

Digital Communities

Brown University

Department of American Studies

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Instructor: Willow Brugh

Day, 00:00-00:00

Email:

Office Hours:

OVERVIEW:

Community and online engagement have been falsely cast in a dichotomous light – either a cure-all or a sure failure. Working with local and online communities will shape our understanding and questions about the complexities of groups.. We'll learn context, tools, and tricks for building powerful community-based campaigns. Students examine how projects can gain new participants while maintaining their focus and think about the differences in community involvement in on-line spaces and off. In a hands-on project, this class explores how to work together in digital space, to create moving media, and to build a campaign for support and growth.

CLASS STRUCTURE

Class will meet once each week, for 2.5 hours. Each class will be divided between discussion and a session interacting with that week's tool. Students will be expected to co-take notes in a shared document, to actively provide each other feedback and support, and to hand the project off in an understandable and continuable way to their project partner at the end of the semester.

OBJECTIVES

- Students understand the complexities of communities, virtual and analog.
- Students learn various digital tools that will help them work in communities.
- Students learn digital and other skills needed to both work in groups and manage complex projects.

ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly Blog Entries: 30%

Reflections on lessons learned or on milestones in project delivery.

Presentations: 20%

During Week 7 and Week 12, each student (as part of a group) will take responsibility for part

of the group's presentation.

Group Participation: 20%

Grade based on participation in shared note taking in class, in the decision making tool Loomio, in populating the task management system with appropriate and even distribution of tasks, and attending other groups' showcased activity.

Final Project: 30%

Each student will be on a team working with a community partner to deliver a project. While the tasks on these projects will be dependent upon the needs of the partners and the skills of the students, timeliness and collaboration will be key in grade assessment, as well be the effectiveness in meeting partner needs. Possible final projects include websites; walking tours; databases; social networks; or maps.

WEEKLY MEETINGS

Class 1 : Meet and Greet, Codesign

Brief overview of codesign, setting expectations and collaborative document editing. Get to know one another, the tools we'll be using, and the structure behind those tools.

Class 2 : Collaboration

As a learning-through-doing class focused on real-world impact, we'll be working with local community groups to help them develop an initiative which taps into communities as housed or augmented by online space. In this class, we'll hear presentations from the partners, ask questions, and collectively take notes in a shared space on the presentations. By collaboratively writing together, attention is distributed, and many angles of understanding are represented. This folds into live-blogging, such that the process of interaction is also the output.

Possible partners include

- Environmental Justice League
- New Urban Arts
- DARE (Direct Action for Rights and Equality)
- Youth in Action
- Urban Pond Procession
- Charter Schools (Met School)

Due at this class:

Create an "about" page for yourself, including why you're interested in the class. Opening discussion will be about why choices were made about putting what into your about page, and trouble shooting in formatting and platform.

Reading for in-Class Discussion

1. Giving communities a voice in resilience <http://www.irinnews.org/report/97595/giving-communities-a-voice-in-resilienc>

2. Collaborative Design Toolkit <http://www.codesigntoolkit.com/toolkit/>
3. Clay Shirkey, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (2008), selections http://sites.middlebury.edu/engl7103/files/2009/07/shirky_village.pdf
4. Is there a Social-Media Fueled Protest Style? An Analysis From #jan25 to #geziparki <http://technosociology.org/?p=1255>

Class 3 : What is New Here?

Why is this class “Digital Communities” and not just “Communities”? What's so new about the digital realm, anyway? Everyone has space to speak online... but does this also assume an ability to listen and dissent? In this class, we'll talk about hierarchies and distributed networks, and how each scales (or doesn't). We'll do a workshop around value-based design, to create a few possibilities for your project, while being aware of other groups from which you might seek help.

Due at this class:

Blog entry about the class and your partner. Refine, point out what you learned from live-blogging and what you might do differently next time. Fill out a form about which project partner you'd like to work with.

Reading for in-Class Discussion:

1. Is the Internet Good or Bad? Yes. <https://medium.com/matter-archive/is-the-internet-good-or-bad-yes-76d9913c6011>
2. Malaria Will be the First Disease Beaten by Mobile <http://www.undispatch.com/malaria-will-be-the-first-disease-beaten-by-mobile>
3. How OWS Confuses and Ignores FOX News and the Pundit Class http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2011/10/how_ows_confuses_and_ignores_fox_news_and_the_pundit_class_.html
4. Yaner Bar-Yam, *Making Things Work: Solving Complex Problems in a Complex World*, (2005), Selections.

Class 4 : Networks Matter

In these distributed networks, decision making looks different. In a strict hierarchy, the person at the top decides on the one thing that everyone will work on, possibly including how to work on it, and who works on each of those components. In a network, the process matters, and discussion should be to discover the most appropriate route. We'll continue exploring design options around the projects in class, as well as learning network-aligned decision-making platforms with a focus on InterTwinkles and Loomio.

Due at this class:

Have discussed with your partner the design possibilities for the project. Take notes on the meeting, and post this (along with self-reflection) on the blog.

Reading for in-Class Discussion:

1. The Battle for Your Digital Soul <https://blog.silentcircle.com/the-battle-for-your-digital-soul/>
2. Science Bettencourt Cities Framework <http://www.santafe.edu/news/item/science-bettencourt-cities-framework/>
3. But I Have Nothing to Hide <http://civic.mit.edu/blog/beckyh/but-i-have-nothing-to-hide-prism-break-up-workshop>

Class 5 : Expression

Digital networks have certain affordances. They can allow for participants to speak as well as listen. Part of being in a digital network is the 'write' part of 'read/write.' In this class, we'll take some time to gain a basic understanding of the structures of digital communication, covering basic coding skills such as HTML and CSS. We'll also discuss open web standards, IndieWebCamp, and walled gardens of some social networks; and how these affect community structure, possibility, and safety.

