Comm 111S: Digital Media and the Political Process
Summer Quarter, 2009
Lectures: T/Th 11-12:30pm, 60-120

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Course Goals
Political campaigns used Facebook, YouTube, text messages, blogs, candidate Web-sites, and e-mail to an unprecedented extent during the 2007-2008 presidential primaries and general election. For many, these technologies are bringing about a radical change in the political process as ordinary citizens are increasingly participating and making their voices heard. Academics and pundits alike argue that in this bold new world networks of on-line citizens are carving out oppositional spaces for political communication, engaging in new forms of collective action, and challenging professional media and political organizations. All of which, they argue, is helping to bring about a leveled, participatory democracy, one where social networks on Facebook and video questions on YouTube are supplanting the gatekeepers of the past.

This course provides a broad overview of influential theoretical perspectives from communication, political science, legal studies, sociology, and organizational analysis with an eye towards exploring these claims. With an emphasis on electoral campaigns, the primary site of technological innovation in politics, this course poses questions like: are digital media altering the balance of political power in American democracy? Do digital networks fundamentally reshape the way that we elect presidents and contest public issues? Is the Internet undermining the ability of journalists and political elites to set the public agenda? To suggest answers to questions like these, we will turn to a number of core theoretical and empirical readings in a range of fields. To ground our discussion, we consider models of democracy. We will then turn to theories of on-line, peer-to-peer collaboration and arguments for why this may be bringing about a qualitatively different networked public sphere for citizens to debate issues. We will encounter theories of how formal political organizations and media outlets are responding to drastically falling information costs. We will explore the literature on networked media and social movements, investigating the potential for new forms of collective action on-line. Throughout, we will address a body of work that argues that new media are not democratizing at all, but extending the power of those already most influential in politics. At the end of this course, students will be familiar with major perspectives on digital media and the political process and equipped with the resources to ask critical questions about their own involvement in public affairs.
Readings

Required readings are available on reserve at Green Library, on-line, and you should buy:


Assignments

Response Papers: You will write two ‘response’ papers of 3 double-spaced pages (1-inch margins) to an assigned statement. The purpose is to encourage you to think critically about the readings, draw connections between them, and develop your position in relation to a critical issue for digital media and politics. For example, you may be asked to respond to the statement: “Digital media changes who participates in setting the public agenda.” Your task is to critically evaluate the assumptions of the statement and develop your own point of view. Your writing needs to be well-supported and demonstrate knowledge of the readings as well as evaluate opposing points of view. The grade you receive will not be based on the position you adopt but the rigor with which you argue it.

First Response Paper Due: July 14th

Second Response Paper Due: August 4th

Final Paper: You will be asked to analyze one of several provided ‘sites’ for digital media and politics. Sites may include: a campaign Website, a Facebook cause, advocacy e-mails, CitizenTube, or non-governmental online efforts like the projects of the Sunlight Foundation. This assignment is intended to help you critically engage, as a work of original research, with a contemporary digital media object as a site for contemporary politics. Your essay will be approximately 8-10 pages. These essays will be graded based on your original analysis of the media object through engagement with the content of the course. The research questions you ask should be guided by your reading, and your essay should consider opposing theories or points of view. The best essays will offer a sustained focus on particular critical issues discussed during the quarter and students may ask a number of questions of their object, including what forms of participation does the site afford? What purpose does it serve and for whom? What types of organization is it premised upon? What is not visible about the site?

Due Date: TBA (Exam Week)

Expectations

Participation: While this is a lecture course, class meetings are highly participatory. All of us engage with digital media everyday, and on the heels of the longest and one of the closest watched electoral contests in history we all have first-hand experience with on-line politics. To that end, you need to come to class having done the readings and
prepared to engage in class discussion. Contributions include questions, thoughts, or responses to your peers. Critical readings of the literature encountered in the course are especially valued, as they are considered reflections on your own engagement with digital media and politics. In addition, I may call upon you to discuss in-progress or completed response or final papers at any point in order to facilitate class discussion and improve writing on the assignments.

Writing: Class assignments need to be on time and polished. Late papers and those with spelling, factual, and grammatical errors will be penalized. The Honor Code applies to all work.

**Grades**

Participation = 15%

First Response Paper = 25%

Second Response Paper = 25%

Final Paper = 35%

**Course Schedule**

**Tuesday, June 23: Introduction: Analyzing Digital Media and Politics**

No Readings

**Thursday, June 25: Models of Democracy**

Andrew Chadwick, *Internet Politics*, pp. 83-113

*Recommended Readings:*


Tuesday June 30: Technology and Society

Andrew Chadwick, *Internet Politics*, pp. 1-37


**Recommended Readings:**


Thursday, July 2: Technology and Society (continued)


**Recommended Readings:**


Tuesday, July 7: Collective Action, Peer Production, and Networked Publics

Andrew Chadwick, Internet Politics, pp. 114-143


Recommended Reading:


Thursday, July 9: The Internet and the Public Sphere


Digital Media and the Political Process

Recommended Readings:


Tuesday, July 14: Networked Civil Society

FIRST RESPONSE PAPER DUE AT START OF CLASS


Recommended Reading:


Thursday, July 16: Mediated Electoral Politics

Andrew Chadwick, *Internet Politics*, pp. 144-176

Read chapter overviews, vignettes, practices, techniques, and tensions and look at the Webscapes of Kirsten Foot and Steven Schneider, *Web Campaigning Digital Supplement*. Available online at: http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/0262062585/WebCampaigningDigitalSupplement.html#

Recommended Reading:


Tuesday, July 21: Theoretical Perspectives on the 2003-2004 Campaign


Recommended Reading:

Digital Media and the Political Process


Thursday, July 23: New Media, Privacy, and Associational Politics

Andrew Chadwick, Internet Politics, pp. 257-288.


Recommended Reading:


Digital Media and the Political Process


Tuesday, July 28: Perspectives on 2007-2008

Guest Lecture: Will Bunnett, Senior Email Writer and Producer, Obama for America, Organizing for America


Thursday, July 30: New Media and New Political Elites?


*Recommended Reading:*


**Tuesday, August 4: New Media Politics and Political Economy**  
**SECOND RESPONSE PAPER DUE**

Andrew Chadwick, *Internet Politics*, pp. 289-316.


*Recommended Reading:*


Henry Jenkins. 2009, April 8. Critical information studies for a participatory culture (Part One). *Confections of an Aca/Fan*. Available online at: [http://www.diigo.com/annotated/0f44ea2a03ae1f3ad411aa21f7a3f74e](http://www.diigo.com/annotated/0f44ea2a03ae1f3ad411aa21f7a3f74e)


**Thursday, August 6: Digital Representation and Governance**

Andrew Chadwick, *Internet Politics*, pp. 177-203


*Recommended Reading:*


**Tuesday, August 11th: Political Communication and the Search Engine**

*Guest Lecture: Laura Granka, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Communication, Stanford University; User Experience Researcher, Google, Inc.*


*Recommended Reading:*

Thursday, August 13th: The Limits of Networked Production?


Recommended Reading:

