

# The Politics of Information

190.327

R. Marlin-Bennett

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Krieger 300

TTh 10:30 AM to 11:45 AM

Office hours: Wednesdays from 1 to 3 pm

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That we live in the Information Age is a truism. But so what? What does that mean for our understanding of information, and what does that mean for our understanding of the politics around it? Has the proliferation of information technologies changed human society? If so, how, and for better or for worse?

The course begins with a discussion of concepts. What is information? What is the Information Age and why is it different (or why not)? After the midterm, we focus on a series of topics: the Internet and Internet governance, intellectual property, the human-information technology interface, privacy, and surveillance.

This course is writing intensive. You will be writing three investigative case studies, each between 7 and 10 pages (not including the references), double-spaced.

## Books

M. Castells (2001), *Internet Galaxy* (Oxford University Press)

A. Borgmann (1999), *Holding On To Reality* (University of Chicago Press)

L. Lessig (2006), *Code Version 2.0* (Basic Books), available for download at <http://codev2.cc/>

### *Recommended:*

Marlin-Bennett, *Knowledge Power: Intellectual Property, Information, and Privacy* (Lynne Rienner Publishers).

Note: I receive royalties on new (not used) copies of my book that are sold. If you buy a new book, I will donate my royalties for that book to a charity if you show me your receipt. (I don't like profiting from my students.) The book will be on reserve; you are not required to buy my book, and you need not buy a new copy if you do choose to buy it.

## Investigative case learning

Many courses require you to write essays, and the assumption is that the essays will follow the standard "hamburger" structure – an introduction with a thesis statement, several paragraphs of argument or evidence supporting the thesis, and a conclusion. In this course, your assignment is to present a narrative of events, a story that shows how course themes play out in the world. The case study narrative starts with an introduction, but instead of providing a thesis, the introduction provides the necessary background for the case, as well as an indication of the particular problem addressed in the case.

The body of the paper will tell the story of that problem, how it arose, how it was understood by the various actors involved, and what happened. You should use multiple sources of information for researching the topic, and to the extent possible, you should use primary sources. While it may be appropriate to get an overview of a topic from Wikipedia, **do not** rely on Wikipedia as a source. Document your paper properly. Using multiple sources will help you avoid plagiarizing.

It may be helpful to think of the narrative arc of the story you are telling: the beginning, the middle, and, if an end has been reached, the end. In the beginning, explain what the problem or puzzle of the case is. Why is this case a case? In the middle, who is contesting whom? What are the various interests at stake? What happens? What are the policy debates, and who makes what policy decisions? Is there a climactic moment in the story when policy decisions were taken that changed access to resources or power? In the end, how has the problem been resolved, or is it still unresolved?

An additional conclusion section that summarizes the key themes is optional, but you **must** pose analytical questions to help open up debate on the topic you have researched. Be careful to avoid questions that are simply questions of fact. ("When did this case begin?" would be a really poor question!)

The three case studies you will be writing have three linked pedagogical purposes. First, the cases will help you acquire knowledge about course- relevant topics. Second, by organizing the research and writing up the results, you will be using composition skills. Third, by posing analytical questions, you will be linking your research topics to the themes from the course.

Each case study should be no fewer than seven pages (not including the references) and no more than ten. Papers should be double spaced. You can revise each case study once, but only if a completed final draft is turned in by the deadline (5 pm on the day before we will be discussing the cases in class).

Case-based teaching has long been used in the fields of business and medicine. You can find examples of cases online (though the subject matter will not be relevant to this course, in all likelihood).

I have listed suggested topics. Please confer with me about alternative topics.

## Grading

Midterm:	15%	Case studies:	20% each, total of 60%
Final:	20%	Class participation:	5%

## Course outline

### Introduction

August 30 no reading assigned

### Governing products of the mind

Intellectual property I

September 1

Reading: Marlin-Bennett, chapters 1 and 2

Intellectual property II

September 6

Reading: Reading: Marlin-Bennett, chapters 3 and 4

Recommended: Christopher May and Susan K. Sell (2006). *Intellectual Property Rights: A Critical History*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. **On reserve**.

September 8

Listen to: Adrian Johns. *History and Politics of Policing Intellectual Property*,

<http://vimeo.com/25663913> (I will try to post the recording on Blackboard) [1:13]

Read: Summary of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act <http://gseis.ucla.edu/iclp/dmca1.htm>

Corynne McSherry and Eric Goldman, The "Graduated Response" Deal: What if Users Had Been At the Table? Electronic Freedom Frontier. Online at

<http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2011/07/graduated-response-deal-what-if-users-had-been>.

#### Case I: Intellectual property

Suggested topics: Napster, RIAA, Disney and changes to US copyright law, Pirate Parties and European elections, patented seeds & Monsanto

**Cases must be posted by 5pm, Sept. 12**

Discussion of Case I

September 13

Reading: 3 cases compiled by your classmates

Watch: *A Fair(y) Use Tale* [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJn\\_jC4FNDo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJn_jC4FNDo)

#### Information

Conceptualizing information I

September 15

Reading: Borgmann, pp. 1-54

Conceptualizing information II

September 20

Reading: Borgmann, pp. 55-121

Treaties as information

September 22

Reading: <http://www.thenagain.info/classes/sources/ummalagash.html>

Genesis, Chapter 26

William Whewell, translator and abridger [1853]. *Grotius on the Rights of War and Peace: an Abridged Translation*, University of Cambridge and John W. Parker. Book III, Chapter 19 and 20 (pp. 406-431). Available for free download on Google Books at

<http://books.google.com/ebooks?id=aGoDAAAAQAAJ>

Conceptualizing information III

September 27

Reading: Borgmann, pp. 123-178

Browse Information about Landsat and earth imaging: <http://landsat.gsfc.nasa.gov/education/> and <http://rst.gsfc.nasa.gov/Front/overview.html>

Consider: implications of earth imaging for global politics

Conceptualizing information IV

September 29 (Lecture will be podcast. Class will not meet.)

