



I202: Introduction to Social Informatics

Social informatics refers to an interdisciplinary body of research dedicated to studying the design, uses, and effects of information technologies. Rather than trace the “social impact” of these technologies, social informatics seeks to understand how social contexts shape the form and character of technology. Conversely, it also studies how technology influences society, affects power relations, and restructures social and organizational networks. In the course, we will be developing our understanding of these issues by engaging critically with various debated topics relating to information and communication technologies (ICTs).

This course asks students to go beyond the “technical” aspects of ICTs and consider the social relations that are an integral part of designing and adopting a technology or technological system. It also challenges students to think critically about technological change and acquire a more sophisticated understanding of the political, economic, and social considerations that underlie technological development.

Nathan Ensmenger
School of Informatics & Computing

Fall 2015

I202: Intro to Social Informatics

Professor Nathan Ensmenger
223 Informatics West
Office Hours: M 9-11 am, T 1:30-2:30 pm
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Associate Instructors:

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Lecture:

Monday, Wednesday 1:25pm-2:15pm (Lindley 102)

Discussions:

4524: Wednesday 2:30pm-03:20pm (Wells 030)
8920: Thursday 9:05am-09:55am (Bryan 018)
4523: Thursday 10:10am-11:00am (Sycamore 137)

Note: AI office hours are by appointment unless otherwise specified in your discussion section.

This syllabus is subject to change, with sufficient notice, as the semester progresses. The most current version will always be available on Canvas.

Textbook:

All readings will be made available online via Canvas.

Introduction:

Social informatics is an interdisciplinary field of research dedicated to studying the design, uses, and effects of information technologies. Rather than trace the “social impact” of these technologies, social informatics seeks to understand how social contexts shape the form and character of technology. Conversely, it also studies how technology influences society, affects power relations, and restructures social and organizational networks. In this course, we will be developing our understanding of these issues by engaging critically with various debated topics relating to information and communication technologies (ICTs).

This course asks students to go beyond the “merely technical” aspects of ICTs and consider the social relations that are an integral part of designing and adopting a technology or technological system. It also challenges students to think critically about technological

change and acquire a more sophisticated understanding of the political, economic, and social considerations that underlie technological development.

Objectives:

By the completion of the course, students will:

1. Understand that the design, use, and application of information technology is a social AND a technical process.
2. Be able to apply a range of frameworks that describe how technologies operate in society.
3. Be able to analyze contemporary sociotechnical issues from multiple perspectives.
4. Be able to locate primary and secondary sources of information on social informatics topics, summarize their content, critically engage with the arguments presented therein, and use them as evidence to create their own arguments.

This class will involve numerous writing assignments geared at developing students' ability to articulate their own arguments, grapple with nuanced questions, and examine the points of view of others as well as their own perspectives.

Student Conduct, Rights and Responsibilities:

All students are expected to submit their own original work. Plagiarism constitutes using others' ideas, words or images without properly giving credit to those sources. If you turn in any work with your name affixed to it, I assume that work is your own and that all sources are indicated and documented in the text (with quotations and/or citations).

We will respond to acts of academic misconduct according to university policy concerning plagiarism; sanctions for plagiarism can include a grade of F for the assignment in question and/or for the course and must include a report to the Dean of Students Office.

For more information on our expectations for student conduct please refer to the Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct, which can be found at: <http://www.iu.edu/~code/code/responsibilities/academic/index.shtml>

Grading

Final grades will be calculated according to the following:

- 40% Homework assignments
- 20% Participation
- 25% Quizzes
- 15% Final Assignment

Student participation grades will be based on attendance and active engagement in discussion section, attendance and active engagement in lecture, and the completion of weekly reading annotation assignments.

Students will also have the opportunity to complete occasional extra credit assignments during the course of the semester.

If you want to contest any of your grades, you must do so in person with the instructor assigned to your discussion section. If you cannot reach a resolution, you should meet in person with the professor assigned to your lecture. The instructors reserve the right to LOWER your grade if we think we were too generous the first time.

Assignment Submission

Homework assignments should be submitted via Canvas by noon on the day they are due, unless otherwise specified. Late homework will be penalized by 10% per day, with a two-day grace period. Assignments that are more than two days late will not be accepted. Students who are absent on either the day assignments are assigned or the day assignments are due are still expected to turn their assignments in on time. Proper documentation may excuse an absence, but does not excuse the student's responsibility to turn assignments in on time.

Attendance

Attendance will be taken at each discussion section meeting. All students will have one discretionary absence for the discussion section that they can use during the semester. Students using a discretionary absence will not need to present documentation to support the absence, such as a doctor's note. Students who need to miss more than one class should inform their AI beforehand to avoid being penalized. Attendance is mandatory on quiz days. Students needing to miss a quiz because of a serious illness or a personal tragedy will need to receive advance approval and provide supporting documentation if requested. Students are responsible for submitting assignments on time, regardless of whether they are present on the day of class. Start homework assignments early; late assignments will be penalized according to the course late policy.

Email Etiquette

Please give us at least 24 hours to reply to your emails, and we will do the same for you. Please put the course number in the Subject line and remember to sign your email with your name. We expect the language and structure of your emails to be professional. This includes punctuation, salutations/signature, etc.

Technology Policy

Students may use laptops or mobile devices in the class, both during lecture and discussion, provided that such devices are used to support learning in class. The use of laptops and mobile devices will at times be helpful and highly encouraged. However, use of laptops and mobile devices that is distracting to other students or the instructors is not allowed. If you are reprimanded for this kind of use during class, you will lose participation/attendance points for that day. Technology use during the discussion sections will vary according to the week's activities—laptops and mobile devices may be useful or requested in discussion sections. Follow the instructions given by your discussion section's AI.

