

**COM 420 / JSIS B 419 / POL S 468**

**Comparative Media Systems**  
**Class Meets Mondays and Wednesdays 1:30pm to 3:30pm, Room 302**  
**5 credits**

**Course Syllabus**

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**Office Hours Wednesdays 9:30am to 11:30am, Room 141**

Communication patterns around the world are being reconfigured by digital and social media. Public policy shapes the innovation of new media technologies, the organization of cultural production, and the diffusion of global media. At the same time, public policy makers themselves need communication strategies, because global media can make or break new regulatory ideas and can be a source of feedback on existing public policy. New communication technologies such as blogs, online communities, and social media have an impact on public opinion and traditional print and broadcast media have a changing role in political discourse. Today, digital media has a key role in shaping our economic, political and cultural lives.

The range of phenomena studied across the social and policy sciences is impressive: the global information economy, the organizational behavior of firms, and the dot-com boom; the structure of the world system, the bureaucratic efficiency of states, the international politics of technical standards; cultural production and consumption, intercultural communication, and ownership diversity of digital media systems. The use of new ICTs, such as mobile phones and the internet, is also being studied in different contexts, from small and local organizational field sites such as work places, households, and schools, to large institutions such as states, firms, social movements and justice systems. In addition, there are new social forms of organization in cyberspace, forms of organization that help define and indeed constitute information societies.

We will critically explore the concepts often used in discussions of contemporary international political economy, including “network society”, “digital divide,” and “information society”. We will also review the theories of modernization, dependency, and underdevelopment that have been used to understand the problems and prospects of development. Case studies from around the world will be used wherever possible. Students will have significant freedom to develop their own research interests through a paper on a topic of their own choosing. Through diverse readings, students will also learn about the various methodologies for understanding global media and communication.

What is an information society? How do well do these theories—proposed to help explain transitions from agrarian to industrial society and the evolution of late industrial capitalism—help explain the network society, open society or information society? Is e-government a straightforward means of building state capacity and further rationalizing public bureaucracies, or are there signs of a deeper transformation in the institution of the state? What is the role of blogs, wikis and other digital media systems in the culture and news diets of people living in authoritarian regimes? While the role of mobile phones and the internet in democratic movements has been feted from Iqaluit to Indonesia, no political revolution has occurred because of the internet. But today, are democratic transitions possible without

it? How has the international high tech sector been structured to limit the types of technology production and consumption in different countries? If there are persistent international institutions for extracting natural resource wealth from poor countries, do these institutions have a similar role in extracting information, innovation, or ingenuity from poor countries?

To cover and debate themes we will use a range of digital video, audio and textual artifacts, including interactive Prezis, discussion boards, and streaming content.

### **Course Goals and Objectives**

By the end of the class, student will be able to:

- understand the role of new media communication tools in local, national, and regional development;
- understand core concepts of political economy, media development, and technology diffusion;
- understand the strengths of comparative research and apply the comparative method to the study of media systems.

### **Course Learning Objectives**

By the end of the class, student will be able to:

- design a small research project and collect data, assess its quality, and manipulate it;
- prepare an original, high-impact digital presentation; and
- manage real working relationships under tight deadlines.

### **Requirements**

Students are encouraged to share their critical insights on development and communication so as to help all of us understand specific theoretical questions about the relationship between cultures, communication and development. Although this course has no formal prerequisites, students with life experience overseas, or coursework in communication, international studies, or political science will be best prepared for the pace and expectations of this course.

### **Course Prerequisites**

This course has no formal prerequisites. Another 400-level course in communication, political science or sociology will help prepare students for the pace and expectations of this class.

### **Technology Requirements**

In addition to the basic technology requirements outlined in the Online Student Handbook, for this course you will need the latest installation of Flash to run Prezi files.

