

bissts
science, technology, society
section b spring 2011
t/th 8-10 pm
UW1 051

397

computers aren't calculators

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UW2 228
t/th 7-8 pm



jentyryteaches.com/397/

Welcome to Science, Technology, & Society: Computers Aren't Calculators!

Pithily put, this is a course about computers and film. We will explore how film (as a mode of producing history and culture) corresponds with the history of computers and computation. That said, a bulk of our time will be spent watching and discussing films (from the 1950s to the present), as well as working through various approaches to computer culture. We will likely ask questions such as these: How do people learn about computers through film, and to what effects? How are computers socially or discursively constructed? How are they tied to questions of race, gender, sexuality, class, labor, and power? What kinds of identities and narratives form around them, and how? What are their aesthetics on the screen? How do they function as characters in films? Do they have agency, and in what ways or situations? How are all of these questions historically contingent?



The list goes on, and the point—at least for now—is that we will be concentrating our efforts not on, say, computer programming or computer science, but on **computers as objects of cultural criticism**, acknowledging all the while the limitations of this perspective.

Aside from writing often, you will also be asked to experiment with collaboratively and actively engaging film. One crucial component of this class will be a Twitter-based backchannel (#bis397), through which we will (in a public forum) chat about films as we watch them. The reason for this experimental approach is for us—as we look at the same screen in the classroom—to **investigate the potential of collective criticism and shared responses** (laughter and frustrations included). Consequently, expect films in fragments. That is, we will often stop and chat about what we are seeing and hearing, not to mention what we are learning through the backchannel (where will we share comments, questions, and links). Indeed, we'll press the limits of multitasking and determine what (if anything) it affords in an academic climate.

The Learning Outcomes

By the quarter's end, you should:

- Become familiar with the **history of computers** (and computation) and demonstrate that familiarity in writing,
- Be able to persuasively articulate (in writing and through in-class conversations) **how computers are culturally embedded** and why their techno-cultures matter,
- Develop competencies in how to **critically approach film**, specifically as a mode of producing history and culture,
- Experiment with collaborative and collective approaches to film, **using a class "backchannel"** as one mechanism, and
- **Write through various critical approaches** to computer culture and explain the differences between them.

These five learning outcomes for the course resonate with the four core learning outcomes for undergraduates in Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences (IAS):

- Critical thinking,
- Collaboration and shared leadership,
- Interdisciplinary research, and
- Writing and presentation.

For more details on the IAS learning objectives, please see this site: <http://www.uwb.edu/ias/iasdegreeportfolio/learningobjectives>. I am happy to further discuss the objectives with you.

Also note that the IAS learning objectives are developed and documented through the IAS degree portfolio process, a process that begins with the program core course and concludes with the portfolio capstone course. For that reason, it is recommended that you retain all work from this course (with comments from me and your peers) for that final portfolio.

Disclaimers

There are no prerequisites for this course. I assume no previous familiarity with film, computers, cultural studies, or science and technology studies. I also welcome students from a broad range of backgrounds, with a variety of educational and professional investments. At any point during the course, please feel free to ask about, or make recommendations for, how the course may be best configured with your educational and professional trajectories.

That said, to do well in the course, you should be able to blend in-class conversations with persuasive writing. You should also be open to cultural approaches to science and technology. In other words, the course material (not to mention my teaching style) generally resists the notion that technical questions and practices are distinct from intellectual ones.

This course will:

- Not rely heavily on lecture,
- Require you to multitask, watching film as you discuss it in a public forum,
- Include frequent, decentralized discussions, and
- Ask you to write often (once per week).

Required Course Materials

For this course, you will need:

- Paper, pen, or mobile technology for in-class writing assignments and note-taking,
- An active UWB e-mail account, and
- A Twitter account and access to it during class.

There is **no text book for the course**. All media for reading, listening, and watching will be circulated via the class WordPress blog or during class. For details on what comes when, see below.

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Assignments

Aside from in-class conversations, there are four ways to contribute to this course. Each way will ultimately be assessed.

Twitter Backchannel

As we view films in this course, we will stop them periodically to discuss them and their relation to history, aesthetics, and politics. However, as we watch, we will also be contributing to (or having a conversation on) a Twitter backchannel (#bis397). You will be expected to frequently contribute to the backchannel, posing questions, chatting with others, providing links, and the like. You are welcome to invite those from outside of the class to participate (via Twitter). In fact, I encourage you to. (I will do the same.) Your participation in the Twitter backchannel will be included in your participation grade. Like conversations during class, I expect you to be respectful on Twitter. Thanks! (My handle is @jenterysayers, by the way.)

