PPP 185:

Internet Design for Democracy

Fall 2000 - 1 credit

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Class: Mondays and Wednesdays 11.30-1.00 Location: 124 Mt Auburn St (Suite 160)
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Aims:

I. To understand the rise of the Information Society and the problems of the ‘democratic divide’;
II. To analyze effective use of Internet communication strategies in meeting organizational objectives;
III. To learn effective techniques for evaluating Internet communication strategies and Web designs, including content analysis, focus groups, online surveys and experiments;
IV. To apply these lessons in a strategic plan for your project client; and
V. To function as an incubator for dot.orgs.
Synopsis:

This class is designed for those who will be engaged in using new technology for communications in diverse career paths, whether employed as information and press officers, communication consultants, journalists and broadcasters, public sector managers, or as policy analysts working in the public and non-profit sector. Your careers may be working for candidates and parties, NGOs and new social movements, the news media, parliaments or government departments, or you may plan to launch your own dot.org.

The course will focus on the problem of the democratic divide, and the practical steps and applied techniques that can be used to maximize the democratic potential of the new technology. For enthusiasts, the Internet promises to provide new forms of horizontal and vertical communication that will enrich engagement, deliberation and democracy in the public sphere. But will Internet resources be open to everyone? The central issue generating widespread concern in the emergent Information Age has been indications of a growing ‘digital divide’ between Internet-haves and have-nots. A global divide has become strikingly evident in the chasm between industrialized and developing societies. A social divide is apparent in the access of rich and poor in each nation, as well as by generation, race and gender. And within the online community, a democratic divide is emerging between those who do, and do not, use Internet resources to engage, mobilize, and participate in public life.

This courses focuses on understanding these issues and what can be done in practice via the Net to promote opportunities for effective civic engagement and democratic policymaking. Projects use ‘hands on’ experience of comparing, analyzing, designing, critically evaluating, and improving political resources on the Internet for a ‘client’ such as a government department, non-profit organization, or an international agency. The class analyzes case studies illustrating effective strategic communications via new technology with examples drawn from many countries worldwide. Class notes will be posted online and class materials will make extensive use of Internet resources.

Familiarity with the nuts and bolts basics of Microsoft FrontPage or an equivalent package will be an advantage. Special sessions will be arranged outside of class time in the computer lab for those who have never used FrontPage or its equivalent.

Core Books for Purchase are:


**Schedule:**

*Optional Shopping Class* Friday September 15th 11.30-1.00 Location: 124 Mt Auburn St
Mondays and Wednesdays 11.30-1.00 Location: 124 Mt. Auburn Street

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Mapping the CyberCommunity</th>
<th>Mon &amp; Wed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction: The Rise of the Information Society</td>
<td>18 &amp; 20 Sept A#1</td>
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**II. Designing Effective Strategies: Meeting Organizational Objectives**

4. Parties and Election Campaigns (no class Monday) | 11 Oct |
5. Civic Society: NGOs, New Social Movements and the News Media | 16 & 18 Oct A#3 |
6. Online Legislatures (no class Wednesday) | 23 Oct |
7. Online Governance | 30 Oct & 1 Nov A#4 |
8. Online Civic Engagement | 6 & 8 Nov |

**III. Data Mining and Evaluation: Learning What Works**

9. Designing Web Sites and Content Analysis | 13 & 15 Nov |
10 Designing and Implementing Web Feedback and Surveys | 20 & 22 Nov |
11 Designing and Implementing Focus Groups & Experiments | 27 & 29 Nov |

**IV. Implementing Strategic Plans**

12. Putting it all together into a strategic plan | 4 Dec |
13. Presentation of your strategic plans | 11 & 13 Dec |
14. Course Evaluation & Closing Lunch | 18 Dec A#5 |

**Visiting Speakers & Events**

Details will be confirmed closer to the events. You should reserve the following *provisional* dates in your diaries:

