I will get back to you within a day), please feel free to email me again (I might not have received your first one) and give me a reminder. I promise not to consider this harassing.

My office hours are Tuesday 12:00-1:00, Thursday 9:00-10:00, or by appointment . My office is ATEC 1.502.

A Final Note:

Should any aspect of class confuse/concern/trouble you, or if you have questions about any of this, please see me.

Digital Rhetoric and Contemporary Politics (Initial Schedule)

Week One

August 21

Intro to Class-Set Up Blogs

Week Two

August 26

Tools: Getting Hyperconnected

August 28

Video Tools

Week Three

September 2

We The Media, Introduction & Chapter 1

September 4

Democracy and New Media, Introduction

Week Four

September 9

Democracy and New Media, Chapter 3, "Which Technology and Which Democracy,"
Benjamin Barber

September 11

TBA

Week Five-Sixteen: TBA

Final Papers Due December 4th

Guest Speakers

September 11

Henry Seltzer (Senior Editor *USMagazine.com*, formerly deputy blog editor of *Huffington Post*)

September 30

Carlo Scanella, *Get FISA Right*, and *Obama Let Down Watch*

Other Important Dates

August 25th-28th

Democratic National Convention

September 1st-4th

Republican National Convention

September 26th

Presidential Debate

October 2nd

VP Debate

October 7th

Presidential Debate

October 15th

Presidential Debate

November 4th
General Election