Course Description

For the current youth generation, the Internet has always existed. Online technologies have profoundly contributed to a dramatic techocultural shift in contemporary society, transforming how we learn, work, play, and socialize. Information from multiple sources on everything from Athabascan birch bark baskets to the calculation of z-scores is there for the googling. Global social networks – made visible, designable, and searchable via services such as “Facebook” (http://www.facebook.com/) and “MySpace” (http://www.myspace.com/) – are increasingly becoming the must-have/must-do activity for businesspeople, college students, and fan communities alike. And whether it’s collaboration on a formal project or informal socializing among peers, our modus operandi has shifted from face-to-face get-togethers, a couple of emails, and the occasional phone call to the overlapping “multimodal, multi-attentional spaces” (Lemke, n.d.) on today’s computer screen – email in-boxes, webpages, collaborative authoring softwares (such as wikis and blogs), multiple instant messaging windows of conversation, videostreaming, file-sharing, voice over IP (VoIP), and even shared online 3D environments where players can fashion digital versions of their corporeal selves and get together in a server-stored tavern for a virtual beer. For those who have grown up with such technologies, this heterogeneous, networked, online, global, “flat” (Friedman, 2005) world is the unremarkable mainstream. While the older, “world on paper” natives gasp and wonder and worry about the furious pace and penetration of online technologies into everyday life, the younger generations just adopt them, adapt them, and move on to the next (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003).

The American educational system has done its best to keep pace, providing Internet connections to virtually all schools (99% in 2001), 87% of which are accessible to students via classrooms, libraries, computer labs, and other regulated spaces (Kleiner & Farris, 2002). Still, the culture of schooling carries on with business as usual – as it was ten or twenty years, ago, that is. As a Pew Internet & American Life Report (Levin & Arafeh, 2002) on the digital disconnect between children and their schools details with excruciating clarity, what students do with online technologies outside the classroom is not only markedly different from what they do with them in schools (e.g. instant messaging, blogging, sharing files, consuming and producing media, engaging in affinity spaces, gaming, building social networks, downloading answers to homework, and researching for school projects and assignments). It is also, in some very crucial ways, more goal-driven, complex, sophisticated, and engaged. Thus, if we want to understand the current and potential capacities of technology for cognition, learning, literacy, and education, we must look to contexts outside our current formal educational system as well as those within.

This course is designed to introduce education researchers and teachers to just such critical educational practices on the Internet. In the first few weeks of the course, we take a broad look at the history and nature of the Internet, particularly as it relates to education and the current “digital divide” between what kids do in and out of school. Next, we take a look at Internet activities “in the wild,” examining some of the key sociotechnical practices that constitute life online, keeping an eye toward what these practices mean for learning and schooling. Finally, we examine broad cultural transitions that the Internet has facilitated and how those shifts bear on the structure and function of the institution of Education itself.
Assessments

The focus of this course will be on critical engagement with the research literature from the vantage point of education, with the weight of course assessments given to weekly reaction papers & in-class discussion.

- **Weekly written assignments**: 70%
- **Participation in class discussions**: 20%
- **Fieldwork in one new technology**: 10%

**Weekly written assignments.** A two page (maximum), 1.5-spaced written paper will be due each week, the day before class, on Wednesday by noon. Assignments will vary from week to week, depending on the topic. Example assignments include: writing a reaction paper to the assigned readings, critiquing a current instructional design that integrates the technology discussed in class, or gathering & reflecting on some small piece of data from a given online tool. Reaction papers, the most frequent format assigned, should (i) summarize the main points of the reading for that week, (ii) draw connections between those main points and your own observations, and (iii) then raise an issue or question for further discussion in class (in that order). No late papers will be accepted; however, students are allowed to skip two response papers over the course of the term, resulting in ten reaction papers total turned in throughout the semester. The reaction papers will be serve as the basis for discussion each week; therefore, students should bring a copy of his or her own reaction paper to class and be prepared to elaborate on the points raised.

**Participation in class discussions.** This is a graduate seminar, so participation in class discussion (both face-to-face in class and, potentially, online) is important and will be included as part of your grade. If you need to miss a class, please contact me.

**Fieldwork in one online technology discussed in class.** (evidence due 12/10). Throughout the course, we will discuss various online technologies that are ubiquitous to the digital generation. Inevitably, there will be at least one such technology you are not yet familiar with. For this course, you are expected to learn how to use one such new technology and to reflect on that experience as both a learner and an educator. Evidence of fieldwork will be due by the last class of the semester and the nature of such evidence is up to each student; however, it should reflect one’s individual goals in using the tool (we will discuss this in more detail in class). Please be creative.

Readings

The complete list of readings can be found in the course syllabus (below). All articles are available on our course basecamp website.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Tentative) Syllabus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sept 4</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Sept 11** | The Internet / Web 2.0.  
| **Sept 18** | The Internet in Education: Digital Disconnect.  
  - Technology for fieldwork selected. |
| **Sept 25** | The Digital Generation.  
| **Oct 2** | Internet as Content Resource / Information Seeking Behaviors.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct 16</td>
<td>No class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 27</td>
<td>No class (Thanksgiving)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Dec 11 | Netroots               | • Readings TBA  
  • *Evidence of fieldwork in one new technology due.* |