### **Completion Requirements**

To successfully complete this course, you must do the following:

- read this course guide and the assigned sections of the texts;
- complete and submit all assignments;
- demonstrate that you have read and reflected on the assigned readings;
- participate in specified team activities; and
- actively contribute to each discussion topic.

### **Netiquette**

The term “netiquette” is used to refer to online etiquette over networks, such as online communities, forums, and even online learning environments. Following the rules of netiquette improves the readability of your messages, lays the groundwork for making trustworthy connections and helps other people to better understand you. You are asked to review the Netiquette Guidelines in the Online Student Handbook.

### **Online Student Handbook**

This handbook answers questions about your online learning course, such as how to purchase your text, schedule an exam, arrange for a proctor, obtain a transcript, and get technical help if you need it. The handbook also provides additional resources, such as how to order books or journals from the library and how to study for an online course.

### **Required Materials**

There is only one required textbook for this class, Castells and the Media (Thousand Oaks, CA: Polity, 2011), ISBN-13: 978-0745652597. If you would like a hardcopy you are welcome to order it, however I am also willing to provide an electronic pdf of the book. Additional scholarly and news articles will be presented in the course and often embedded in topic-specific Prezis.

### **This Course**

This course has ten lessons and several minor assignments. Each lesson is followed with a short number of multiple choice questions designed to let you demonstrate your familiarity with the concepts covered in that lesson. There will be three short structured debate sessions, an exercise in mapping out your own social networks, and an opportunity to produce a digital artifact on a topic of your choosing. There are non-graded quizzes to just to test the knowledge you have picked up in each lesson.

### **Key Terms**

Each lesson includes terms that are important to the concepts you will learn in the lesson and are intended to serve as guides to your study; these terms are boldfaced and italicized where they appear in the text, are identified in lesson plans, and your knowledge about them is queried at the end of each lesson. You will be expected to use the terms in your written work and presentation material whenever possible. You will find the terms defined either in the lesson commentary, the assigned readings, or both.

### **Wednesday Lesson Meetings**

On Wednesdays we will meet to discuss the ideas and questions from one of the lessons. Many lessons come with a posted question or comment from the instructor that should help drive discussion. But there will also be structured debates that allow teams of participants to coordinate extended debates on three questions related to course themes. These are for your benefit; they also help your instructor evaluate your understanding and adjust accordingly. These face to face discussions allow you and your classmates to share knowledge and help each other learn.

### **Monday Lab Meetings**

On Mondays we will meet to do lab work collecting data about how algorithms are used to manipulate public opinion over social media. This will be time to catalogue and analyze comparative social media trends, working closely with the instructor to understand the latest technology trends. The first Monday Lab Meeting will involve training on the system we have for cataloguing bots. Thereafter, students will pick up a new case assignment on arrival in class on Monday and it must be completed by the beginning of class the following Monday.

## **About the Lessons**

There are nine lessons in this course.

### *Lesson 1: Media and Collective Action*

Lesson 1 defines the project of studying media systems, and introduces both some of the features of media systems that we will study and the arc of the course. This session will be about collective action theory and the contemporary processes by which the public mobilizes for political and policy change.

### *Lesson 2: Social Media and Political Change*

Understanding contemporary communication patterns means understanding the strength of weak ties. In this class we will discuss the original idea of strong and weak ties, and then evaluate that original idea in today's media context.

### *Lesson 3: Network Societies and Political Discourse*

This class will introduce the theory of the network society and one of the classic debates about the impact of communication on public life.

### *Lesson 4: Technology and Open Societies*

This lesson will be about the open society metaphor and the role of digital media in contemporary political discourse.

### *Lesson 5: Social Media and Your Social Networks*

How can the theories about social networks and media systems be used to improve our own political, economic, and cultural lives?

### *Lesson 6: Digital Diplomacy*

Lesson 6 introduces one of the most important challenges in contemporary international relations, the use of social media in diplomacy. Diplomacy and the practice of intergovernmental relations have been significantly impacted by digital media. But is the impact always positive? Are there traditional protocols of global diplomacy that are worth protecting?