- 26 September Carl Bernstein (Voter.com) Voter-Com - Democracy on Your Desktop? Shorenstein Center Brown Bag Taubman 275 11.45-12.45pm
- 14th October Women and the Web Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study 8.15- 4.00pm Saturday Longfellow Hall, Radcliffe Yard. Details at [www.radcliffe.edu/alumnae](http://www.radcliffe.edu/alumnae)
- 17th October David Plotz (Slate) Tba Shorenstein Center 11.45-12.45 Taubman 275.
- 18th October Andrew Olmstead (Cambridge Incubator) class talk on Wednesday 11.30-1.00.
- 6th November Bruce Bimber (University of California, Santa Barbara) The Internet and Democracy class talk 11.30-1.00 Monday 6th November.
- Tba John Gage (Sun Microsystems) Tba
PPP185 Weekly Readings:
(M=Mondays) (W=Wednesdays)

**Week 1: Understanding the Rise of the Information Society**
- Pippa Norris *Digital Divide* Chapter 1 & 2 (W)
- Anthony Wilhelm *Democracy in the Digital Age* Chapter 1 (W)
- Richard Davis *The Web of Politics* Chapters 1 (W)

**Week 2: The Global Digital Divide: Who’s Online Worldwide?**
- Pippa Norris *Digital Divide* Chapter 3 (M)
- OECD *Information Technology Outlook 2000*. (Long online report in Acrobat format - read Chapters 1 & 2)(M)
- UNESCO World Communication Report (Long online report in Acrobat format - read part 1) (W)
- International Telecommunications Union. *Internet Case Studies*. (W) http://www.itu.int/iti/casestudies/index.htm (parts still under development)

**Week 3: The Social Divide**
- Pippa Norris *Digital Divide* Chapter 4 (M)
- Anthony Wilhelm *Democracy in the Digital Age* Chapter 3 & 4(M)

**Week 4: Parties and Election Campaigns (No class Monday)**
- Pippa Norris *Digital Divide* Chapter 6 (W)
- Pippa Norris *A Virtuous Circle* Chapter 7 & 8 (W)
- Richard Davis *The Web of Politics* Chapters 4 (W)

**Week 5:Civic Society & News Media**
- Pippa Norris *Digital Divide* Chapter 7 (M)
- Anthony Wilhelm *Democracy in the Digital Age* Chapter 5 (M)
- Richard Davis *The Web of Politics* Chapters 2 & 3 (W)
Week 6: Legislatures (No class Wednesday)
- Pippa Norris  *Digital Divide* Chapter 5 (M)

Week 7: Governance
- Pippa Norris  *Digital Divide* Chapter 5 (M)
- Richard Davis  *The Web of Politics* Chapter 5 (M)

Week 8: Civic Engagement
- Pippa Norris  *Digital Divide* Chapter 8 & 9 (M)
- Pippa Norris  *A Virtuous Circle* Chapter 12 & 14 (M)
- Richard Davis  *The Web of Politics* Chapter 6 (M)
- Richard Davis  *The Web of Politics* Chapter 7 (W)

Week 9: Designing Web Sites and Content Analysis
We will draw on various sources this week: read the ones that you find most useful.
- Patrick Lynch  *Web Style Guide:Basic Design Principles*. Check also other books listed on his linked home page.URL: http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/manual/
- David Sigel  *Creating Killer Web Sites*. Great example sites and useful guide to design tools. URL: http://www.killersites.com/core.html

Week 10: Designing Web Feedback and Surveys
- The Pew Research Center on the People & the Press.  *Pew Internet and American Life.* This site has regular surveys of Internet use in the US. URL: http://www.pewinternet.org/index.asp
Week 11: Designing Focus Groups & Experiments


Week 12: Presentation of Strategic Plans

Week 13: Presentation of Strategic Plans
PPP185 Assignments:
The following are the assignments for this class. Written work should be handed in after class discussion on the due date.

