

Washington Elective
“Digital Governance: From Clay Tablets to the Cloud”

UCR POSC 184

DRAFT SYLLABUS

Professor Randolph C. Head

History, UCR

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Class meetings: Wednesdays, 6:15-9:00 PM

Room:

Office hours, Room 339: Tuesday 5-7 or by appointment
(evening appointments are available)

Course Theme

Politics involves intense communication, and political communication – now more than ever – depends on the technologies and media available to political participants and observers. This course will combine historical and policy-oriented approaches to the question of media technologies and the forms of government they have enabled in the long term, as a way to enrich students’ perspective on the emerging forms of digital governance we will experience in the coming generation.

The first part of the course will consider how various medial environments have inflected political institutions in the past, asking to what extent information technologies, ancient and modern, shape or constrain political decision making. The second part will turn to our contemporary predicament by engaging with the ways that communications technology has shaped recent government practice in the areas of agency rulemaking, deliberation, secrecy, and campaigning.

Students may choose either an analytic or a policy approach for their written assignments, which will involve shared case studies as well as active research into the way media technologies have shaped politics since the Neolithic.

Course ethic

I urge you all to participate in all course activities according to the following set of principles:

1. **Think hard!** The goal of this course is to investigate a complex and rapidly changing medial environment by bringing both historical evidence and contemporary experience to bear. Because media carry as well as shape our ideas, thinking about their influence on our practices and institutions requires precision and care.
2. **Go find out!** The issue we are addressing is rich and multilayered. You will succeed in the course and in Washington (or wherever your future takes you) if you reach out pro-

actively to explore its many ramifications. Course assignments are a starting point, not the maximum limit of your preparations for each class.

3. **Intellectual honesty.** Intellectual honesty has two parts, internal and external. Internal intellectual honesty means that you believe that what you are saying or writing is true or justified. External intellectual honesty requires giving credit for any ideas, texts, words, images and any other stimulus you received from another. Avoid **plagiarism** by providing a reference – in a form appropriate to the perspective you are writing or speaking from – for any material you take from another source. Avoid **copyright infringement** by following the rules for fair use in an educational setting, which allows some use of copyrighted material but not in ways that would harm the copyright holder.

5. **Confidentiality and discretion.** Many of you work at internship sites where confidential material of various kinds may circulate. Please remember that you should never violate the confidence of your workspace for this class, and should respect that all members of the class probably have some information they cannot discuss. To ensure that you're not 'leaking', make it a habit to reflect consciously before telling anecdotes or making use of information you acquired at your internship. Often, it's all right to do so: but only after conscious thought.

Course assignments

The course consists of weekly meetings for discussion and presentation of material on the medial foundations of politics, and how they are shaping emerging digital governance. Class attendance is required. Assigned reading should be done **before** each class meeting. Participation, engagement, and in-class contributions are a vital part of the course for every student.

Students will write a series of short assignments, make an in-class presentation, and write a detailed prospectus for a research project that would produce a substantial research paper or detailed policy report if carried out. You may choose one of two perspectives for each of your written and presentation assignments:

The scholarly: by framing questions and seeking out evidence, perform a **critical analysis** of some aspect of the mediality of politics.

The policy-oriented: **propose specific steps** that an institution you identify should take to communicate and activate its agenda, in light of the medial environment of policy and politics.

Requirements and grading:

1. Attendance and participation (25%)

Attendance at each class meeting is required. If a high-priority event at your internship site conflicts with attendance, please contact Prof. Head in advance as early as possible to

make arrangements. For **emergencies and illnesses**, please inform Prof. Head as early as possible.

Participation means taking part in the discussion on the basis of completed preparation, contributing ideas, facts, opinions and positions. I will also include discussion during my office hours as part of your course participation.

2. Reading and preparation

Course reading assignments must be completed **before** each class, as listed in the syllabus. These form the essential shared foundation for discussion each week. One way to find a topic for your short writing assignments is to pick one point you found intriguing or unexpected (or that you found disturbing or mistaken) from the reading and exploring it in a pithy essay.

The formal assignments are only part of your preparation requirement. In addition, you should spend at least **2 hours per week** pursuing deeper engagement with the issues involved, either by enriching your empirical knowledge of the topic by targeted reading and internet research, or by reviewing policy papers, news reports and other opinions on the implications of the week's issues for governance more broadly.

Access to readings

Many of the readings will be available in a reader available in Washington once the quarter begins. Where fair use allows, these readings, as well as few others, will also be on the UCDC academic server, if you are willing to read on your computer. Instructions will be made available at your orientation. In addition, **three whole books** are assigned, which I suggest you purchase as soon as you're certain you're taking the course:

Lawrence Lessig, *Code Version 2.0* (Basic Books, 2006)

Ian F. McNeely and Lisa Wolverson, *Reinventing Knowledge: From Alexandria to the Internet* (W. W. Norton, 2008)

Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet* (Walker & Co., 1998)

All are available from online book vendors for less than \$15 – often much less.

