

ENGLISH 382 : CAPSTONE
DIGITAL LITERACIES : COMPOSING W/ SOUND

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office hours . Tu Th 12:30-1:30pm + by appt

class meets: 2:30-3:45pm
Bartlett 205 + Du Bois 767 (OIT Mac lab)

There is no such thing as an
empty space or an empty time.
There is always something to
see, something to hear.

In fact, try as we may to make
a silence, we cannot.

—John Cage

BACKGROUND

In the past two decades or so, our communication landscape has undergone some pretty dramatic changes—thanks in large part to the Internet and a host of digital technologies. These changes have prompted educators, politicians, employers, and others to argue that students, workers, and citizens must have the skills needed to make effective use of digital technologies. The phrase “digital literacy” has become a shorthand way to refer to these skills, and to suggest that these skills are just as fundamental in the 21st century as reading and writing were in the previous century. (There have also been calls for *computer literacy*, *information literacy*, *visual literacy*, and *multiliteracies*.)

In this course, we will explore some of the questions and ideas that form the backdrop for this concern with digital literacy: What does it mean to be digitally literate? To be a “digital native”? How have digital technologies changed the skills we need to communicate effectively? What sorts of qualities will 21st century workers need to succeed, especially those whose jobs require them to work with language or to communicate ideas? What is meant by “convergence” and what are some of its consequences? What new kinds of texts are being produced as a result of digital technologies?

New technologies don’t just change how we do our jobs; they alter the ways we create and sustain social connections, and the way we represent ourselves to the world. What are the risks and rewards of these new forms, and how can we navigate them most effectively?

COURSE OBJECTIVES

We will have two primary aims in this course: (1) to read and think about digital technology and its impact (on culture, on us as writer-communicators), and (2) to explore audio as a medium of communication.

You will:

reflect on your own relationship to technology,
practice recording, editing, and composing with digital audio,
reflect on the process of communicating through sound, and
research and write about a digital technology for a final paper + sound project.

You will use:

Audacity and GarageBand (sound editing software),
WordPress (blogging program), and
sound recording devices (USB mic, Zoom recorder).

TECHNOLOGY

This course asks you to be patient, open-minded, and resourceful. Working with technology can be challenging, so expect that there will be times when things go wrong or you just plain feel frustrated. This is normal—it happens to everyone (including IT professionals and your instructor). What matters most is how you respond. Initiative, perseverance, and willingness to problem-solve (and help each other!) in the face of such challenges will help your grade.

PARTICIPATION

This is not a lecture course. Your presence and your voice are essential. You will be expected to contribute to class discussions and workshops through your thoughtful reading, writing, questions, comments, and sharing of information. Regular attendance, participation, and completion of readings and other homework are expected.

When we are in the computer classroom, you are expected to direct your full attention to others when they are speaking. This means removing your hands from the keyboard/mouse, and looking at the person speaking, not your monitor. No cell phones or texting during class.

COURSE POLICIES

All work must be submitted on time. Unless otherwise noted, graded assignments are due at the start of class. Work submitted after I have collected assignments will lose 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g., a “B” drops to a “B-”), and will continue to drop by 1/3 for each additional day late. Being absent does not excuse late work; if you plan to miss class, it is your responsibility to make arrangements with me *before* your absence to hand in your assignment early.

“My printer broke!” and **“My printer ran out of ink!”** (and similar crises) do not excuse late work. Stock up on ink. Save often. Back up your work. Leave ample time for printing.

Seriously, people: BACK UP YOUR WORK. This means saving it in *more than one* place, to more than one device/computer/server. (For example, if you keep your sound files on a USB memory stick, make sure to regularly copy those files to your home computer.)

Plan to attend every class meeting. The classroom is an intellectual community, and your participation in that community is necessary to its well-being. Accordingly, attendance in all class meetings is expected. If you miss more than 2 meetings, you can expect it to affect your final grade.

If you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to contact a classmate to get notes and figure out what you missed. This is not an online course, so please do not request course recaps via email. If you will be absent due to a religious observance or school-sponsored activity, please contact me in advance to let me know you’ll be gone.

Plagiarism is unacceptable, and may result in a failing grade for the course. If you are using the ideas of another person in your writing, you should cite your source, using quotation marks to designate direct quotation. Passages that re-express another’s ideas in your own words should be accompanied by appropriate citation information. If you’re unsure about how to cite your sources (in a written or recorded piece), please ask me *before* submitting your assignment for a grade.

Give credit for all borrowed or sampled sounds and images. Sound or music sampled from an existing source must be credited to its original creator. I strongly encourage you to use sound that comes from the public domain, *or* that you have created, *or* that have appropriate Creative Commons licenses.

COURSE TEXTS, SUPPLIES

Course texts

Palfrey, John G. and Urs Gasser. *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*. New York: Basic Books, 2008. (available at Amherst Books in downtown Amherst)

Other readings will be made available electronically or as handouts; bring a hard copy to class on the day the assigned reading is due.

Gadgetry

USB microphone that will work on Macs and PCs (price range: \$25-\$40)
External USB memory device, 1 GB or larger
Earphones or earbuds
AA batteries for the Zoom recorders

Printing

You may be asked to bring printed copies of drafts to class workshopping sessions, and will be expected to submit paper copies for some assignments (though significantly less than in 380 or 381). Please plan accordingly, whether that means buying enough printer points, ink for your printer, or allowing adequate time to print in a busy computer lab.

Stapler and folder

You will need a stapler to fasten together your paper submissions; you may need to use a binder clip or folder for thicker documents. Do not hand in loose papers.

TECHNOLOGY

Use a USB drive or your UDrive to back up your work and make sure that you can access it from our computer classroom. Do not rely on lab machines for storage.

Check your UMass email account regularly for course updates and announcements.

ASSIGNMENTS*

10% participation, preparation for class meetings

20% blog entries, sound exercises, quizzes

10% sound project #1: technology autobiography

15% sound project #2

10% research paper proposal and bibliography

15% research paper

20% sound project #3: research audio piece + reflection

***All major assignments must be completed to pass this course.**