

open.michigan

Unless otherwise noted, the content of this course material is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution – Share Alike 3.0 license.
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

© 2009, Robert Frost

You assume all responsibility for use and potential liability associated with any use of the material. Material contains copyrighted content, used in accordance with U.S. law. Copyright holders of content included in this material should contact open.michigan@umich.edu with any questions, corrections, or clarifications regarding the use of content. The Regents of the University of Michigan do not license the use of third party content posted to this site unless such a license is specifically granted in connection with particular content. Users of content are responsible for their compliance with applicable law. Mention of specific products in this material solely represents the opinion of the speaker and does not represent an endorsement by the University of Michigan. For more information about how to cite these materials visit <http://open.umich.edu/education/about/terms-of-use>

Any medical information in this material is intended to inform and educate and is not a tool for self-diagnosis or a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional. You should speak to your physician or make an appointment to be seen if you have questions or concerns about this information or your medical condition. Viewer discretion is advised: Material may contain medical images that may be disturbing to some viewers.



SI 110 Introduction to Information Studies (i2i)
Winter 2009
Professor Bob Frost

Syllabus

Course Objectives

The vaunted Information Revolution is more than Web surfing, Net games, and dotcoms. Indeed, it is arguably the foundation for an economic and social transformation on a scale comparable to the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. As a culture we have learned from earlier such transformations and it is important to recognize those lessons and chart a path toward intellectual and practical mastery of the emerging world of information. At the School of Information, we take pride in our tradition, inherited from librarianship, of "user-centeredness" and public access. For this reason, not only will you, the "user" of this course, be given unusual attention, but intellectually, we will approach information technology from the perspective of end-users and their concerns.

This course will provide the foundational knowledge necessary to begin to address the key issues associated with the Information Revolution. Issues will range from the theoretical (what is information and how do humans construct it?), to the cultural (is life on the screen a qualitatively different phenomenon from experiences with earlier distance-shrinking and knowledge-building technologies such as telephones?), to the practical (what are the basic architectures of computing and networks?). Successful completion of this "gateway" course will give you, the student, the conceptual tools necessary to understand the politics, economics, and culture of the Information Age, providing a foundation for later study in Information or any number of more traditional disciplines.

Over the course of this course, we will often elicit your feedback and analysis. These evaluation procedures are not, however, merely to make "guinea pigs" of you; rather, a key part of our assessments will use leading-edge electronic and information tools, and your ability to use those tools well will also be a key part of the agenda. In addition, of course, we very much want to know what works and what does not work for you, as this course belongs to you.

Materials for the Course

There are no books to be purchased for this course, as all readings are on-line, linked to each week's relevant Web page. (However, if you need help writing—and chances are, you do (Prof. Frost sure does!)—we strongly recommend Diedre McCloskey's *Economical Writing*). We also make the lecture slides available in Acrobat™ .pdf format and as PowerPoint™ slides as well (Prof. Frost actually uses Apple's Keynote™). We also try to post video podcasts of the lectures on-line (also linked on the weekly pages; they are .m4b files accessible via iTunes™) so that you can have Prof. Frost screaming in

your ear. Those podcasts are comprised of slide images synched with audio tracks from the lectures.

A VERY Important Note on Academic Honesty

You should draw on the ideas and writings of others in your work, but you must not plagiarize. American Heritage Dictionary defines plagiarize as "to steal and use [the ideas or writings of another] as one's own." Many students seem to be under the impression that plagiarism is difficult to detect, but it isn't. Indeed, thanks to the Internet, it's simple to plug a suspect phrase into a search engine and find plagiarized material. Come on! We teach this material, and we've had to prosecute students in the past for lifting content off the Web.

Plagiarism is a serious academic crime for which you can be expelled from the university. (In 2001, this actually happened to over fifty University of Virginia students. And yes, do note that a mess of student computers at the US Naval Academy were seized for downloading MP3s.) The following practices will help you avoid plagiarism:

- Whenever you use information or ideas of someone else, credit the source. You may use any standard reference system—we really don't care, as long as the original material can be located based on your citation.
- Direct quotations of phrases and sentences, if used, must appear in quotation marks, and the source must be cited. (Minimize the use of direct quotations except when necessary to convey the unique flavor of an original source.)
- Copyright law protects not ideas per se, but the expression of them; for that reason, you generally don't need to cite obvious facts, yet you should cite something if you're using it as evidence in an argument.

The University of Michigan takes plagiarism very seriously; here's a link to the honor codes on campus, and here's the plagiarism document posted by the Rackham School of Graduate Studies.

There's a humorous take on plagiarism, "Plagiarize," by Tom Lehrer which in a way underlines how intellectual dishonesty was one of the causes of the end of the Soviet system.

Weekly Topics

Week 1	Course Introduction
Week 2	Information in Democratizing Societies
Week 3	Computer and Network Architectures
Week 4	Intellectual Property
Week 5	IT & Difference: The "Digital Divide"
Week 6	In, Out, and Beyond: What's Hot, What's Not
Week 7	Interfaces to Information
Week 8	Catch-Up and Midterm Exam

Week 9	Information Searching and Retrieval
Week 10	The Info Biz, and Info in Biz
Week 11	Work and Information Technology
Week 12	Memory, Archives, and Records
Week 13	Privacy
Week 14	Cyberculture[?]
Week 15	Final Exam

Information on Papers

- Paper 1, due mid-semester
- Paper 2, due last-semester

Information on Exams

Here is how we do this... We post the questions one week before the exam; you'll be informed by email of the posting. You have six questions to study. On the day of the exam, we will have cut two of the six remaining questions, so you'll see four on the exam, of which you'll answer three, plus a question you've not seen before, a "mystery question."

