

LIS 674- Spring 2005- Hersberger

University of North Carolina at Greensboro
School of Education
Department of Library and Information Studies

LIS 674: The Electronic Community

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1. Course Description

LIS 674. Seminar: Issues and The Electronic Community (3:3).

Major social and ethical issues emerging in the electronic community including those embraced by access, privacy, intellectual property, freedom of speech, institutional/social control, and evolving formats.

2. Student Learning Outcomes

This course is designed to help the student fulfill the following educational objectives:

- a) Conceptualize, define and synthesize the building blocks of communities, both real and electronic.
- b) Conceptualize, define, and synthesize benefits and challenges of participation in communities, both real and electronic.
- c) Articulate a reasoned and coherent position on the student's own roles in ego-centric networks in electronic communities.
- d) Exercise creativity in exploring ways to study electronic communities.
- e) Demonstrate excellent communication skills.

3. What this class is about:

Robert Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone*, has triggered national discussion over concerns of the deterioration of community and civic involvement in the United States. It has been speculated that the popularity of the Internet and virtual or *Electronic Communities* has contributed to this deterioration. But, has it really?

Webster's Dictionary defines "community" as follows (the OED definition can be found under "course documents"):

1: a unified body of individuals: as a : STATE, COMMONWEALTH b: the people with common interests living in a particular area; broadly: the area itself <the problems of a large community> c : an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (as species) in a common location d: a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society <a community of retired persons> e: a group linked by a common policy f: a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests <the international community> g: a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society <the academic community>

2: society at large

3 a: joint ownership or participation <community of goods> b: common character: <Community of interests> c: social activity: FELLOWSHIP d: a social state or condition

Several of these variations will apply to our class efforts particularly the idea of a group or collective of people with COMMON interests of some sort.

Howard Rheingold, author of *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* defines virtual communities as:

the social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace.

[NOTE: we will be using "virtual" communities somewhat as a synonym for "electronic" communities, however, we will be taking a broad approach to more than just computer technologies. PDAs (a form of computer yes, but not quite the same), cell phones and other telecommunication technologies ought to be part of our conceptualization of electronic communities. Also, we will be studying both totally electronic communities AND communities enhanced greatly by electronic technologies.]

Both Webster and Rheingold refer to social activities and personal relationships as critical aspects of "community." As such, we will be taking a sociological and psychological approach to studying e-communities. As the instructor, I do NOT have a formal education in either area, but my research has helped me get started into intellectual inquiry into both topics. I DO NOT expect students in this class to be experts in either area, I simply hope that students in this course enjoy the challenge of learning in new subjects areas too. Libraries per se are NOT the focus of this course. PEOPLE are the focus, how they build relationships which fit into larger associated groups, AND HERE'S THE KICKER-- how INFORMATION plays a very important role in these e-communities.

One of the important areas of information science is examining information needs, information seeking and information use. One of the valuable aspects of a community is what is called "social supports." We all experience affective support from many of our networks (family, friends, neighbors, etc). Information is an incredibly valuable artifact of social networking in our various communities and this information sharing/seeking, etc. will be an important focus of this class (the "so what" as you will hear me asking often throughout the semester).

Through weekly readings, weekly discussions, assignments, guest speakers, and a few other approaches I haven't even had time to think about yet, it is my hope that the end result of this class is that each of us has a clearer understanding of what a community is, how communities change or do change in an electronic environment, and what this means for information flow, diffusion, sharing, etc.

4. What is means to participate in a seminar-- both actual and/or virtual

This course is run as a seminar ,which means that the success or failure of the class depends, to a great extent, on your participation throughout the summer session. Think of this participation as an INVESTMENT in your education. The more you invest in the class, the more you will get back -- the more DIVIDENDS you will receive. Participation means the student will do all the readings and post cogent and well considered Blackboard discussion messages. Participation also means "discussing" the points made by other students on the Bb discussion board, i.e. responding to their messages or even starting discussion threads of your own interests. Participation may also take the form of posting citations to other articles (articles being interpreted very broadly to mean web sites cites, newspapers, periodical articles, etc.) or posting directions to other interesting or useful stuff (think outside the box).