Reading: Borgmann, pp. 179-233

Browse: <https://twitter.com/#!/AlecJRoss>

<https://twitter.com/#!/StateDept>

<https://twitter.com/#!/bobbynton>

Owning information  
October 4  
Reading: Marlin-Bennett, chapters 5-7

Privacy  
October 6  
Reading: Marlin-Bennett, chapters 8-10

### **October 11 – Fall break**

#### Case II: Privacy

Suggested topics: Celebrities and privacy rights, medical privacy, European data privacy, video surveillance

**Cases must be posted by 5 pm, October 12**

Discussion of Case II

October 13

Reading: 3 cases compiled by your classmates

Listen to: *Privacy* by Michael Jackson <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mr8pY9bNsrY>

Watch: Privacy and Social Networks <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7gWEgHeXcA>

**Note schedule change.**

#### Internet politics

The Cyber-Political Economy I

October 18 (possible podcast class)

Reading: Castells, pp. 1-63

**Midterm (topics: intellectual property, information, commodified information, privacy)  
October 20**

The Cyber-Political Economy II

October 25

Reading: Castells, pp. 64-115

The Cyber-Political Economy III

October 27

Reading: Castells, pp. 116-136

L. D. Falvey (2011), Reconstructing power in Second Life®: Controlling the virtual mayhem, *Journal for Cultural Research*, 15(1), 55-74.

Code & Law

November 1

Reading: Lessig, pp. 1-60

Code & Law

November 3

Reading: Lessig, pp. 61-119

Code & Law

November 8

Reading: Lessig, pp. 120-153

Paul T. Jaeger, Jimmy Lin, Justin M. Grimes (2008), Cloud Computing and Information Policy: Computing in a Policy Cloud? *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 5.3: 269-283.

Online political participation?

November 10

David Karpf (2008), Understanding Blogspace, *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 5.4: 369-385.

Browse: a political blog of your choice. Be prepared to discuss. Suggested blogs:

<http://drezner.foreignpolicy.com/>, <http://duckofminerva.blogspot.com/>,  
<http://contemporarycondition.blogspot.com/>, <http://blogs.state.gov/>

Recommended: Renée Marlin-Bennett (2011), I Hear America Tweeting and Other Themes for a Virtual Polis: Rethinking Democracy in the Global InfoTech Age, *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 8.2: 129-145.

### Case III: Internet

Suggested topics: Wikileaks, Google+ and Facebook, Social Media and the Arab Spring, decision to create .xxx ("adult" top level domain)

**Cases must be posted by 5pm, November 14**

Discussion of Case III

November 15

Reading: 3 cases compiled by your classmates

Virginia Heffernan (2001, April 11), Miss G.: A Case of Internet Addiction, Opinionator blog, *New York Times*, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/09/miss-g-a-case-of-internet-addiction/>

### Internet Governance

ICANN

November 17

Browse: <http://www.icann.org/>

Reading: George Christou and Seamus Simpson (2007), Gaining a stake in global Internet governance - The EU, ICANN and strategic norm manipulation, *European Journal of Communication* 22.2: 147-164.

Milton Mueller (2009), ICANN, Inc.: Accountability and participation in the governance of critical Internet resources, position paper published by the Internet Governance Project, available at <http://www.internetgovernance.org/pdf/ICANNInc.pdf>

Recommended: Thomas M. Lenard and Lawrence J. White (2011), Improving ICANN's governance and accountability: A policy proposal, *Information Economics and Policy* 23.2: 189-199.

November 22

Reading: David A. Simon (2011), An Empirical Analysis of Fair Use Decisions under the Uniform Domain-Name Dispute-Resolution Policy (July 17, 2011). Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1887888>

### **November 24 – Thanksgiving break**

Governance within websites

November 29

Browse: Terms of Service and privacy policy of a social media website or two. Suggested sites:

<http://www.facebook.com/terms.php?ref=pf>, <http://www.facebook.com/privacy/explanation.php>  
Reading: Schackman, D. (2010). Commons or gated community? A theoretical explication of virtual community and the example of Craigslist. *Community Informatics*, 6(2) Available at <http://ci-journal.net/index.php/ciej/article/viewArticle/457>.

Piotr Konieczny (2010), Adhocratic Governance in the Internet Age: A Case of Wikipedia, *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 7.4: 263-283.

Summary and Review  
December 1  
(No additional reading)

**Final exam (2-5 PM Friday, December 16).** The exact details are to be determined. One possibility will be to assign this as a take home exam due at 5pm on Dec. 16.

## **A Note on Academic Integrity**

I take academic integrity extremely seriously. In the past, I have not hesitated to bring charges against students for cheating. The University asks that the following statement be included in syllabi. The boldface text is my addition.

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition.

**This course has some special requirements:**

**(1) Do not plagiarize the text of your case study. Relying on a single source will make it more difficult to avoid using that source's words. Using multiple sources of information will be helpful because then you will need to combine and integrate the information before presenting it in your own words.**

**(2) You *may* have a classmate, other friend, or writing tutor read over your case study and give you critical comments before you edit it and then turn it in. The case studies must, however, be your own work, so it is *not* OK for the other person to rewrite your case study for you. If you have questions about how much help is acceptable and how much is too much, please consult the professor.**

**(3) Your in-class exams must be your own work and you may not receive any help from anyone other than the professor.**

Report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the associate dean of student affairs and/or the chairman of the Ethics Board beforehand. See the guide on "Academic Ethics for Undergraduates" and the Ethics Board Web site (<http://ethics.jhu.edu>) for more information