

OKANAGAN COLLEGE
Department of Communications
CMNS 220: Writing in a Digital Workplace

Course Description

This one-semester course examines the tensions of digitally mediated communication situated in the discursive fields of globalization, Humanism versus Behaviorism, and the individual versus community. Emphasis will be given to close reading, writing, and interpretation of electronic texts informed by the use of metaphor and narrative.

Students will participate in activities and discussions dealing with emerging digital practices such as email, blogging, hypertext, and gaming. These emerging genres are questioning society's traditional views of human relationships. Issues like anonymity, ownership of meaning, and authenticity are creating new tensions in today's workplace. Students will draw on their own experiences and current research to analyze how these discursive exchanges can result in hostility, violence, and rupture.

Students will collaborate with the instructor to design and develop best practices and competencies for communicating in today's digital workplace.

Prerequisite: Successful completion of CMNS 100 or 2nd year standing.

Outcomes

Students will:

1. Read, think, and write critically about hypertext and its implications on narrative practices
2. Understand the nature, range, and functions of on-line relationships
3. Practice formative and summative processes of evaluation in relation to forms, contexts, and audience
4. Practice transforming traditional texts to interactive modes of expression
5. Develop competencies and best practices to avoid issues of polarization in the workplace
6. Practice self-assessment strategies as a component of higher order thinking framed in questions of self and other

Topics

1. Introduction to Computer-Mediated Communications
2. CMC Genres
3. Communities of Discourse
4. Disruptive Online Behaviour
5. Writing for the Web
6. The Effects of Computers on Traditional Writing
7. Images for the Web
8. Identity and Performance in Cyberspace
9. Hypertext: Towards a Definition
10. Feature Writing
11. Anonymity, Privacy and Property Rights
12. Elements of User Experience

Method of Instruction

As a learner-centred course, students share responsibility with the instructor for the success of each class session. Having carefully read and contemplated the texts and topics under consideration in advance of a given class, students should be prepared for vibrant class discussion. Classes will feature a fluid combination of lectures, presentations, individual and collaborative work, workshops, and seminars.

Texts

Shedletsky, Leonard. *Human Communication on the Internet*, USA: Allyn & Bacon, 2004.

Note: The text will be supplemented with a Webct epack provided by the publisher/author.

Course Requirements

Portfolio Project (formative and summative assessment)	40%
Research Paper	10%
Seminar based on research paper	20%
Final Exam	20%
Participation (including attendance, preparation, responses to study questions, informal group presentations, engagement in class activities, and low-stakes writing assignments)	10%

Evaluation and Assessment

Students will collaborate with the instructor to determine criteria for each assignment. The criteria will vary according to each assignment's audience, purpose, content, and communications medium, and will be developed in advance of a given assignment's submission date. Students will also engage in reflective self-assessment as a means of better integrating evaluation with learning.

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Sample Assignment: Learner Lead Seminars
Worth: 20%

The course is organized as a seminar. To make the classes successful, students will read the assigned material for each session, and be prepared to discuss it in detail in class and via Webct discussion threads. Students will choose a topic to be explored from the list of course topics and then present a 30-40 minute reading/research seminar. This discussant will prepare a set of discussion questions (usually 3-4 per reading), issues that need further clarification, criticisms of the readings and present their own findings based on their own scholarly research. More generally, students will be expected to engage each other in developing the best critical understanding of each text.

Evaluation Criteria:

Formative Assessment—Class participants and the instructor will provide feedback, and sometimes engage in assigned activities, on all the seminar material no later than 24 hrs prior to the seminar. An activity may consist of an on-line knowledge base assessment or evaluating a discussant-assigned reading.

Summative Assessment—A grade will be assigned by the instructor based on the following criteria.

1. Preparedness. Has the discussant done the reading, prepared notes on the reading and created a list of 3-4 relevant questions that guide the seminar discussion?
2. Quality of Comments. Did the seminar have an overall flow, engender comments that were informed by the readings and the issues at hand, move the conversation forward, and use examples from the readings as evidence of critical analysis?
3. Initiative and Responsiveness. Did the discussant both initiate dialogue and engage in the dialogue initiated by others?
4. Quality of Listening. Did the students listen to others, follow up on other students' comments or ask questions of classmates?

5. Adequate Depth of Presentation. Did the discussant provide a thoughtful analysis of the topic or simply a summary?
6. Organization. Did the seminar have a structure, e.g. a beginning, middle and an end?
7. Quality of Class Participation. Did the seminar include handouts, visuals, or activities to involve the audience?
8. Conclusion and Recommendations. Did the discussant provide her own conclusions on how we can adapt or use the main theories in our lives as students and/or future professionals?
9. A Final Suggested Reading List. This list will be a list of the secondary sources used to research your topic. It should consist of no less than three articles from peer-reviewed journals, two books from authorities in the field and two credible websites that engage the issues related to your seminar.
10. Webct Posting. Did the discussant post all the seminar material, e.g. handouts, reading list, PPT show, if applicable, and any other seminar material in the appropriate discussion thread no later than 24 hours before class so the class could provide feedback or comments?

Assignment Outcomes:

Seminars Build Community – A seminar approach not only encourages a student to master a topic, but also fosters a second goal: to create a community in which we not only talk about the topic bringing us together, but continue to learn how to talk – how to listen, how to express disagreement, how to defend one’s position, how to change one’s mind, how to clarify a question or a point of confusion, and so on. Needless to say, learning how to talk in these ways extend well beyond the classroom. These skills add to all parts of our lives, including work and personal relationships. They also foster our curiosity and desire to continue to learn over the course of our lives.

Other Assignments: Short Descriptions

Portfolio—Students will create a learning portfolio based on the production of a print and a non-print Information Package for first year students in any one faculty at the college. Students must justify the design, the product, and the choice of the information and faculty.

The portfolio will be comprised of:

1. a project proposal outlining the composition of the project and outcomes
2. a progress report demonstrating an understanding of the project's scope, tasks and deadlines
3. a research component demonstrating primary and secondary research efforts, methodologies and results
4. a learning journal linking content and self-assessment
5. a print version of the Information Package
6. a non-print version of the Information Package

The portfolio will be displayed on a weekly basis via Webct for peer and instructor feedback and commentary.

Paper—Students will write a theoretical paper of 1500-2000 words. The paper will be of a format and style similar to what is found in the *Canadian Journal of Communication*. The paper will be due one week after the end of semester. In the paper, I expect you to explore some area of CMC theory that you found interesting while researching your seminar. For example, you might compare two or three perspectives and discuss how they would lead to different predictions about a particular phenomenon, and how you might resolve this problem with an applied theory or practice. The idea is to understand the discussion surrounding your area of inquiry and locate your own thoughts and draw meaning for your own academic and professional needs.

Professional Participation—Students must demonstrate leadership ability in the classroom and in online discussions. Develop a good working relationship with the instructor and all other students. Participate in discussion threads on Webct. Lead and develop at least one thread. Make an overall **positive impact** on the tone and discussions of class. Keep in mind that **quality** is preferred to quantity, so only comments, questions and discussions that directly relate to an improved understanding of the topic at hand qualify for participation marks.

Final Exam—A final exam will be conducted to ascertain the learner's level of engagement with the course content. It will be comprised of a project learning summary, performance analysis, and criteria development.