Response Papers (All Submitted in Print)

Each Tuesday, you will submit a short response paper. It should be one-page, single-spaced. Each paper will engage one or two questions we collectively raise and decide upon during class (usually the Thursday prior). These questions will be based on issues in and approaches to computer culture.

Response papers 1, 4, and 7 should engage the assigned question (using evidence from the films we view) and be written with a general academic audience in mind. On the day they are due, you should submit them to a peer, not me. (Although I will look at them first.)

Response papers 2, 5, and 8 should respond to papers 1, 4, and 7 (respectively) in the form of a letter to your peer. While these papers will continue addressing questions and issues raised during class, the audience will (of course) be more concrete. These letters may be less formal than those papers written for an academic audience. On the day they are due, you should submit them to a peer, not me. (Although I will look at them first.)

Response papers 3, 6, and 9 should respond to paper couplings 1-2, 4-5, and 7-8 in the form of a letter to me. While these papers will continue addressing questions and issues raised during class, the audience will (of course) be concrete. These papers should take the opportunity to clarify what you are learning during the course, what questions you have, and what you still want to learn. They should also reference the paper couplings preceding them, quoting your writing (or your peer's) when necessary. These letters may be less formal than those papers written for an academic audience, but more formal than a letter to your peer. In class, you should submit them to me, attaching to them the corresponding paper couplings (i.e., 1-2, 4-5, or 7-8).

I will respond, in writing, to papers 3, 6, and 9, which will serve as a mechanism for you to gauge your progress in the course. I will assign a grade to each group of three papers (i.e., 1-2-3, 4-5-6, and 7-8-9).

No worries, before these papers are due, I will provide a quick, detailed review of what you should do for each.

VJ Session

In a collaborative group, you will be given the opportunity to "VJ" (or video jockey) a class meeting, leading us through snippets of films (or even an entire film / TV show) you think is relevant. You will not only be responsible for providing the content for the class viewing; you will also be asked to facilitate our conversations in-class and on Twitter. During class meetings, you will have opportunities to prepare for your VJ session.

Final Paper

Your final paper will be a reflection on the course; however, it will assume the form of an argument for a particular approach to computer culture we discussed during class. The paper will be two-pages, single-spaced. During the second half of the quarter, I will provide a detailed prompt for it.

Evaluation

Final grades (on a 4.0 scale) will be determined using the following percentages and criteria:

In-Class Participation (30% of the grade)

Participation in this course is about a network of ideas: sharing thoughts and talking with, supporting, and listening to others. Class time will often be spent in large/small group conversations and workshops. Collaborative learning and collaborative teaching add interest, excitement, and investment to the classroom experience. Each helps students brainstorm for their projects, unpack concepts, learn from others, and develop proficiency in how to constructively critique other people's work. That said, all of these aspects of in-class participation—not to mention arriving to class on time and prepared—will be included in your participation grade.

Your contributions to the class backchannel (on Twitter) are also included in your participation grade.

Response Papers (40% of the grade)

Your weekly, one-page response papers will collectively count for nearly half of your grade. There are nine total, each emerging from in-class discussions, without a specific prompt. I will assign a grade to three groups of three papers each (i.e., 1-2-3, 4-5-6, and 7-8-9). The average across them will be your final response paper grade.

Cluster-Based VJ Sessions (10% of the grade)

Your collaborative VJ session (conducted during one class toward the quarter's end) will be assessed based upon how persuasively you engage existing discussions during class, what you add to those discussions, and how well-prepared you are to present.

Final Paper (20% of the grade)

Your final paper (two pages) should reflect on the class (including the approaches to film and computer culture we discuss). I will provide a detailed prompt for the assignment.

Schedule

The schedule is subject to change. Below are dates, what we'll do during class, and what's due.

- **T 3/29:** Welcome and Introductions (Nothing Due)
- **Th 3/31:** *Giant Brains* in class (Due: Set up a Twitter account / say hello via the class hashtag)

- **T 4/5:** *Giant Brains* in class (Due: Response #1)
- **Th 4/7:** No class (outside of class: finish *Giant Brains* if need be) (Nothing Due)

- **T 4/12:** *Desk Set* in class (Due: Response #2)
- **Th 4/14:** *Desk Set* in class (Nothing Due)

- **T 4/19:** *Alphaville* in class (Due: Response #3)

- **Th 4/21:** *Alphaville* in class (Nothing Due)
- **T 4/26:** *2001: A Space Odyssey* in class (Due: Response #4)
- **Th 4/28:** *2001: A Space Odyssey* in class (Nothing Due)

- **T 5/3:** *Tron* in class (Due: Response #5)
- **Th 5/5:** *Tron / Hackers* in class (Nothing Due)

- **T 5/10:** *Hackers* in class (Due: Response #6)
- **Th 5/12:** *Sleep Dealer* in class (Nothing Due)