Week 1 One page (two sides single spaced) memo for class discussion Wednesday 20th September (Grade max: 10 points)
You have been asked to act as a consultant to compare, review and evaluate the web sites developed for any two of the candidates in the presidential race. The sites are the following:

- George W. Bush Republican
- Al Gore Democrat
- Ralph Nader Green Party
- Harry Browne Libertarian Party
- John Hagelin Natural Law Party
- Pat Buchanan Reform Party

Write a one-page bulleted memo comparing the pros and cons of each of these sites in your view. Be prepared to justify the criteria you use to evaluate these sites in class discussions.

Week 3 Four-page memo for discussion Wednesday 4th October (Grade max: 15 points)
You have been asked to act as a consultant for UNESCO comparing the differences in the diffusion of the Internet in countries in one major region of the world (eg Latin America, Western Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa etc.). An Excel database is available online for downloading with information from 179 nations. The sites listed under resources - statistics give you some background information that might prove helpful for your data analysis.

Write a four page bulleted memo:

(i) explaining the differences between countries in your region of choice,
(ii) demonstrating the major factors which in your view have contributed to these differences,
(iii) outlining three major policy recommendations about what UNESCO should do to widen Internet access in your region and say why you believe these would work.

Be prepared to justify the factors you select as important. Use tables, graphs, scatterplots or regression analysis to demonstrate your evidence.

Week 5 One page memo for discussion Wednesday 18th October (Grade max: 10 points)
You have been asked to act as a consultant to compare, review and evaluate the web sites on one policy area (eg the environment, human rights, world trade, conflict resolution, women's rights) developed for any two interest groups, new social movements, or NGOs. Sites can be found using any search engine or the following resources:

- Political Resources on the Net http://www.politicalresources.net/
- Interweb New Social Movements http://www.interweb-tech.com/nsmnet/resources/default.asp
- Protest Net http://www.protest.net/
- Grassroots.com http://www.grassroots.com/
- Union of International Associations http://www.uia.org/
Pick two sites in your policy area that you think exemplify the best practice and most effective design and two sites that you think exemplify the worst. In your memo explain the criteria you used to make your evaluations and be prepared to defend your argument in the class discussions.

**Week 7** Two page memo for discussion **Wednesday 1st November.** Grade max: 15 points.

You have been asked to act as a consultant to evaluate digital government by comparing the web sites for central ministries and departments. Use the online Excel database provided by the Cyberspace Policy Research Group (CyPRG).


In your memo:

(i) How would you evaluate the methodology used by CyPRG to content analyze and evaluate government web sites?

(ii) How would you analyze and explain the major patterns in the data?

(iii) What conclusions would you draw about which countries have proved most advanced in promoting digital government?

**Week 9** Group discussion **Wednesday 15th November** (Group class discussion for the launch of project work. Group projects will be presented in weeks 12 and 13. Grade max: **worth 30 points**.)

Your group has been asked to act as consultants for one of the following organizations. The client wants to evaluate their web site with a view to relaunching and redesigning it within the next six months. Working as a group you are asked to produce a report which:

(i) Summarizes the aims, objectives, contents and design of the current web site;

(ii) Systematically compares the contents and design of the web site with three others by similar organizations;

(iii) Designs ways to evaluate how far the web site is achieving its aims and objectives including proposing surveys, or focus groups, or experiments or other research to monitor who uses the web site and its effectiveness for users;

(iv) Proposes a strategic communication plan with three options for relaunching the web site including outlining the aims and objectives, the core design, features, and contents, along with an indication of the costs and schedule for each option.

Groups will be based around one of the following possible clients:

- State Government: Commonwealth of Massachusetts [http://www.state.ma.us/](http://www.state.ma.us/)
- International Non-Profit Agency: IDEA International [http://www.IDEA.int](http://www.IDEA.int)
- NGO: Greenpeace [http://www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org)

The project is to be handed in by the deadline of the last day of class on **18th December** with a group mark for the whole project.

Overall class participation: (Grade max: 20 points)