Learning about E-communities ought to continue long after the class ends. As with many seminars, we might end the session with more questions than answers, but that is just fine! Issues discussed throughout class will mature over time, evolve, and maybe even re-structure themselves in the future.

PLEASE, if you have questions or concerns about what is happening in the class, do not wait until the course evaluation to express them. I will be willing to help out as much possible. Learning can be fun in addition to educational so my goal is to put together a collegial learning forum where we can explore various aspects of a topic in a structured, but not rigid, learning environment. Remember that you get back what you put into such classes!

5. Course Requirements

To receive a passing grade in this course, you must turn in all of the assignments and the term project and do your presentation. You cannot pass this course without doing all of

the assigned work, however, turning in all of the work is not a guarantee that you will pass the course.

All papers and assignments must be word processed and double-spaced unless otherwise indicated and must be handed in on the dates specified in this syllabus. If you cannot hand in a paper or assignment or cannot deliver a presentation on the date it is due, it is your responsibility to discuss your situation with the instructor, preferably in advance. Given that your reasons or problems are legitimate, arrangements for the completion of the outstanding work can be made; this will occur, however, at the discretion of the instructor. There will be a penalty for work turned in after the assigned date, and this will also be applied at the discretion of the instructor.

Your written work will be evaluated according to five criteria; it must:

- Be clearly written or presented;
- Demonstrate a degree of insight into the concepts, issues, and trends in both the areas you investigate in the assignments and in the course content;
- Demonstrate a high level of analysis, evaluation and description as needed to convey information, views, opinions, etc.
- Demonstrate a degree of originality in your reviews, analyses and interpretations; and
- Display some familiarity with the appropriate current and/or classic literatures.

6. Readings

Readings will be on electronic reserve in Jackson Library. To access these readings, go to Jackson Library via the LIS 674 Blackboard course. DO NOT search for readings using my last name as this will pull up all readings from all my classes. Search using LIS674 (do not use a space). You will need your UNCG ID to access readings. Readings will come up in alphabetical order (I think). There are some clear instructions at the site on how to access readings- if you encounter problems, either contact the help desk for electronic reserves or post a message to the Bb discussion forum "Help, I'm having technical difficulties."

Also, be prepared for it to take some time for you to download and print each article-- unless you choose to just read the articles online and take notes or just cut and paste important parts-- it's up to you how you choose to do your readings. Just know that you MUST do the readings to be able to participate fully in the class. Yes, this takes some time to do and you will need a lot of paper, but it beats the heck out of having to stand at a photocopier and plugging in lots of coins in a university library-- or having to buy a lot of expensive textbooks. Remember that there are always trade-offs!

Finally, some of these readings will be research studies. I do NOT expect students who have not had some intensive research methods class to focus on the statistical analysis sections. What I do expect from students is to read these articles and get the main points that the authors are sharing. You will NOT be tested on minutiae-- but you need to get the big picture points from each article and synthesize them across weekly topics in order to

end the class with a basic understanding of how e-communities function, why, and what this means in terms of information flow.

7. Tentative Class Schedule:

PLEASE: The readings have been structured in such a way that you will maximize your study by reading them in the order listed each week.

- **January 10th: Introduction to the course**

- **January 17th: What is a Community? What is an E-community? Introduction to Social Network Analysis (SNA)**

Readings:

Putnam, Robert D. (2000). *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community*. NY: Simon and Schuster

Chapter 1: Thinking about Social Change in America, pp. 15-28.

Chapter 9: Against the Tide? Small Groups, Social Movements and the

Net,

pp. 148-180.

Chapter 13: Technology and Mass Media, pp. 217-246.

McMillan, David W. and Chavis, David M. (1986). Sense of community: a definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14: 6-23.

- **January 24th: Concepts and Principles of Communities and E-communities**

Readings:

Crickman, Robin D. (1976). Community communication patterns. In M. Kochen and J.C. Donahue (eds.) *Information for the Community*: 237-248. Chicago: ALA.

Wellman, Barry and Berkowitz, S.D. (1988). *Social structures: a network approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Part 1: Thinking structurally, pp. 15-18.

