



## Introduction to Interactive Communication

Fall 2008 - Online  
Blackboard and <http://501dc-fa08.qublogs.com>

### Instructor

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### Office Hours

Mon, 12:00 – 13:00 (GMT-5)  
@ Video/Text: <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/halavais>

Tues & Weds, 16:30 – 18:00 (GMT-5)  
@ QU Mt. Carmel Campus, Faculty Office Building 23

(Or by appointment.)

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This seminar is designed to provide a foundation for the MS in Interactive Communication program, introducing the theory and practice of interactive communication, and establishing the organizational and research skills demanded by the field. As a field of study and as a profession, interactive communication is only just emerging, and there is no clear fixed tradition or discipline. There is, however, a collection of ideas about what interactive communication means, and how it works. Our focus during the semester will be on engaging these ideas, providing each student with a broad idea of how to take apart social and interactive systems, how to reassemble

them in more effective ways, and how to track the current state of the art in interactive technologies.

Throughout the semester, we will be touching on the meaning of interactive communication and the deeper questions of why things work the way they do. We will also be looking at how to uncover the current trends, and predict opportunities for yourself and your organization. We will not be spending as much time on the practical elements of production technique, or on structured approaches to managing such production in an organization, as these are treated in more detail in later coursework. As a survey, we are interested in the big questions, and how to integrate a broad set of ideas into a useful group of conceptual relationships for each student.

By the end of the semester, you should have a framework within which you are able to better understand the role of interactive technology in organizations and society. You should understand the current trends in the interactive industries, and some of the constraints under which they operate. You should possess the skills needed to find useful information, make sense of it, and present it in an organized and compelling fashion. You should also have, at some stage of development, a design philosophy: a personal understanding of what values you hold important, and how best to achieve those ends.

## Schedule and Timing

The work for the semester is divided into seven modules, each of which will last a week. During each module you will be presented with a variety of materials to work through and understand. All of these materials will be linked from the course website, and will generally include several book chapters or scholarly articles, as well as audio and video lectures, both by the instructor and by others. Generally, you should budget a minimum of 15 hours each week to complete the work of the module.

- Module 1: Development of Interactive Technologies (9/2 – 9/8)
- Module 2: Games, Simulations, and Interactions (9/9 – 9/15)
- Module 3: Mass Interaction (9/16 – 9/22)
- Module 4: Informing Professions (9/23 – 9/29)
- Module 5: Interactive Production (9/30 – 10/6)
- Module 6: Legal, Ethical, and Policy Issues (10/7 – 10/13)
- Module 7: Future of Interactive Communication (10/14 – 10/20)

## Weekly Assignments

While we are working at a distance, and many of us may never meet face-to-face, discussion, debate, and collaboration is vital to graduate education. I encourage you to try to get together as groups and find other ways of getting to know your classmates, but for the purposes of this course, we will be having conversations through text. This does not take place through threaded discussion boards, but through a personal blog. Each participant's blog will be the main way that person presents her work to the class and to me.

That work largely represents reflections on the readings and other materials we are engaging in. You should post on a minimum of five separate days during each module. Many of these posts are entirely up to you. Ideally, these posts will draw on your thinking about interactive systems and their design, but you generally have a great deal of latitude here. Particularly useful are links to relevant materials (and their discussion), rants, manifestos, tutorials, and critiques. Your mandate is to be informative and interesting.

Although the topic of many of those five or more postings is up to the author, you will need to use one or more of them responding to the readings and lectures. These response papers should be posted *before the Thursday* of each module. Generally a response paper provides a thoughtful analysis of the arguments or ideas presented in the materials from the module, and draws from them evidence for a particular, unique thesis. Participants should feel free to draw from their own experiences, and from other things they have read or learned, to make sense of the ideas presented in the work.

Since others in the class will be responding to the same readings, you should read through what your classmates have already posted. This will ensure that your own response brings up unique ideas or states your position in a unique way. It also gives you the opportunity to respond to others' opinions in your own work. If you are concerned that your ideas may already be adequately explored in others work, extend their discussion and critique it, or post early enough that this is not an issue.

