THE INTERNET & DEMOCRACY

Fall Semester 2012
W 4.00 – 7.00 pm
CMA 4.308
Graduate Course

Homero Gil de Zúñiga, PhD.
Office: BMC 3.376
Office Ph #: 512-471-6323
hgz@austin.utexas.edu
Off. Hours: Any time by appointment

Course description

This seminar will focus on the intersection between the Internet and civic and political life. Based on diverse mass communication theories we will examine the implications of new media use for democratic functioning at both political and civic participatory levels. We will pay particular attention to the empirical observations of emerging technologies and their effects in the USA, while trying to place these observations in the broader theoretical themes of social integration and democratic governance. Accordingly, the course will focus on the complex interrelationships between the various uses of the Internet by democratic citizens and the wellbeing of our communities, our politics and our society.

Course requirements

(1) Final Paper 50%
(2) Response papers 15%
(3) Role as class discussant 10%
(4) Participation 25%
Final Paper:

This is the main requirement for this class. The paper must be original and the topic will be discussed during the course of the seminar. The paper should grow out of one of the topical areas covered in the course and contain the following sections: (1) brief introduction; (2) literature review; (3) statement of hypothesis or research model; (4) methodology; (5) results; (6) concluding discussion. The goal of the paper is to contribute to research in the area of Internet and politics, new media effects, and/or technology, digital media and politics. If possible, the paper should present findings based on the collection of original data or existing data sets. Whether or not you present data, your work should reflect an empirical orientation that relies on qualitative, quantitative or network analytic techniques. Some of you may wish to extend projects you have developed elsewhere or to refine ideas toward completion of Master’s or Doctoral theses; please consult with me if this is the case. Students with a professional orientation can present a project instead of a research paper; the scope of the project should be discussed with me early in the semester.

Your research paper should reflect an original extension of the ideas we have encountered in class, not a simple recapitulation of past work. You will present your paper (conference style) to the rest of the seminar participants on November 28, and December 3rd and/or 5th (if necessary). The final paper is due December 7th and should be approximately 20 – 25 pages including cover, bibliography, tables, and figures. The expectation being that this paper constitutes the draft of a conference paper. Students are encouraged to submit their papers to WAPOR (December deadline) or other appropriate conferences such ICA, AEJMC, etc. The paper accounts for 50% of your total grade.

Response papers:

You will have to write 3 response papers during the course of the semester. Think of these as a book review of approximately two single-spaced pages in length, that are due in class the day the reading is discussed. To write these “book reviews”: (1) reconstruct the structure and logic of the argument; (2) discuss what is important about the contents; (3) discuss the limitations or weaknesses of the work. You decide which 3 weeks you will write a response for, but I strongly recommend that you start early. Each response paper is worth 5% of your final grade.

Class discussant:

Every student will be required to serve as a discussant for one class sessions. As a discussant, you will be responsible for bringing questions about the reading for that week that we should discuss in class and will also have the last 20 minutes of each session to present an original reading that challenges or further develops the readings for that week. Choose to be discussant on a week that coincides with your broader interests. This work will be worth 10% of your final grade.

Seminar Participation:

The final 25% of your class grade will be based on contributions to seminar discussion. Students are expected to go beyond opinion-giving and be able to critically engage readings and explain (or explain away) their findings. At the same time, each student must contribute to a classroom environment in which ideas are debated in a respectful way. All reading materials will be made available prior to class in a Dropbox shared folder. Please come to see me if you do have a Dropbox account or need any help setting one up.
Grades in the class will be based on the following components and percentage distribution:

1. Final Paper 50%
2. Response papers 15%
3. Role as class discussant 10%
4. Participation 25%

A = 4.0; A- = 3.67; B+ = 3.33; B = 3.0; C+ = 2.33; C = 2.0; C- =1.67; D+ = 1.33; D = 1.0; D- = 0.67; F = 0.0

**Semester Schedule**

Week 1 (August 29)  Introduction, class overview, brief discussion.
Week 2 (September 5)  Political Communication as a field.
Week 3 (September 12)  Collective Action.
Week 4 (September 19)  Public Sphere.
Week 5 (September 26)  Internet Politics.
Week 6 (October 3)  Mobile Communications.
Week 7 (October 10)  Blogs and Politics.
Week 8 (October 17)  Internet Politics II.
Week 9 (October 24)  Social Media, Citizen Journalism and Politics.
Week 10 (October 31)  Deliberation.
Week 12 (November 14)  Internet & Civic Engagement.
Week 13 (November 21)  Digital Democracy.
Week 14 (November 28)  In-class Presentations.
Week 15 (December 3)  In-class Presentations.

**Readings**

All readings will be provided by the instructor. There will be a shared folder at Dropbox. Readings may also be uploaded at Blackboard. Students will have to upload suggested readings, presentations and a final paper at Dropbox.

**Week 2 - September 5 - Political Communication**


**Week 3 - September 12 - Collective Action**


Week 4 - September 19 - Public Sphere  
Discussant: Dr. Johnson


Week 5 - September 26 - Internet Politics  
Discussant: 


Week 6 - October 3 - Mobile Communications


Week 7 - October 10 - Blogs and Politics  
Discussant: 


Week 8 - October 17 - Internet Politics II

Readings by active voting in class!

Week 9 - October 24 - Social Media, Citizen Journalism and Politics  
Discussant: ____________


Week 10 - October 31 - Deliberation  
Discussant: ____________


Week 11 - November 7 - New Technologies and Mobilization  
Discussant: _________ Dr. Shah _______


Week 12 - November 14 - Internet & Civic Engagement  
Discussant: ______________


**Week 13 - November 21 - Digital Democracy**


**University Policies**

**Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty**

This class will follow University guidelines concerning scholastic misconduct and grievance procedures. Please be aware of the University’s policy on plagiarism, copyright and intellectual property. Always bear in mind the University of Texas Honor Code:

"The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the University is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community." To learn more about the creation of the Honor Code, visit: [http://www.utexas.edu/president/speeches/hc_042904.html](http://www.utexas.edu/president/speeches/hc_042904.html).

In this class, any form of academic dishonesty – including plagiarism and making up quotes, sources, or any other information – will result in an automatic grade of F. For your own sake, don't even think about it. The Institutional Rules on Student Services and Activities at the University of Texas at Austin defines plagiarism as follows "Plagiarism' includes but is not limited to, the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any other means another's work and the submission of it as one's own academic work offered for credit" [Section 11-802(d)].

In other words, don't steal other people's work and pass it off as your own.

Ways to avoid plagiarism:

1. Don't copy and paste stuff from the Web into your own work.
2. Attribute information that you get from others.
3. Use quotation marks and attribute when you are using the exact words of others.

Important point: As a journalist, you should be getting your own direct quotes through interviewing. Journalism means obtaining original materials. Taking quotations from the Web, even if you attribute them, is not really journalism. The Web is most useful to the journalist for verifying facts and spellings, getting background information on a current happening and gaining understanding of some complex topic (prior to an interview, for instance).

Everything on most Web pages is copyrighted through common law copyright, whether or not there is a copyright notice. Most information from government sources is not copyrighted, but still should be attributed.

**Religious Holy Days Observance Policy**

The Texas Education Code specifies that an institution of higher education shall excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

[http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi03-04/ch4/ch4g.html#attendance](http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi03-04/ch4/ch4g.html#attendance)

**Students with Disabilities**

Please notify your instructor of any modification/adaptation you may require to accommodate a disability-related need. You will be requested to provide documentation to the Dean of Student's Office in order that the most appropriate accommodations can be determined. Specialized services are available on campus through Services for Students with Disabilities.

[http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/](http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/)