Chapter 2: Structural analysis: from method and metaphor to theory and Substance, pp. 19-61.

Wellman, Barry, et. al (1996). Computer networks as social networks: collaborative work, telework, and virtual community. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22: 213-238.

Visit: (you can access all websites for the class via the External Links button on your Bb access page)

Caroline Haythornthwaite's website

<http://www.lis.uiuc.edu/~haythorn/>

Dr. Haythornthwaite, associate professor at LIS at the University of Illinois (and a PhD student at the University of Toronto with Barry Wellman) has written several articles on online classes as virtual communities. I recommend that you skim those on "virtual community among computer-supported distance learners" in particular.

Barry Wellman's website:

<http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~wellman>

Dr. Wellman is one of the movers and shakers in social network analysis. It's a cool website and offers a lot of relevant information that would help explain much of what we are studying in this class.

• **January 31st: The Internet and Electronic Communities**

Readings:

Haythornthwaite, Caroline (2001). The internet in everyday life. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 45(3): 363-382.

Katz, James E. and Rice, Ronald E. (2002). *Social consequences of internet use: Access, involvement, and interaction*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Chapter 1: America and the Internet: Access, Involvement, and Social Interaction, pp 1-14.

Chapter 6: Civic and Community Involvement: basic issues and prior evidence, pp. 103-133.

Chapter 11: Social Interaction: Survey Results, pp. 227-264.

• **February 7th: More Basics of E-communities**

Readings:

Schuler, Douglas (1996). *New Community Networks*. NY: ACM Press.

Chapter 1: Community and Technology-- a Marriage of Necessity, pp. 1-34.

Chapter 2: Conviviality and Culture, pp. 35-71.

Chapter 8: Social Architecture, pp.253-284.

Burnett, Gary (2002). The scattered members of an invisible republic: virtual communities and Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics. *Library Quarterly*, 72(2): 155-178.

***** **Assignment #1- Egocentric Map Analysis Due** *****

• **February 14th: Studying E-communities**

Readings:

Garton, L., Haythornthwaite, C., and Wellman, B. (1997). Studying online social

networks. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, (3)1: available
<http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol3/issu1/garton.html>

Thomsen, Steven R. et. a. (1998). Ethnomethodology and the study of online communities: Exploring the cyber streets. *Information Research*, 4(1): np.

Burnett, Gary (2000). Information exchange in virtual communities: a typology. *Information Research*, 5(4) available at:
<http://informationr.net/ir/5-4/paper82.html>

• **February 21st: Studying E-Communities, cont.**

Readings:

Pugliesi, Karen and Shook, Scott L. (1998). Gender, ethnicity, and network characteristics: variation in social support resources. *Sex Roles*, 38(3/4): 215-238.

Granovetter, Mark (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6): 1360-1380.

Constant, David, Sproull, Lee and Kiesler, Sara (1996). The kindness of strangers: The usefulness of electronic weak ties for technical advice. *Organization Science*, 7(2): 119-135.

• **February 28th: Community Building Week**

***** **Assignment #2- FUN Assignment Due** *****

• **March 7th: Spring Break- class does not meet**

• **March 14st: Community Building Week**

• **March 21st: Community Open House, Discussion week**

• **March 28th: Examples of studies of E-communities**

Readings:

Hampton, Keith N and Wellman, Barry (1999). Netville online and offline: observing a wired suburb. *The American Behavioral Scientist* 43(3): 475-492.

Matei, Sorin and Ball-Rokeach, Sandra J. (2001). Real and virtual social ties: connections in the everyday life of seven ethnic neighborhoods. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 45(3): 550-564.

Savoleinin, Reijo (2001). "Live encyclopedia" or idle talk? Seeking and providing consumer information in an Internet newsgroup. *Library and Information Science Research*, 23: 67-90.

*******Assignment #3- Class Project Analysis Due *******

• **April 4th: Current Studies of E-communities**

Readings:

Each student is responsible for finding one or two current “studies” of E-communities. Think creatively about the term “article” as these could come from any field, be a website, etc. The articles can update the seminal works we have discussed or address other issues not covered in previous weeks.