After all of the initial reactions have been posted, you should write a response (on your own blog) to at least one of the other response papers. In some cases, you may also be asked to complete and report on an activity assigned as part of the module.

You should not be writing just for me, but for a wider audience: your fellow seminar participants as well as a wider world. Your aim is to encourage

an audience of people who are interested in your thoughts: other bloggers, other professionals, and the mass media, among others. This is not just an opportunity to communicate beyond the course, it is an essential feature of our discussions, and the degree to which you draw in outside comments will figure into the assessment of your work.

## Final Project

The final project is to provide a well-researched, well-designed, original **manifesto on interactive design in the world today and in the future**. This may be produced in the medium of your choice: as a scholarly paper, video, game, or in some other format. As with the blog, part of its effectiveness will be judged by the number of people you manage to interest in the topic, and part of it will rely on your creative and engaging interpretation of the assignment. I expect the statement it makes to be clear and compelling. The precise nature of this statement is largely up to you, though I will encourage you to begin discussing it beginning in the first few weeks of our semester. You may work on the project alone or in teams, as you prefer.

## Evaluation

**Blogging will account for ten percent for each of the seven modules. Forty percent of the grade will be the result of the final project.** Lest you fear your math skills are failing you, I am not asking you to give literally 110%. Your lowest module score will be dropped.

At the end of each module, each participant is asked to reflect on her work during the module in a private journal on Blackboard, shared only between the student and instructor. You will also reflect on your progress and completion of the final project in this journal. This is a place for students to express their personal learning experience within the course—including their frustrations, epiphanies, or questions they would rather remain private—their reflections on the course, and their readiness to move on to the next module. Their journal should reference the grading rubric (below) and the assignments explicitly. This need not be a sizable undertaking; a paragraph is plenty unless you feel the need to say more.

Each participant should have one entry following each module, completed by the final day of the module. The instructor will provide private

feedback to the participant about her self-evaluation and post her mark for the module to the course grade book on Blackboard.

The blogging for each module will be evaluated according to the following rubric:

**In order to receive a D** for the module, the participant must have at least five posts during the time assigned to the module, on different days, with at least one of these in response to another class member, and at least one representing a response to the readings and lecture. In total, blog entries during the period of the module should make up **at least 1,200 words** (or the equivalent in non-textual media), and each entry should have an easily identified thesis.

**In order to receive a C** for the module, in addition to the above requirement, the blog entries should be relatively free from grammatical errors, should make use of the conventions of writing for the web (for text: double-spaces between paragraphs, the use of hyperlinks, and the like), and should be structurally sound (for text: have a thesis statement, topic sentences for each paragraph, subheads for longer entries, and the like). We will discuss these conventions for writing, video, and audio as we move through the class. At least one of these posts should explicitly address the readings for the module, and demonstrate the student has understood and critically assessed them.

**In order to receive a B** for the module, in addition to the above requirements, the entries must represent a clear understanding and articulation of the readings and other content of the course, and be presented in a consistent, scholarly style. The postings should demonstrate that the author has managed to read and determine the most important elements of the readings, integrate, compare, and contrast the ideas in these readings, and draw connections between the readings and the author's own experiences and learning from outside the course. In other words, she should reflect an informed opinion of the readings, and explain how she has reached that opinion. She need not like or agree with the readings, but she should explain why she agrees with the readings or disagree with them, likes them or dislikes them.

**In order to receive an A** for the module, in addition to the above requirements, the seminar participant must both teach me (and the rest of the class) something we did not already know, and engage other members of the class or the broader community on the web. Obviously, I cannot tell you what it is you will teach or show me, as it will be unique to the student, but every student comes to the classroom with a rich history of professional and personal experiences that can be applied to the problems we are addressing,

and every student has the capacity to be creative. The author should make use of what she has learned in other classes, at work, and in her travels to unlock or explain some of the concepts we are exploring. Think seriously about a mass audience, and what you can do to interest and inform them. As participants go through each module's materials, they should actively track down more information in areas that interest them and report back to the rest of us.

Note that these criteria are cumulative, so that an A requires mastery of the subject matter, as well as a cogent, grammatically correct set of posts. Creativity and originality do not make up for poor grammar and spelling, or a failure to engage the reader.

