

Calendar and Readings (week of May 9)

Revised due dates

- Rewrite of paper #1 due Friday, May 6 at 5:00 P.M.
- First draft of paper #2 due Sunday, May 8 at 11:59 P.M.
- Hardcopy printouts of paper #2 are due at TWP (Huang 049) for 181W students whose last names begin with A–K by noon on Monday, May 9

Monday, May 9

I'll start off Monday's class with by exploring the history of social networks, even before cyberspace. I'll then move on to describe some of the first online virtual communities, which were the MUDs described in the Curtis and Dibbell sections of the reader. We will then move on to a more general discussion of how social networks and the availability of instantaneous, worldwide communication are changing people's lives.

Readings: The following articles from Part 8 of the reader: Curtis (page 296), Dibbell (page 317), Shirky (page 345), and boyd (page 351).

Thought questions:

- What response would you have recommended to the LambdaMOO community after wake of the incident described in Julian Dibbell's "A Rape in Cyberspace"?
- Pavel Curtis's paper about LambdaMOO talks about the problem of governance in virtual worlds. How does the notion of governance survive in an anonymous world suffused with a libertarian culture? Should it? What are the alternatives?
- The article by danah boyd appeared just a year and a half ago but already seems dated. What are the most important changes you can identify in the Facebook community she describes?

Wednesday, May 11

For the first part of class, I'm going to show excerpts from a documentary called *HATE.COM: Extremists on the Internet*, which was aired as an HBO special in 2000—which is of course a lifetime ago in Internet time. Although parts of the documentary (which was directed by Bill Guttentag who used to teach in Stanford's documentary film program) are clearly dated, it nonetheless raises important questions about the limits of free expression in cyberspace. After the film, there will be time to talk about your reactions, both to the dangers described in the documentary and on the similar issues raised by the Nuremberg Files case.

Readings: The *New York Times* articles on the Nuremberg Files case in Handout #14.

Extra-credit opportunity for this week

Next spring, I'm going to be co-teaching a new course with the following description:

Social Animals, Social Revolutions, and Social Networks—We like to think of social networks as contemporary phenomena. But before Facebook, individuals organized themselves in social networks; before Twitter, revolutionaries used media to communicate and coordinate their messages. In fact, even animal societies are networked. Do all these social networks share certain properties? What can we learn by comparing them? These are some of the questions we will ask in this course, as we traverse the natural world and past societies before taking a fresh look at our modern social networks.

Professor Deborah Gordon (Biology)

Associate Professor Dan Edelstein (French and Italian)

Professor Eric Roberts (Computer Science)

4 units, Spring quarter

The course is a pilot for what are currently called “Big Ideas” courses, which are part of the draft recommendations coming out of the Study of Undergraduate Education at Stanford (SUES). These courses are designed to provide new models for interdisciplinary education at Stanford, which has been growing in popularity and importance in recent years. Each of these courses will be taught by a faculty team from departments that do not ordinarily interact closely at the curricular level. By bringing those departments together, the hope is that both faculty and students will find interesting synergies and new modes of thought that will enrich the intellectual content of the participating programs.

Your assignment for extra credit is simply to come up with an example in modern social networking that illustrates the classic French adage, most commonly attributed to Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr in 1849, that reads *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* (“the more things change, the more they stay the same”). In other words, what I want is a paragraph or two that (1) identify a common phenomenon that at first seems peculiar to online social networks and (2) make the case that a clear analogue of this phenomenon existed in social interaction before the Internet existed. As always, extra-credit submissions are due Sunday at 11:59 P.M.

Reaction paper assignment for sections starting May 12

Not surprisingly, cyberlibertarians typically defend very strongly the principle of free expression on the Internet and have, for example, campaigned strongly against restrictive laws like the Communications Decency Act and similarly restrictive court decisions like the Nuremberg Files described in Handout #14. What has been interesting to me is that some cyberspace evangelists have taken the position that even the constraints that apply to other media—libel laws, restrictions on speech that presents an actual threat of immediate violence, or prohibitions against child pornography—should not apply in the online sphere. Write a one-to-two page paper in which you address the question of whether there is any form of speech that deserves *greater* protection online than the same expression would have in more traditional media.