Students will write an abstract (400-500 words) that you will post- make sure that you cite the articles in enough detail so that students can follow up and find the articles for more information.

Discussion for the week will then evolve from the readings that you generate.

Abstracts are to be posted by 5:00 pm on Friday, April 1- no fooling! ☺

• **April 11th: Current Issues and E-communities**

Readings:

Each student is responsible for finding two articles on important current issues that affect E-communities. Think creatively about the term “article” as these could come from any field, be a website, etc. The articles can update the seminal works we have discussed or address other issues not covered in previous weeks.

Students will write an abstract (400-500 words) that you will post- make sure that you cite the articles in enough detail so that students can follow up and find the articles for more information.

Discussion for the week will then evolve from the readings that you generate.

Abstracts are to be posted by 5:00 pm on Friday, April 8th

• **April 18th: The Future of E-communities**

Readings:

As per the preceding week, each student should try to find one article that is related to the future of e-communities and abstract said article in the same fashion and post.

Discussion for the week will then evolve from the readings that you generate.

******* Term Project Due *******

• **April 25th: So what does it all mean? Class wrap up and evaluations**

Readings:

Kraut, Robert, et. al (1998). Internet paradox: a social technology that reduces social involvement and psychological well-being? *American Psychologist* 53(9): 1017-1031.

Kraut, Robert, et. al (2002). Internet paradox revisited. *Journal of Social Issues* 58(1): 49-74.

8. Assignments

	Grades	Due
Egocentric Information Network Map	15%	Feb. 11th
Fun Assignment	15%	Mar. 4th
Class project: Building an E-community	20%	April 1st
E-Community Analysis	25%	April 22nd
Participation	25%	Weekly

Students are required to abide by the university's academic integrity policy (URL: <http://www.uncg.edu/saf/studiscp/Honor.html>). Late assignments are unacceptable unless arrangements are made at least 24 hours prior to their deadline with the instructor-- except in the case of an emergency. Assignments turned in late will receive a half-grade reduction. Incomplete assignments will result in a lower grade for that assignment. All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. Simply handing in all assignments however will not guarantee the student of a passing grade in the course.

• **Project/Paper: Egocentric Information Network Mapping 15% Due: by 5:00 pm on Friday, February 11th**

For this project/paper, you will need to download the Egocentric Mapping tool from Course Documents in Blackboard (Bb). The center is you (ego) with concentric circles spreading out from the circle. You are to use this mapping tool to construct a better depiction of your very own information network! Those with whom you are in more frequent contact ought to be noted closest to you, with others being situated as is reasonable. For instance, those you email frequently might be a 1 or 2, those you email infrequently, but who provide you with info, might be further out in your circle. Feel free to adapt the tool if you wish in terms of the four categories.

IMPORTANT: Since this is your INFORMATION network, some sources might be face-to-face sources, some might be a combination of F2F and E-sources, some might only be e-sources. Try to use a different mark (X= F2F source, Y= combo sources, Z= e-sources) or whatever to add depth to your analysis. Add initials or numbers with a list so that you can remember who each info point is! Also you might wish to connect the dots of any sources that know each other. In addition, you might want to use thick lines to connote a close info relationship, a thin line if you get lots of info from a source but they are not

particularly close to you in a relationship (i.e. I often call the public library for info, but I do not think of the ref folks as close friends ;-)). Have some fun constructing your map! You do NOT have to turn in your maps, but you can if you want to.

Once you have your map finished, you will write a short analysis paper. The regular paper requirements (double spaced, 12-point font, etc) apply here too. This paper will also probably be in the 5-7-page range.

Questions to address might include: how many sources do you have in each section of your map (hint: your map should have some sections-- it ought not be one total circle with out pie pieces!!). What kinds of sources predominate in each section? How efficient and effective do you think your information network is? How does technology come into play? Who is pre-programmed into your phone and/or batched together for volume emails you might regularly send? What kind of information do you seek and receive from your network sources? You might have saved emails in some sort of classification scheme that you can go back look over for some assistance. Some of you might collect certain phone messages, etc. Looking at your saved emails might also help you remember phone calls, F2F visits, etc. that can help you construct and analyze your map.