Other Useful Items

- First and foremost, please, at any time, offer feedback on this course, either in your name or anonymously
- Here's a nice how-to for making a written argument—how to write an academic paper
- Peeled out from the above document, here's one specifically on citation practices
- And here's a how-to on reading academic material

We assure you that your time and effort spent on the above how-tos will yield a very high return over your academic career. Non-technical academic writing is a special sort of discourse, and if you read the i2i assignments in the way you might read a chemistry text, you'll have no time for the rest of your life.

Student Assessment Methods, aka "Grading"

As there are few "objective," numerically-scorable assignments in this course, we admit up-front that grading in this course is an exercise in professional judgement. So be it, but between Prof. Frost and the assistant(s), we have had sufficient experience to make those judgments with confidence. We view grades not as rewards or punishment, but as a system to indicate to you how you might improve your performance. That is why we tend to comment excessively on your papers. In any case, here's the weighting system:

40% - Two short (5-7 page) papers as defined below and in the specific assignments (obviously 20% each)

- 20% - Midterm exam
- 20% - Class participation, particularly in discussion sections
- 20% - Final exam

Readings for the Course

All readings for the course are on-line, and they are extensive, so you should bookmark the syllabus page. Nearly all of them are readable through your browser and by using Adobe Acrobat™ .pdf format; if you don't link to it automatically, get Acrobat, proprietary as it is. Due to intellectual property issues (about which you will learn quite a bit in this course!), we encourage you to honor the copyright claims of authors' and creators' work posted on this site.

Class Participation

Though this is considered a "lecture" course, it's far more exciting and educational as we have a lot of "back-and-forth" in the plenary meetings ("lectures") as well as in the discussion sections. This is all the more important with this content, as you, the students, are often more attuned to some of these issues than the professor is. We should all be learning together here.

As for you showing up in lecture, we are aware that providing video podcasts allows you the liberty to time- and space-shift the lecture content, and it's your adult choice whether to attend each lecture. That said, a part of your grade is based on contributions you make to the class, both the lecture and the discussion sections—if you are not there, it is difficult to earn a good grade on your participation. We will check attendance for each discussion section; you can miss two of those, but after that, each absence in a roll call will cost you 1/3 of your final letter grade. We are quite well aware that differences in age, sex, class, and cultural background bear heavily on rates of participation (and confidence) in class discussions and we take that fact into account when evaluating student performance. At the same time, this class should be a learning experience for us all, and we can achieve that best by being active learners—all of us. That means also that fruitful participation helps create an atmosphere in which innovative thinking and peer support/respect are vital.

Short Papers

Twice during the semester, you will write short (5-7 page) papers on assigned topics (By 5-7 pages, we mean that roughly; we don't count words). They should be double spaced, and they must provide proper citations of outside sources. We require that papers be submitted as email attachments to your discussion section leader in Microsoft Word™ format. If you use different software, let us know and we can perhaps accommodate. We are not fans of Microsoft and our use of the format is not in any way an endorsement of its business or political agenda. (Free, open-source "clones" of MS Office™ are also available; for the Mac, there's NeoOffice, used heavily by Prof. Frost, and for Windows™, you can use OpenOffice. If you're a Linux user, you know better than us what works. If you're worried that "free" means "cheap" or "flaky," here's a review of

OpenOffice. In addition Google™ offers an online document processor, sort of a free, Web version of Word, called Docs. If you elect to use this, let us know and sign us on as collaborators. We'd like to know about your experiences, as you can be a de facto beta-tester.

The papers should not be a simple summarization of the readings or a "report;" rather, we want you to make an argument, to take a position and defend it. Your grade on the papers does not come from the opinion you have or position you take. Instead, you will be graded on your ability to support that stance, providing logical and persuasive rationales and using solid evidence. Spouting an opinion without due attention to logic and evidence—the Rush Limbaugh practice—simply will not do. We will offer you not only topics for each assignment, but a few examples as to how you might address them.

We try to come up with new paper topics each term so that your thinking will always be fresh and relevant. Please feel free to suggest paper topics at any time. On the syllabus page, there are links early on in the course for topics we assigned in the previous term.

A key rationale for assigning papers is to facilitate both the firming up of ideas on your side—nothing helps gel ideas better than putting them on paper—and to fuel discussions in the, er, discussion sections. This approach flows from our belief in active learning, that is, that by grappling with issues you in a sense gain "ownership" of them, thereby going beyond the passivity of merely letting words float before your eyes. (This follows from my teaching philosophy, shared by the Moodle project). For some guidance on completing this assignment, see "How to Argue" on Professor Frost's web site.

The due dates for the papers posted on the "i2i Syllabus & News Page" are of a "drop dead" character (we urge you to turn them in earlier if you wish), and for each day a paper is inexcusably late, you will lose 1/2 of a grade letter on the paper.

Midterm and Final Exams

Each exam is worth 20% of the final grade, and each will be one hour long. The midterm exam will cover material from the first half of the course and the final will cover second-half material (only). Both will occur in the usual classroom; the final will happen in our last lecture-class meeting and, the midterm exam will be set by your vote early in the term, though we have our own preference, which we'll make known.

Here's how both exams will work. A bit more than a week before the exam, we'll develop a set of eight potential questions for the exam. You'll view them on the Web and very shortly after, you'll vote by email to eliminate two of them. Of the remaining six, you'll see four on the exam, of which you'll answer three, plus one you've not seen before—a "mystery question." We pull no tricks: the mystery question will, hopefully, come as no surprise to those who've been keeping abreast of the course. On the syllabus page, there are links early on in the course for exam questions we used in the previous term; once the questions for the current term are ready, we'll replace the older ones with the new ones.