Unless otherwise noted, work turned in after a deadline will receive a zero for the assignment. Because the lowest module is dropped, this does not put anyone at a disadvantage if they find themselves unable to complete the work during a week, and does not put the instructor in the position of "arbiter of excuses."

## Success

There is a good chance, if you are a new graduate student, that you are accustomed to being at the top of the class. Every student in this course has been at the top of their undergraduate classes or leaders in their profession. It is my job to make you stretch, and although you may not appreciate it every week, by the time we are finished, I hope you will be happy with what you have accomplished during the semester.

Chances are, if you are overly concerned with your grade in the course, graduate school is not for you. On the other hand, I would be disappointed if you did not want to do well in the course. My advice for doing well is as follows:

1. *Plan your time wisely.* Some people suggest that the reason they like to hire people with graduate degrees is no more than that graduate students have demonstrated an ability to make good use of their time and are comfortable working under pressure. I expect you will need about twelve to fifteen hours each week to complete the work of the course. We all have other demands on our time, but you should schedule and protect this time.

2. *Go beyond the minimum.* At a minimum, I expect you to read and think about the readings and lectures, and present that thought in an interesting way. A tossed together response that demonstrates a superficial understanding of the topic and little original contribution is frustrating to

read, since it wastes your time and mine. There are times when pro forma performance is acceptable, but I have high expectations for your capabilities, and hope you will show me your best work.

3. *You are not a blank slate.* In every course I teach, students come in with a valuable set of personal and professional experiences. This is more obvious in the case of someone who is late in their own career, and may have many years of media or other professional experience. While not as obvious in the case of younger students who may have recently finished an undergraduate degree, I guarantee that you have had experience that can be brought to bear on the problems we will be discussing. The degree to which you can connect these earlier experiences to the work we do in the course will determine, to a great extent, how much you learn and how well you can apply it. Learn also from the experiences of your fellow participants.

I do my best to be a fair grader, but in order to be fair, it means that I have the responsibility of making an A in my course be well earned. I also have the responsibility to you and to the program to not pass students who do not demonstrate a preparation for graduate work.

## Recommended

There is one book that should be on every graduate student's desk:

Strunk, W., Jr. & White, E. B. (2000). *Elements of style* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon.

It can be had used for just a few dollars from any used bookstore or via Amazon.com. I also recommend:

Harvey, G. (2008). *Writing with sources*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Several of the readings this semester will be excerpted from longer books. Some of these books can be accessed in full online, and many are inexpensive to buy used. If you find one of the readings that interests you, I encourage you to explore the full books, or other readings by the same authors.

## Policies

At the beginning of the course we will discuss the problem of plagiarism and proper citation. At its root, plagiarism constitutes misrepresenting the authorship of work for a course. If you make use of another's ideas, this must be cited. If you make use of words and phrases that are substantially similar to another's work, you must cite this. If you make use of phrases that are identical to another's, regardless of the length of the phrase, you must place these in quotation marks.

Please refer to the Quinnipiac University Academic Integrity website (<http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x1046.xml>) for information about Academic Integrity and proper student behavior. Students are expected to be familiar with these university policies. Forms of dishonesty include:

- cheating or helping another to cheat on an exam
- using a paper authored by someone other than yourself
- plagiarizing another's written work (papers or outlines), in full or in part, including failure to properly cite all sources
- deliberately distorting information
- falsifying information (e.g., reason for absence)

Students found guilty of any of the above will be subject to sanctions, usually a failing grade for the course, and will also be reported to the Academic Integrity Board.

Students with disabilities who wish to request reasonable accommodations should contact: John Jarvis, Coordinator of Learning Services in the Learning Center, Tator Hall Room 119 at (203) 582-5390 or at [john.jarvis@quinnipiac.edu](mailto:john.jarvis@quinnipiac.edu). More information may be found at <http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x1168.xml>. Quinnipiac University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

I am always happy to chat not only about the topics of the course, but anything else you would like to talk about. If you feel overwhelmed, underwhelmed, or just whelmed, please do get in touch online or in person.