

Course Title : HISTORY OF INFORMATION
Course Code : HST3012
Recommended Study Year : Term 4-8
No. of Credits/Term : 3
Mode of Tuition : Sectional
Class Contact Hours : 3 hours per week
Category in Major Prog. : Elective (Category 4: “Comparative and Transnational”)
Prerequisite(s) : None
Co-requisite(s) : None
Exemption Requirement(s) : None

Brief Course Description

This course explores the history of information from the early modern period onwards. The transmission of and access to information have long formed a battleground for governmental and religious authorities, publishers and media producers, and publics. The concept has particular relevance to the self-consciously mediated societies of the 20th and 21st centuries. We will examine information as an instrument of governance, a source of profit, and a tool of political and social enfranchisement, through case studies ranging from illegal publishing in Enlightenment Europe to the spread of telegraph networks in China and British India to the role of mass media in 20th-century decolonization and civil-rights movements. The course also addresses the prehistory of contemporary issues like digital privacy and the environmental cost of cloud computing.

Aims

This course introduces students to select topics in the history of technology, media history, and the history of ideas. It encourages them to critically analyze claims of technological determinism and to develop their own evidence-based arguments using primary and secondary sources. Finally, the course hones their ability to convey their ideas in written and spoken English.

Learning Outcomes

1. Explain how information technologies have related to political and social change in a variety of historical contexts.

2. Formulate compelling, fact-based arguments about historical change.
3. Identify appropriate primary and secondary sources, and deploy them effectively to support claims.
4. Communicate effectively in written and spoken English.

Indicative Content

- I. Approaches to the history of information
- II. Early modern print cultures and censorship
- III. Piracy, then and now
- IV. Censuses as tools of state and tools of representation
- V. Imperial networks and policing empires
- VI. The emergence of mass media
- VII. Modern warfare and propaganda
- VIII. Language as information medium
- IX. Inventing the internet(s)
- X. The materiality of information: labor and the environment
- XI. Privacy, surveillance, and transparency in historical context
- XII. Programmed inequality

Teaching Method

The course will be taught in seminars emphasizing the close analysis of texts and regular student participation. Class activities will include group discussions, structured debates, and small-group brainstorming.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

- Quizzes (LOs 1, 2)
Regular quizzes will test students' comprehension of key concepts presented in class sessions and reading assignments.
- Research paper (LOs 2, 3, 4)
Each student will craft a research paper related to the course topic featuring an original thesis and using both primary and secondary sources.
- Participation (LOs 1, 4)
Students are expected to participate actively in every class.
- Source presentation (LOs 3, 4)
The source presentation prompts students to investigate an information technology or information phenomenon of their choosing and to present a selection of relevant sources to the class.

Assessment

- Quizzes **30%**
- Research paper **35%**

- Participation **20%**
- Source presentation **15%**

Required Readings

Readings may include selections from the following (the precise readings may vary from term to term):

Baark, Erik, *Lightning Wires: The Telegraph and China's Technological Modernization, 1860-1890*, Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1997.

Bayly, C. A., *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Berry, Mary Elizabeth, *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2006.

Blair, Ann, *Too Much To Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2010.

Blair, Ann, Paul Duguid, Anja Goeing, and Anthony Grafton, eds., *Information: A Historical Companion*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2021.

Bouk, Dan, *How Our Days Became Numbered: Risk and the Rise of the Statistical Individual*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Darnton, Robert, "An Early Information Society: News and Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (2000): 1-35.

Gordin, Michael, *Scientific Babel: The Language of Science from the Fall of Latin to the Rise of English*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Headrick, Daniel, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851-1945*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991.

Hicks, Marie, *Programmed Inequality: How Britain Discarded Women Technologists and Lost Its Edge in Computing*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2017.

Hu, Tung-Hui, *A Prehistory of the Cloud*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2015.

Igo, Sarah E., *The Known Citizen: A History of Privacy in Modern America*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2018.