- **T 5/17:** *Sleep Dealer / The Social Network* in class (Due: Response #7)
- **Th 5/19:** *The Social Network* in class (Nothing Due)

- **T 5/24:** VJ Session #1 (Due: Response #8)
- **Th 5/26:** VJ Session #2 (Nothing Due)

- **T 5/31:** VJ Session #3 (Due: Response #9)
- **Th 6/2:** Final Class / Evals / Potluck

- **M 6/6:** Final Paper Due

Attendance

While I do not take attendance, attending class meetings will greatly enhance your chances of submitting a persuasive final paper, learning about the material, collaborating with others, and sharing your ideas in an open, face-to-face learning climate. Given our Twitter backchannel and our collaborative responses to films, active participation will be especially crucial to your learning.

Classroom Conduct and Participation

Since conversations are essential to the quality of this class, I expect that we shall work together to create an atmosphere of respect. College level discourse does not shy away from sensitive issues, including questions of race, gender, class, sexuality, politics, and religion, and neither will we. There are going to be differences in opinions, beliefs, and interpretations when we question texts and cultural issues. Students need not agree with the arguments in the course material or with what their peers or I have to say—in fact, it is important to think critically and question the course material. Still, you must do so intelligently and with respect. Respect for difference is instrumental to creating a classroom in which a variety of ideas can be exchanged and points of view can be explored.

What is crucial to this course is that you are comfortable expressing yourself and your ideas. If, for whatever reason, you are not, then you should notify me immediately in class or visit me in my office hours. I understand that some people are more comfortable speaking in front of the class than others. That said, participation in office hours will also augment your participation grade. If you are not comfortable bringing your concerns directly to me or are not satisfied with my response to your inquiry, then I encourage you to contact IAS.

Late Policy

Since your response papers will often require a peer's response, they should be submitted on time. Otherwise, you risk quickly falling behind in class.

While I will accept late papers, they do negatively influence your response papers grade. I will also not comment on late papers. (Yikes!)

Incompletes

University rules state that “an incomplete is given only when the student has been in attendance and has done satisfactory work until within two weeks at the end of the quarter and has furnished proof satisfactory to the instructor that the work cannot be completed because of illness or other circumstances beyond the student’s control.” Please also note that IAS strongly discourages incompletes.

Academic Integrity

Please see this site (<http://www.uwb.edu/student-services/academic-conduct>) for crucial information regarding academic integrity. The library also has an extremely useful website, with resources here: <http://libguides.uwb.edu/ai>. You are responsible for knowing what constitutes a violation of the University of Washington Student Code, and you will be held responsible for any such violations whether or not they were intentional.

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else’s ideas or writing as your own. In this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people’s thoughts and writing—as long as they are cited. Many students do not have a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism. It includes:

- A student failing to cite the source of an idea,
- A student failing to cite sources of paraphrased material,
- A student failing to cite courses of specific language and/or passages, and
- A student submitting someone else’s work as her or his own.

If you have doubts about whether to cite or acknowledge another person’s writing, then you should just let me know. Better safe than sorry. And think about it—Google, websites galore, and the fact that I was an undergraduate, too, make it really, really easy for me to spot plagiarized work. For more information on plagiarism, visit: <http://www.uwb.edu/learningtech/plagiarism>.

Disability Support Services

Support for students with disabilities is a campus priority. If you believe that you have a disability and would like academic accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) at (425) 352-5307, (425) 352-5303 (TDD), (425) 352.5455 (fax), dss@uwb.edu, or <http://www.uwb.edu/student-services/dss>.

I will work with DSS to provide students with disabilities what they require. I will also take suggestions specific to this class to meet student needs. The course syllabus and policies are available in large print, as are other class materials. The course site should adhere to accessibility standards. When it does not, please contact me and let me know. I will revise it accordingly.

Inclement Weather

Please check if the campus may be closed due to weather. Information on suspension of operations will be made public and available through the media. You can learn of campus operations status from the website or by calling the Campus Information Hotline: (425) 352-3333. You may also sign up with an alert system that will contact you via email or text message if classes are canceled. For more information on the alert process, please see this site. Class activities will be rescheduled as needed.

Student Support Services

Library: (425) 352-5340
Writing Center: (425) 352-5253
Quantitative Skills Center: (425) 352-3170
Student Success and Career Services: (425) 352-3776
Student Counseling Services: (425) 352-3183

Contacting Me

Email: JSayers@uwb.edu (I generally respond within 24 hours.)
Office: UW2 228
Spring Quarter Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 7 – 8 p.m.
Phone: (425) 352-3460
Mailbox: 358511 (in the IAS Graduate Office in UW2 340)
Be in touch! I'm looking forward to the quarter!