3. Short writing assignments (25%)

One goal of this course is to give students practice in researching and writing quick but penetrating short pieces, as people working in Washington often have to do. The goal of these pieces is not to be comprehensive, but rather to address a single point in a scholarly or policy-oriented way. These short essays should be about 500 words (about two pages, double-spaced). They can be longer if you wish, but should not be shorter.

I will give you suggestions for each week's short writing that connect with the week's assigned reading and discussion, but you are welcome – indeed, you are encouraged – to

follow your own thinking in developing your own specific topic. Short assignments are due by **midnight the Monday before each class** (by e-mail to Prof. Head). I will regularly ask students who wrote particularly impressive short pieces to pitch them orally to the class during discussion.

Each short assignment (during weeks 2-10) can earn up to 8 points, and the maximum that can be earned for all of them is 25 points (you get one point free). Thus, you do not need to submit a short assignment every week – but please pace yourself through the quarter.

4. Oral presentation (20%)

Each student will make an oral presentation in class. Presentations will be scheduled to begin in week 5, after you have settled into the city and your internship. I will begin discussing topics as soon as the course starts; a **one-paragraph topic proposal** is due on **April 17 (week 4)**. (Bring a hard copy to class).

Presentations should be about 10 minutes. If you want to use graphics, multimedia or handouts, please consult with Prof. Head in advance.

5. Research or policy project prospectus (30%)

Each student will write a **prospectus** for a substantial research project – a project that if carried out would result in a major research paper or a full-scale policy proposal. You will *not* carry out the larger project for this class (though I hope that the prospectus will be useful to you if you work on a senior thesis or similar project). A prospectus (1) carefully defines an issue or question, (2) outlines a research approach, (3) describes specific evidence and resources that can be used to carry out the proposed approach (including the most important research-methods literature in the area), and (4) provides preliminary thoughts (though speculative) on the possible outcome of the project.

A complete prospectus will include at least 10 pages of main text, as well as a considerable bibliography describing sources of evidence and listing primary and secondary scholarly works that are relevant.

Each student should visit Prof. Head in office hours or by appointment to discuss this paper's topic **before May 8 (week 7)**.

Course Schedule

Week 1 – March 27 – Introduction: Media, institutional cultures, and governance

Reading: Walter Ong, “Writing Restructures Consciousness [excerpt],” from *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982), pp. 78-101

Week 2 – April 3 – Early and contemporary technologies of power

Readings: Jack Goody, “The state, the bureau and the file”, ch. 3 of *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (1986), pp. 87-126.

Lawrence Lessig, *Code 2.0*, chapters 1-5

Writing: short assignments due by midnight Monday, April 1 (if you submit one this week) and every week. Up to 8 points each, up to 25 points total.

Week 3 – April 10 – Communication and power: media and institutions of knowledge in pre-electronic cultures

Reading: McNeely and Wolverton, *Reinventing Knowledge* (2008), chs. 1-2.

Simon Teuscher, “Document collections, mobilized regulations, and the making of customary law at the end of the Middle Ages,” *Archival Science* (2011).

Week 4 – April 17 – Book technologies for power and control: The Inquisition as prototype

Reading: James Given, "The Inquisitors of Languedoc and the Medieval Technology of Power," *American Historical Review*, 94, 2 (1989), pp. 336-359.

Inquisitors' manual, pp. 200-206, from Edward Peters, ed., *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe*.

Week 5 – April 24 – Networks of Knowledge before 1800

Reading: McNeely and Wolverton, *Reinventing Knowledge*, Chs. 3-5.

Week 6 – May 1 – War, States, and the Victorian Internet

Reading: Standage, *The Victorian Internet*, pp. 1-104

NOTE: CLASS WILL NOT MEET ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 8!

Week 7 – May 15– The Transformative Telegraph: Code, Law, and Society

Reading: Standage, *The Victorian Internet*, pp. 105-211

Week 8 – May 22 – Backing into electronic government

Reading: Lawrence Lessig, *Code 2.0*, chs. 6-8

Viktor Mayer-Schönberger and David Lazer, “From Electronic Government to Information Government,” in *Governance and Information Technology* (2007), pp. 1-14.

Week 9 – May 29 – “Knowledge wants to be free”: is the Internet revolution a challenge to governance?

Reading: Lawrence Lessig, *Code 2.0*, chs. 9-13

William D. Eggers, *Government 2.0*, chapter 6, “The Transparent State”

Week 10 – June 5 – Course Conclusion

Reading: Lawrence Lessig, *Code 2.0*, chs. 14-15

Micah Sifry, *Wikileaks and the Age of Transparency*, ch. 6, “Open Government: A movement or a mirage?”