Religious and Civic Observations

In accordance with the Office of the Dean of the Faculties, any student who wishes to receive an excused absence from class must submit a request form available from the Dean of the Faculties for each day to be absent. This form must be presented to a course instructor by the end of the second week of this semester. A separate form must be submitted for each day of class you will be missing. The form must be signed by an instructor, a copy made, and the original returned to the student. Information about the policy on religious observation can be found at the following web site: <http://www.iub.edu/~vpfaa/welcome/forms.shtml#religious>.

Students with Special Needs

Please discuss any accommodations you may need with the instructor. Please visit <http://studentaffairs.iub.edu/dss/> and fill out the forms, requesting that memos be sent to one of the instructors from the Office of Disability Services for Students regarding your testing/classroom modifications. You may also contact the office by telephone (812.855.7578) or visit in person in the Herman B. Wells Library, room W302.

Classroom Behavior

Everyone is expected to conduct themselves professionally during class. This includes arriving on time. Arriving late or using laptops or other devices for entertainment distracts everyone. Students who arrive at class more than ten minutes late, leave early without advance permission of an instructor, or use electronic devices may not receive attendance and/or participation credit for the day, at the discretion of the instructors. Professional behavior also entails being respectful of others and their opinions—even and especially when you do not agree with them.

I202: Weekly Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments
1	8-24	Introduction to I202		
1	8-26	What is Social Informatics	(1) Sawyer, "Social Informatics"	Distributed: Assignment 1
2	8-31	Evocative Objects	(1) Gathman, "Cell Phones"; (2) Green, "Really Thinking About Things"	Due: Assignment 1
2	9-2	Technologies in Everyday Life	(1) Gold, "How smart does your bed have to be, before you are afraid to go to sleep at night?"; (2) Bringsjord, "Only a Technology Triad can Tame Terror"	Distributed: Assignment 2
3	9-7	No lecture: Labor Day Holiday		
Big Idea #1: Models of Technology and Society				
3	9-9	Technological Determinism	(1) Nye, "Does Technology Control Us?"; (2) Baym "Technological Determinism"	
4	9-14	Social Construction of Technology	(1) Mackenzie, "The Social Shaping of Technology"; (2) Baym "Social Construction"	Due: Assignment 2
4	9-16	Mutual Shaping	(1) Winner, "Do Artifacts have Politics?" (pp.121- 128)	
Big Idea #2: Mythologies of Invention				
5	9-21	Invention Myths	(1) Latour, Science in Action (pp. 103-108); (2) Heath and Heath, "The Myth About Creation Myths"	Distributed: Assignment 3
5	9-23	The Romantic Author and the Social Construction of Inequality	(1) Boyle, "Shamans, Software, and Spleens" (pp. 125-128)	
6	9-28	Intellectual Property and Creativity: the Social Construction of Invention	(1) Lessig, "Property" (pp. 116-147); (2) Posner, "Why there are too many patents in America"	
6	9-30	Quiz #1		Due: Assignment 3
Big Idea #3: The Internet as Open (and Closed)				
7	10-5	"The Cycle" Model of Open/Closed Information Infrastructure	(1) Wu, The Master Switch, "Introduction"	
7	10-7	Free Software and Politics	(1) Chan, "Coding Free Software, Coding Free States"	
8	10-12	The Open Internet and Open Source Software	(1) Raymond, "The Cathedral and the Bazaar"	

Week	Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments
8	10-14	On the Internet You Have Access to Everything	(1) Pariser, "The Filter Bubble" (TED talk); (2) Grayling, "The Googlization of Everything: Has Google Turned Evil?"	
9	10-19	Quiz #2		
Big Idea #4: The Knowledge Economy and Changing Work				
9	10-21	The Knowledge Economy and Corporate Culture	(1) Howard, "How I escaped from Amazon.cult"	Distributed: Assignment 4
10	10-26	The Other Side of the Knowledge Economy	(1) Winner, "Electronic Cottage"; (2) Standen, "Silicon Valley Boot Camp Aims To Boost Diversity" (podcast)	
10	10-28	Computing & the Environment	TBD	
11	11-2	The Global Lifecycle of Technology	TBD	
11	11-4	ICTs and Developing Nations	(1) Heeks, "ICT4D 2.0"; (2) Oxford, "Blogging from the Bush"	
12	11-9	Quiz #3		Due: Assignment 4
Big Idea #5: Digital Duality: Is Virtual Reality really that Different?				
12	11-11	Social Media Activism	(1) Gladwell, "Why the revolution will not be tweeted"	
13	11-16	Media Ideologies	(1) Gershon, Breakup 2.0, "Introduction"	
13	11-18	Virtual and/or Real?	(1) Coleman, Hello Avatar, "What is an Avatar"	
14	11-23	No lecture: Thanksgiving Holiday		
14	11-25	No lecture: Thanksgiving Holiday		
Wrap-up & Final Project				
15	11-30	Quiz #4		Distributed: Final Assignment
15	12-2	Relational Technologies	(1) Turkle, "Authenticity in the age of digital companions"; (2) Jurgenson, "The IRL Fetish"	
16	12-7	Technology and Identity	(1) Lanier, You are Not a Gadget, "Missing Persons"	
16	12-9	BIG FINISH		
	12-14	Final Assignment due in Canvas by noon. No late assignments accepted		Due: Final Assignment