Due at this class: Decide which project your group will implement.

Reading for in-Class Discussion:

1. 5 Ways You Can Give Attention as Aid <http://civic.mit.edu/blog/mstem/5-ways-you-can-give-attention-as-aid>
2. Comment and Control in Era of Social <http://emergencysafety.blogspot.com/2014/05/command-and-control-in-era-of-social.html>
3. Facing the Public in Disaster <http://www.emergencymgmt.com/disaster/Facing-the-Public-in-Disaster.html>
4. 81 Ways Humanitarian Aid Has Become Participatory <http://civic.mit.edu/blog/mstem/81-ways-humanitarian-aid-has-become-participatory>
5. The Scaling Up Fallacy <http://bottomupthinking.wordpress.com/2011/05/27/the-scaling-up-fallacy/>
6. Action Path <http://civic.mit.edu/blog/erhardt/action-path-a-location-based-tool-for-civic-reflection-and-engagement>

Class 6 : Making a Plan

Based on your selected project, each group will make a plan. Revisiting the values-based workshop, we'll talk about categories and learn various task management systems. Each system has costs and benefits, so each group will determine which they'll use and spec out the rest of the semester specific to their project and associated milestones. We'll compare the projected plan against the readings to anticipate failure modes.

Due at this class:

Project description, objective, and rough plan as a blog entry incorporating embedding, CSS, and other

elements of HTML.

Reading for in-Class Discussion:

1. Free Speech vs Freeze Peace <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/daylightatheism/2013/05/free-speech-vs-freeze-peach/>
2. Open Sourcing Feminism - the Challenge of Collective Intelligence
<http://blog.loomio.org/2014/03/08/open-sourcing-feminism-the-challenge-of-collective-intelligence-in-2014/>
3. Scattered Notes on Race in Engineering <http://blog.melchua.com/2013/10/14/scattered-notes-on-race-in-engineering-education-stereotype-threat-asians-as-model-minority-racism-without-racists-olpc/>

Class 7 : Presentations

Class time will be divided so that each group gets an equal time to present, with limited time for response from the rest of the class. Each group will talk to the class about their project, progress, and plans. We'll take notes for each other and ask questions collaboratively.

Due at this class:

Presentation and associated project page. Both should include a project plan / outline of objectives loaded into a task management system of your choosing. Needs to include outreach, a media campaign, and a semester's end hand-off plan.

Class 8 : Granularity

Now that we have a better understanding of how distributed networks work, what is the role of level of zoom (forest // trees) and diversity (monoculture // polyculture)? We'll discuss self-regulating networks, panopticons, and transparency. As an exercise, we'll build out budgets using spreadsheet formulas for our project and potential scale-up projects with an eye to letting the world keep up-to-date.

Due at this class:

Blog post describing one other group's project presentation, including what they're doing well and concrete suggestions for their improvement and inclusion of end users.

Reading for in-Class Discussion:

1. Selection from "The Future of the Internet (and how to stop it)" TBD
2. A Brief Guide to User-Generated Censorship <http://civic.mit.edu/blog/petey/a-brief-guide-to-user-generated-censorship>
3. Myanmar - No Longer Closed, Still Complicated
<http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2014/03/12/myanmar-no-longer-closed-still-complicated/>
4. If Customers Knew How You Use Their Data Would They Call It Creepy?

<http://blogs.hbr.org/2014/04/if-customers-knew-how-you-use-their-data-would-they-call-it-creepy/>

Class 9 : Amplified Voice

What makes good media? Accessibility, inspiration, alignment, and simple techniques are first steps. We'll take the beginning steps in class to create videos around your community and project. We'll play with Mozilla popcorn to remix and add to existing videos.

Due at this class:

Complete the budget, write a group blog entry about difficulties and concerns.

Reading for in-Class Discussion:

1. Gangnam Style vs Harlem Shake <http://www.facegroup.com/how-stuff-spreads-1-gangnam-style-vs-harlem-shake.html>
2. Crowdsourcing Policy and Thinkup <http://techpresident.com/news/21987/expert-labs-crowdsourcing-policy-and-thinkup-look-back>

Class 10 : Databases: Individual vs Group Identity

We tend to assume there is tension between individual and group identity, but how does this actually look? The forest is made up of trees, and the trees are a part of the forest. The connection of nodes to one another is what forms a network. The structure of these networks can be expressed in various forms of databases. In this class, we'll cover types of databases, object relationships, and how databases are useful or overkill.

Due at this class:

Complete the video in such a way that people feel inspired to join your cause / take part in your project.

Reading for in-Class Discussion:

1. Leadership in Horizontal Movements <http://civic.mit.edu/blog/cfd/leadership-in-horizontal-movements>
2. Yaner Bar-Yam, *Making Things Work: Solving Complex Problems in a Complex World*, (2005), Selections.
3. Corrupt Personalization <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/niftyc/archives/1003>

Class 11 : Maps: Shared Voice

How do we build a shared view of what is going on? In this class, we'll play with OpenStreetMap/MapBox, Wikimedia installations, and similar tools for building a shared vision of importance, guidance, and history. Any remainder questions or outstanding items needed to finish your project should be completed during this class time.

Due at this class:

Implement the knowledge structure of your project with an appropriate tool – database for contact

management, map for key locations; or listening flow for audio clips.

Reading for in-Class Discussion:

1. Sharing and Solidarity <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/jun/20/sharing-and-solidarity/>

Class 12 : Final Presentation

Each group will present on the project, what they've learned, and how they'll hand things off in a useful way to the partner. Community Partners will be invited.

Due at this class:

Project presentations