### *Lesson 7: Censorship and Surveillance*

This session will involve considering the different ways that censorship and surveillance are done in different countries, from democratic to authoritarian ones.

### *Lesson 8: Big Data and Regime Type*

Digital media is having a significant impact on the policy making process, even though many state organizations and political elites are reluctant to adapt. How will big data impact different regimes?

### *Lesson 9: Ignite Talks*

This session will be dedicated to viewing the ignite talks made by the class.

## **About the Assignments**

*Public Debate Assignments.* There will be three public debate assignments, where small teams are assigned to argue the affirmative or negative to three questions:

- Public Debate Assignment 1 – Did Digital Media Cause the Arab Spring?
- Public Debate Assignment 2 – Should Diplomats Be Allowed to Tweet?
- Public Debate Assignment 3 – Should NSA's Digital Surveillance Stop?

*Bot Coding & Essays.* You will be asked to research, catalogue, and analyze bots—automated scripts for manipulating public opinion over social media like Facebook and Twitter. If you have language specific skills you may be able to nominate cases from the social media platforms of other countries. This work involves a) online research into any news or user coverage about the impact of a bot b) answering a closed-ended survey about the features of the bot and c) writing a 250-word synopsis of the social impact of the bot. On an average week the coding assignments will be made on a Monday and will be due by the following Monday. As students get comfortable with the research and coding system, they may be able to complete coding assignments within class time.

*Data Memo – Visualizing Your Own Digital Networks.* This is a short reflective essay in which you analyze some of the data from your own social networks. You can choose any one of three ways of analyzing your social networks—each will let you use a different kind of skill set. This Data Memo should describe your process and what you found, and offer some explanation about why you found what you found. The essay should be no more than 750 words and is due in the middle of the course.

*Ignite Talk, Outline and Presentation.* Your ignite talk can be on any of the topics or questions raised in the class, and you can develop your talk in two stages. In the middle of the course you can draft an outline or script, and begin collecting any digital artifacts. You may choose how to deliver your ignite talk: You may record it and we will watch it in class, or you may present your talk in class.

### **Assessment and Grading**

In this course, you are assessed and graded on your contribution to ongoing discussions and the public debate, the quality of your bot essays, the thoughtfulness of your social media use essay, and the impact of your ignite talk.

### **Assessment Criteria**

This is the general grading rubric that informs grading decisions. The best way to catch many of the mistakes identified below is by asking a friend to proofread your writing before you submit the assignment. If your writing style impedes my ability to understand your arguments your grade will suffer, so it is a good idea to have someone proofread your writing. Use William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (New York: Macmillan, 1979) for writing style questions. The University of Washington has a number of resources to help with writing style, and [they are described online](#). Howard Becker's *Writing for Social Sciences* also has advice on developing good writing habits. I recommend that citations be formatted according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Please refer to the University of Washington's "[Student Conduct Code](#)" for the definitions and consequences of plagiarism.

- Is spelling and basic grammar perfect?
- If this is an essay, does it have a thesis statement, and do its paragraphs have topic sentences?
- How closely does the essay follow the assignment instructions?
- How does the writing style and analytical insight compare with peers?
- Does the author use gender-neutral language?
- Is the essay too far above or below the word limit?
- Are references formatted according to a consistent style, such as "Chicago Style" or "APA Style"?
- Are significant chunks of text pasted in from online documents written by other people?

The Bot Essays, Data Memo and Ignite Talk Outline writing will be evaluated according to:

- the quality of reasoning and insights;
- the quality of examples and connections to course concepts and readings;
- the appropriate use and citation of outside sources;
- writing that makes the ideas easy to understand and appreciate through good organization, correct grammar and spelling and respect for the word limit.