Johns, Adrian, *Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wars from Gutenberg to Gates*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009.

- Larkin, Brian, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2008.
- Lemberg, Diana, *Barriers Down: How American Power and Free-Flow Policies Shaped Global Media*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2019.
- McCoy, Alfred W., *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State*, Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press, 2009.
- Mullaney, Thomas, *The Chinese Typewriter: A History*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2017.
- Nunberg, Geoffrey, "Farewell to the Information Age," in *The Future of the Book*, ed. Geoffrey Nunberg, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1996.
- Ong, Aihwa, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2006.
- Peters, Benjamin, *How Not to Network a Nation: The Uneasy History of the Soviet Internet*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2016.
- Pozen, David E., and Michael Schudson, eds., *Troubling Transparency: The History and Future of Freedom of Information*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2018.
- Slauter, Will, "The Paragraph as Information Technology: How News Traveled in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World," *Annales* [English edition] 67, no. 2 (2012): 253-78.
- Starosielski, Nicole, *The Undersea Network*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2015.
- Tworek, Heidi, *News from Germany: The Competition to Control World Communications, 1900-1945*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2019.

Supplementary Readings

- Abbate, Janet, *Recoding Gender: Women's Changing Participation in Computing*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2012.
- Adorno, Theodor, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, 1991.
- Calhoun, Craig, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1992.
- Cortada, James W., *All the Facts: A History of Information in the United States Since 1870*. Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2016.

- Darnton, Robert, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1982.
- De Weerd, Hilde, *Information, Territory, and Networks: The Crisis and Maintenance of Empire in Song China*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Dubcovsky, Alejandra, *Informed Power: Communication in the Early American South*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2016.
- Edwards, Brian T., *After the American Century: The Ends of U.S. Culture in the Middle East*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2016.
- Eubanks, Virginia, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor*, New York, St. Martin's, 2017.
- Frankel, Oz, *States of Inquiry: Social Investigations and Print Culture in Nineteenth Century Britain and the United States*, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.
- Galison, Peter, "Removing Knowledge," *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 1 (2004): 229-243.
- Grafton, Anthony, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Guarneri, Julia, *Newsprint Metropolis: City Papers and the Making of Modern Americans*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Habermas, Jürgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, tr. Thomas Burger, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1989 [1962].
- Hampton, Mark, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850-1950*, Urbana, IL, University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Johns, Adrian, *Death of a Pirate: British Radio and the Making of the Information Age*, New York, W. W. Norton, 2011.
- Kline, Ronald, *The Cybernetics Moment: Or Why We Call Our Age the Information Age*, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015.
- Lauer, Josh, *Creditworthy: A History of Consumer Surveillance and Financial Identity in America*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2017.
- Mailland, Julien, and Kevin Driscoll, *Minitel: Welcome to the Internet*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2017.

- Medina, Eden, *Cybernetic Revolutionaries: Technology and Politics in Allende's Chile*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2011.
- Morozov, Evgeny, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, New York, PublicAffairs, 2011.
- Potter, Simon J., *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876-1922*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Rosenthal, Caitlin, *Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2018.
- Ross, Corey, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany: Mass Communications, Society, and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Schudson, Michael. *The Rise of the Right to Know: Politics and the Culture of Transparency, 1945-1975*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Soll, Jacob, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System*, Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 2009.
- Soni, Jimmy, and Rob Goodman, *A Mind at Play: How Claude Shannon Invented the Information Age*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 2017.
- Stamm, Michael, *Dead Tree Media: Manufacturing the Newspaper in Twentieth-Century North America*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018.
- Starr, Paul, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications*, New York, Basic Books, 2004.
- Stoler, Ann Laura, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Turner, Fred, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Wenzlhuemer, Roland, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World: The Telegraph and Globalization*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Winkler, Jonathan R., *Nexus: Strategic Communications and American Security in World War I*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2008.

Important Notes:

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours

- of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
 - (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
 - (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>.