You will not remember all your info contacts, of course, so this can be a work in process (you know, as you fight with friends and relatives you can erase them right off that map ;-). Just do your best and have some fun!

An A paper will demonstrate that the student has put some time and effort into thinking about their personal information networks. An A paper will also combine description and analysis-- such as asking do I have sufficient info sources? If not, what are the consequences? Might you have too many info sources? What are the consequences for this?? A B paper again will be one that is overly descriptive and lacking analysis (answering the "so what" questions) and lacks a sense of effort (this does NOT mean that those with more data points get a higher grade!!) but one that lacks depth of detail in the mapping process.

• Project/Paper: Fun Assignment 15% Due: by 5:00 pm on Friday, March 4th

Again, this is NOT an acronym; I want you to have fun with this assignment! You may even choose to collaborate with one or more of the other students in the class for this assignment. An article I read while in Canada (in the Globe and Mail) had an article that talked about "high-tech anxiety flicks" especially focusing on the Matrix Reloaded (or, the Matrix Rebooted as I like to call it ;-). "The Matrix films and other sci-fi classics are propelled by the fear technology might rob us of our very humanity" is the teaser line given.

You should pick a science fiction film, book, television show, website, etc. that features electronic communities prominently and then write a short paper on how such communities are portrayed. This assignment goes along with our course theme of

whether electronic communities are beneficial to society or destructive (and all points in between). What did you think of the work? Do you think what is portrayed is a reasonable/probable future or not? This could be an older work- such as the movie Metropolis (the Fritz Lang b&w silent movie), or even old Star Trek television shows. You should comment on their predictions of the future and whether what was portrayed has happened or not, and why or why not.

Other films might be Things to Come, Blade Runner, 2001, television shows such as the Jetsons, BattlestarGalactica, and works of fiction from William Gibson, Marge Piercy or Neal Stephenson. You might use Genreflecting (available at most public libraries) to help you find books to use.

You could even select a fun website, such as Howard Rheingold's homepage (<http://www.rheingold.com>) and comment on his work.

This will mainly be a descriptive paper but some analysis/evaluation needs to be presented to get an A paper. The paper is the usual 5-7 pages, double spaced and so on. A B grade paper again would be one that reflected very little effort or attempt at creativity and fun!

• Class Project/Paper: Building an E-community 20% Due: by 5:00 pm on Friday, April 1st (no fooling)

The midterm project/paper is a collective assignment where students will build your own MOO community. We will have a guest speakers (building consultants) and I will also help act as the construction supervisor, but with minimal input. The class will determine what they wish this community to "look" like and "act" like. At the end of final building session, we will have a "town meeting" with invited guests. There will be more information coming on this assignment. This is all pretty EXPERIMENTAL so do not panic!

Following the construction of the e-community, each student will write a 7-8 page paper analyzing this experience and summing up what they learned in this semester's seminar. Think "SIM City"!! An A project contribution will be awarded to students who display creativity and a sense of fun to constructing the e-community. Also, an A project includes a paper that analyzes the process and the outcomes of the project.

I anticipate a lot of questions regarding this project/paper, but PLEASE hang in there and this will all become much more clear as we work through this semester. If this works, it will be a really cool assignment. If it fails, it should still be a valuable learning exercise! If the assignment does not go as planned for various reasons beyond the control of the student, you will not be penalized grade-wise, but evaluated again on effort put forth.

• Term Project: E-Community Analysis 25% Due: by 5:00 pm on Friday, April 22nd

For this final assignment, you are to choose one of two options:

Analyze a current electronic community using the concepts you have learned throughout this semester-- either totally online or heavily supported electronically-- (listserv, chatrooms visited regularly, Bbs frequented, online courses-- think broadly) in which you are a member. Why does this community exist-- what is its purpose (i.e. what does everyone have in common)? Using the readings from week # 1 and #2, what are the important building blocks of a community? How are these functioning (or not functioning) in your online community? What role(s) do you play in this e-community? Why? What role(s) would you like to play? Why? What roles do others play (please use first names or pseudonyms, please)? Overall, what is the value of this community to you? How might its value increase-- and what would need to happen for this to occur? What do you predict will be the future of this e-community? Will it enjoy a long life or do you predict extinction at some point?