Excellent writing will show depth of thought and a thorough understanding and application of course concepts and readings. The analysis will be insightful and supported by several strong examples from lectures and/or readings. The evaluation will show original thought and logical links to the analysis. The paper will be very well-organized and well-written, with correct grammar and spelling.

An average paper will meet the requirements of the assignment, with adequate analysis, evaluation and reference sections. A paper that fails to meet the basic requirements will lose points for failing to analyze or evaluate, for superficial explanations, lack of examples, poor organization and/or sloppy editing.

**Evaluation**

The public debates will be evaluated shortly after the final debates have occurred, and the participation scores will be determined at the end of the class.

Public Debate	20 points
Bot Coding & Essays (BC&E)	90 points
Data Memo	20 points
Ignite Talk Script	5 points
Ignite Talk	45 points
Participation	20 points
Total	200 points

The points earned will be doubled to become a score out of 400, and divided by 100 to make the score out of 4.0.

Participation will be evaluated by the degree to which you advance conversation in the discussion forums (when you are not participating as part of the required public debate assignment). I’ll look for evidence of your engagement with the material, including the knowledge checks and interactive content I’ve collected. I will also look for other evidence that you’ve contributed, perhaps by sharing content or ideas over the class twitter hashtag and participating peer review discussion of debates and ignite videos. There is no “shyness” component to the grade, and contributing in innovative ways generates the evidence of your participation. Late assignments will be accepted with a lateness penalty of 2 points per day. If there is a medical explanation for the missed deadlines, providing me with a note from your doctor will mean the penalty can be waived.

**Study Tips**

In any given week, your study plan could look something like this:

- First, review any Prezis, lecture videos, or documentaries for that lesson. If there are interactive websites offered as examples of the phenomena we are studying, play around with them.
- Second, reflect on the materials presented. How do they connect to the previous week's topics? Have any questions come up in a previous lesson that relate to the immediate topic? Is there evidence from your own life or own observations that you should share because it confirms or contradicts the evidence presented in this week's materials?

Take notes or underline areas that seem especially important to you. These notations should be helpful to you as a review before the written assignments. It can be convenient to read scholarly essays online, but is often best to use many media to learn about ideas...including paper. Printing off an article allows you to do "active reading"... mark up the margins, underline key thesis statements, and identify things you think are well said. Write NO by lines you disagree with and YES by the turns of phrase you like! Active reading, pen in hand, allows you to follow the flow of the argument. Use several colors, and have a highlighter pen at hand. This is what emoticons are for. Mark up the text so that next time you consult it you can quickly spot any research questions, find good quotable quotes, and identify the key points of argument.

### **About the Instructor**

Philip N. Howard is a professor and writer. He holds faculty appointments at [Central European University](#) in Budapest, the [University of Washington](#) in Seattle, and is a fellow at Columbia University's [Tow Center for Digital Journalism](#). Currently, he works as the Director of the [Center for Media, Data and Society](#) and the founding Professor at the new [School of Public Policy](#) at Central European University. He investigates the impact of digital media on political life around the world, and he is a frequent commentator on global media and political affairs. His projects on bots, digital activism, global information access, and political Islam have been supported by the [National Science Foundation](#), [US Institutes of Peace](#), and [Intel's People and Practices Group](#). He has published seven books and over 100 commentary essays, conference papers, book chapters, and academic articles. His research spans several disciplines, and he is among a small number of scholars who have won awards from all three major academic associations for his work in political science, sociology, and communication. He is the author, most recently, of [Pax Technica: How the Internet of Things May Set Us Free or Lock Us Up](#). He is the recipient of an ERC Consolidator award for his study of algorithms and public life. His BA is in political science from [Innis College](#) at the University of Toronto, his MSc is in economics from the [London School of Economics](#), and his PhD is in sociology from [Northwestern University](#). He has held senior academic posts at Stanford, Princeton, and Columbia Universities. His website is [philhoward.org](#), and he tweets from [@pnhoward](#).