

“The invention of *Printing*, though ingenious, compared with the invention of *Letters*, is no great matter. But who was the first that found the use of Letters, is not known.” — Hobbes

## **LIS 694**

# **Information, Technology and Society: Philosophical Dimensions of Library Studies**

Summer, 2004

Phone: 235-7338 (work)

Time: Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 7:30 to 9:45

Course webpage: <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~richards/LIS694.html>

Instructor: Brian Richardson

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From the very beginning, human language has been sustained by various technologies of communication. The introduction of writing in an oral culture is frequently marked as a decisive cultural shift. The same is said of the introduction of the printed book and of the computer. But what is it that makes these changes in communication technology important? What is communication supposed to do for us, or to us?

The principle goal of this course is to introduce students to philosophical issues associated with technologies of information. We will examine several related themes.

The first important theme concerns the relationship between information, technology and human beings. What do we do when we read? What impact does information have on us? Does information make us free, or does it control us? These questions have a significant social dimension. What impact does writing, the printed book, or the internet have on society? What is significant, if anything, about the shift from oral to written to electronic media? Do different technologies change society? Do they change us?

The second important theme concerns what we mean by “information” and how it relates to other concepts such as knowledge, wisdom, facts and experience. While information is a relatively new concept, some of the current debates are echoes of debates that are centuries old.

Finally, technologies of information raise various ethical and political concerns. Who should control information? Should anybody be able to own it? What sorts of information ought to be available? To whom? What is the good of information, anyway?

### **Course Philosophy:**

This course emphasizes developing intellectual skills and knowledge necessary to engage with the philosophical debates concerning the library and technological change. The broad goal of the course is to help students acquire an awareness of the basic arguments that justify and undermine the value of libraries in our society.

### **Teaching Methods:**

Reading, reading again, class discussions of what's been read, lectures, written assignments, and a written examination.

### **Technical Requirements:**

This course requires you to use a computer to produce all of the written assignments. You must also become familiar with the HITS technology used in the classroom.

### **Program Learning Objectives**

This course addresses the following objectives of the LIS Program, enabling students to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the philosophy, principles, policies and ethics of library and information science and technology;
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the development and communication of knowledge;
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the development and interrelationship of librarianship and information science;
5. Demonstrate theoretical understanding of and basic competencies in evaluating, selecting and organizing information sources;
6. Demonstrate theoretical understanding of and basic competencies in retrieval, dissemination, utilization and evaluation of information sources; and
12. Demonstrate an understanding of the above goals within the perspective of prevailing technologies.

### **Course Learning Objectives**

The reading and writing assignments are designed to impart a knowledge of key philosophical issues surrounding information technology and encourage the development of analytical skills useful for engaging with works that talk about those issues. By the end of the course students will be able to:

1. demonstrate an awareness of the assumptions that ground debates over the role and value of information technologies;
2. engage in effective and philosophically rigorous debates over the value of

- information and technology to people and society;
3. critically analyze the political, social, and moral implications of various technological changes; and
  4. demonstrate a familiarity with some of the key authors and texts in the western philosophical tradition that consider the connection between reading and the human condition.

### **Assignments:**

Analytic Reaction papers	40% total, 10% each
Long paper	20%
Final Exam	30%
Participation	10%

Students are expected to write 4 analytical papers (2 to 3 pages each). The paper topics will be given each Friday and the paper will be due the following Monday. No late papers will be accepted. Over the duration of the course there will be a total of 5 topics. The best 4 papers will be counted towards the final grade

The long paper should be roughly 5 pages and focus on some topic relevant to the course. The long paper is due Monday, August 5th. Students are encouraged to rewrite their papers in light of comments made by the instructor.

The final exam will be essay questions reflecting the readings and topics discussed during the course.

Active class participation is essential to the atmosphere of this class because it is only through intellectual discussion that the key philosophical issues can be explored adequately. Students are expected to prepare for each class by reading and reflecting on the texts assigned for that day.

### **Required Texts:**

Johann Herder and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Origin of Language*  
(University of Chicago Press: 0-226-73012-3)

Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*. (Ballantine Books: 0-345-34296-8)

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Harcourt: 0156787334)

Theodore Roszak, *The Cult of Information* (University of California Press:  
0-520-08584-1)

Reading packet

## Topics and Reading Schedule

### **Wednesday, July 7th — Introductions**

Chapter from Italo Calvino's *If On a Winter's Night a Traveller* (handout)

### **Friday, July 9th — Language and humanity**

*Politics*, Book 1, Aristotle (reading packet)

### **Monday, July 12th — Language and Thought**

*Leviathan*, Chapter 8, Thomas Hobbes (reading packet)

### **Wednesday, July 14th — The Origin of Languages**

*Origins of Languages*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, chapters 1 to 11

### **Friday, July 16th — The Origin of Languages**

*Origins of Languages*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, chapters 12 to end

### **Monday, July 19th — The Origin of Languages**

*Essay on the Origin of Language*, Johann Gottfried Herder, section I

### **Wednesday, July 21st — The Origin of Languages**

*Essay on the Origin of Language*, Johann Gottfried Herder, sections II and III

### **Friday, July 23rd — Political Factors in the Organization of Language**

*Areopagitica*, John Milton (reading packet)

### **Monday, July 26th — Political Factors in the Organization of Language**

*Fahrenheit 451*, Ray Bradbury

*Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman (reading packet)

**Wednesday, July 28th — Social Factors in the Organization of Language**

*A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf (continued)

**Friday, July 30th — Social Factors in the Organization of Language**

*A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf (continued)

**Monday, August 2nd — Assessing the Quality of Language**

"What is Enlightenment?", Immanuel Kant (reading packet)

"Politics and the English Language", George Orwell (reading packet)

**Wednesday, August 4th — Language as a Tool of Social Control**

"Panopticism", Michel Foucault

**Friday, August 6th — Some Introductions to Digital Text**

*Being Digital*, Nicholas Negroponte (reading packet)

*Digital Mosaic*, Steven Holtzman (reading packet)

*Cult of Information*, Theodore Roszak, Introduction and chapter 1

**Monday, August 9th — The Cult of Information**

*Cult of Information*, Theodore Roszak, Chapters 2 to 6

**Wednesday, August 11th — The Cult of Information**

*Cult of Information*, Theodore Roszak, Chapters 7 to end

**Friday, August 13th — Last Day of Class**

Final Exam