IF you are not a member of an electronic community (which would be rather improbable one would think!) you may choose to analyze the Blacksburg Project website. See if you can answer most of the questions posed in option #1, but also think about whether you would like to join this community. Why? Why not?

Feel free to add other questions to answer based on the variations in e-communities.

This is a term project so I highly recommend you think about your community each week and make notes weekly. Doing a term project in the week prior to the due date is NOT recommended- learning progresses over time and I hope to see some maturation of thought in your analysis.

An A paper will be around 10-15 pages double-spaced. Use 12-point font please. This is an **analysis paper**, which means that you will need to provide some description, but this is NOT a descriptive essay so you will need to answer the "so what" question too. To get an A, I need to see that you have spent some time synthesizing important points from the readings and class discussions, then applying them to what is happening in your chosen e-community. An A paper will also have some structure (**use headings**) rather than simply being a series of observations or description strung together. For example, you might use Table 1.1 (The Dystopian View of the Consequences of the Internet) or Table 1.2 (The Utopian View of the Consequences of the Internet) from Katz and Rice (Social Consequences of Internet Use, chapter 1, pp 8,12) to help structure your paper.

A paper which simply describes who does what, without considering the "so what" of the topic, will most likely receive a grade of B. Between a grade of A and B will be those papers which address the topic in varying degrees of clarity and insight.

If you cite other sources, please use a recognized style manual (APA, MLA, Turabian, etc.) but I have no preference to citation style.

Please feel free to post questions about assignments either to the Bb discussion forum for assignments. You may email the instructor directly, but other students may have the same question and everyone could benefit from the answer.

• Participation 25% Due: Weekly

As noted earlier in the syllabus (see: What it means to participate in a seminar) the success of this class will depend on the active participation of all students in the class. Participation means that each student will read the weekly articles, respond to questions posted by the instructor on the weekly Blackboard forum, post new discussion threads when you have noted an important point not being already discussed, responding to other student postings (this is known as a "discussion"). You will NOT receive credit for superficial postings. Actually, you will be PENALIZED for taking up class time by taking the time to simply respond to someone's post by saying "thank you!" Postings need to address a point or respond to a point in a meaningful way. This class will be discussion intensive and those of you with lesser computer access will NOT wish to wait awhile to access brief and non-essential messages (note: the instructor herself only has 10 hours of dial-up service each month from home and I resent spending money to access this type of message ;--).

To get an A grade in participation, students will post thoughtful answers to questions posed by the instructor, pose questions or post position points of their own, and respond to other students postings. However, this does NOT mean one has to post a response to everything, just when you have something relevant to say or on a topic that very much interests you. A class victim will whine that there was nothing important or interesting that they wanted to respond to, so, post something yourself! Remember, (one more time) the burden of effort for this class is on the student to participate. A B grade will be awarded to students who simply respond to instructor questions but not to any other posts, and never posts their own comments or questions.

I do not like to quantify how many posts one must make each week in order to get an A or B, but I do want students to take some interest in the class and participate in our very own electronic community!!!

9. Grades

Student work is graded on a 4.0 scale as follows:

A (4.0)= superior; exceeds course requirements; demonstrated ability to: integrate concepts and covered in class and readings; think abstractly, logically, critically and ethically about issues; analyze problems objectively, identify needs, set goals, and formulate original and creative solutions; communicate clearly and concisely.

A- (3.7)

A-/B+ (3.5)

B+ (3.3)

B+/B (3.15)

B (3.0) = Good; meets course requirements; demonstrates ability to: understand concepts covered in class and readings; apply concepts to practical problems; communicate clearly and concisely.

B- (2.7)

C (2.0) = Weak, but acceptable on a limited basis for graduate credit.

F= Failure

I= Incomplete ; indicates inability, for reasons beyond the student's control, to complete course requirements by the end of the term in which the course was offered. (A grade of incomplete is not encouraged, and only in consultation with the instructor).

W= Withdrawal from course within the time period specified by the university.

NC= No credit (for audited courses).