I. Course Description

This seminar approaches the study of interactivity and new media from both theoretical and applied perspectives, exploring the implication of two-way communication as well as the social and psychological effects of interactivity at different levels of analysis. The central questions organizing the seminar, where interactivity resides and what consequences interactivity has for user communities, serve to structure our semester-long exploration. Beyond defining and locating interactivity, this seminar is concerned with the history, applications, benefits, and drawbacks of interactive processes and media systems across a variety of contexts, including entertainment, advertising, journalism and mass communication, political communication, social life, education, and the arts. Throughout the semester attention will also be paid to related concepts relevant to new media, including media evolution, parasocial interaction, virtual reality, (tele)presence, flow, remediation, and the merging of mass and interpersonal processes. Although our emphasis throughout the semester will be on the inter-section of new media and communication theory, the readings, discussion, and assignments provide a broad foundation for students interested in 6050 projects, thesis or dissertation work relating to interactivity, regardless of their specific emphasis area or field of study.

II. Expected Outcomes

- Identify and compare different approaches to interactivity found in the research literature;
- Demonstrate mastery in situating these approaches in relation to communication theories to explore their practical application;
- Apply conceptual understandings of interactivity to questions of effectual communication across a variety of settings;
- Observe technology users in natural settings and assess what types of interactive affordances and activities are most engaging, and which features fail to captivate;
- Pursue an original research project with data collection (either quantitative or qualitative) to gain new insights into interactive processes; and,
- Develop an analytical foundation for continued graduate study in communication and technology, including research for 6050 projects or thesis/dissertation work.
III. Methods of Assessment

Expected learning outcomes will be assessed through class discussion/participation, written synthesis and critiques of existing research, in-person observations of user interactions with mediated technology, development of a research project, peer review, in-class presentation(s), take-home exam, and final paper.

IV. Required & Recommended Readings

Individual readings will be posted to a course Dropbox folder for download. For a list of specific readings by week, see section VII titled “Course Schedule” below. There is no textbook as such.

Recommended

- New York Times technology section
- Wired magazine
  - www.wired.com
- Technology Review magazine
  - www.technologyreview.com

V. Course Assignments and Grading (details on all assignments will be distributed)

The Research Synthesis paper, 4-5 pages in length, is designed to get you thinking about interactivity from an analytical perspective early in the semester. The Interactive Field Report requires students to write a second 4-5 page paper based on observations at an off-campus interactive environment, whether a children’s museum (e.g., Science Spectrum in Lubbock, or the Harrington Discovery Center in Amarillo – or similar museums in Dallas, Austin, etc.), entertainment center (e.g., The Main Event in Lubbock), or even an “interactive restaurant” (e.g., Chuck-E-Cheese’s or Dave & Busters). The intent of this assignment is to put you “in the field” as an observer of interactive engagement, and then to systematically analyze the results of your observations. The Midterm Exam will take the form of a take-home essay in response to a question arising from the readings, which students will have one week to complete. And for the In-class Facilitation, each student will be responsible for walking the class through a reading.

The Interactivity Research Project requires students to work in teams and come up with an original research idea based on topics covered during the semester. The project unfolds in stages. First, a short study synopsis of 2-3 pages is due. Next, students will develop a research plan and present their research idea as a team to the seminar for feedback. After receiving feedback, students will then engage in an original data collection, which can be either quantitative (e.g., a user test, short experiment or survey) or qualitative (e.g., interviews, observations, focus groups) in nature. Overall, the project requires that students apply a model or theory of interactivity to a pressing question about new media, collect some data to support your idea, then produce a compelling research presentation (in PowerPoint) to share your results and recommendations on the last day of class. The final Research Paper will be based on your presentation and elaborate the study you have already presented in class. Each phase of the Research Project is graded individually. For the final paper, students should write their paper as if it were a submission to an academic or industry conference (i.e., with an introduction, literature review, methods section, analytical approach, findings, and discussion). Details on all assignments will be discussed in class and guidelines about each project distributed.
Seminar Participation

The participation component of your grade will be determined by attendance and contributions to in-class discussion. The only way to receive a good participation grade is to contribute by adding your unique voice and informed opinion to the discussion. *Note: Graduate seminars depend on student contributions!* Discussion works best when it is free-flowing and contains multiple voices. Please do not wait for me to call on you before offering a response to the discussion. When you have something relevant to offer, just say it. Interesting ideas and insightful responses should be shared with the group so everyone can benefit – the broader the discussion, the richer the seminar. Where possible, be proactive when it comes to your education, not reactive!

**In summary, course assignments, grading percentages, and due dates are as follows:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Grade %</th>
<th>Due Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Synthesis Paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Sept. 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity Field Report</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Oct. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Essay Due</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Oct. 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class Facilitation</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Throughout term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity Research Project</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Research Synopsis</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Oct. 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Research Pitch</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Oct. 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Results Summary</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Nov. 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Presentations/Drafts</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Nov. 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Final Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Dec. 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>All semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**A Note About Grading**

Each of the above assignments will be graded on (or converted to) a 100-point scale. The grading scale in all of my courses is as follows: A 94-100; A- 93-90; B+ 89-87; B 86-84; B- 83-80; C+ 79-77; C 76-74; C- 73-70; D+ 69-67; D 66-64; D- 63-60; F 59 & lower.

Note that a grade in the A range represents outstanding or exceptional work – something not easily achieved. Grades in the B range indicate competent, satisfactory work in the course. A grade of B- or lower in this or any graduate course suggests that the student's work is lacking in some important way. Although a C means satisfactory at the undergraduate level, the standards in graduate school are such that a C represents seriously flawed work, and thus a failing grade. In this seminar that would mean doing the assignments but misunderstanding basic concepts or presenting them in an unacceptable form and not participating in seminar discussions. Any grade lower than C implies outright negligence of the course.

**VI. Additional Course Policies**

1. **Americans with Disabilities Act**

Any student who has a disability that may affect his/her academic performance should contact the instructor as soon as possible so that necessary accommodations can be made. Students should present appropriate verification from Disabled Student Services in the Dean of Students Office (806) 742-2405.
2. Attendance
Class attendance and active participation are expected in graduate school. I reserve the right to count absences against your participation grade, which could easily lower your overall grade. Moreover, the instructor is not responsible for material missed due to an absence. If you are having problems, let me know as soon as possible. If things go off-track early, chances are that I won’t be able to help you in the final weeks of the semester. I don’t give automatic incompletes. If you have reasons for not meeting deadlines or obligations, please contact me in advance.

3. Academic Integrity
Cheating on exams or plagiarism or any form of violation of the University honor code is a serious offense and will receive a failing grade for that assignment. The work you turn in must be entirely your own. Do not submit the same paper, or paper draft, to more than one class. All students are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars and professionals. If any questions ever arise as to what constitutes academic dishonesty, please consult the Student Handbook (see http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentaffairs/) as well as the Academic Integrity section (OP 34.12) of the campus Operating Policies and Procedures website (http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/contents.php#34).

4. Civility Policy
The University supports an environment of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. It does not tolerate statements, behavior, or tokens that deride or disparage an individual or group because of race, ethnicity, creed or personal lifestyle. In line with maintaining a professional learning environment, please be respectful of and attentive to fellow seminar participants. The quality of the class relies on engaged discussion and debate. Consequently, please turn off mobile devices while in class and use laptops or tablets for academic purposes only.

5. Late Assignments
Late assignments will be accepted only under extreme circumstances on a case-by-case basis, and will be subject to a point deduction. No late work will be accepted a week past the due date.

6. Incompletes
The only way to qualify for consideration of an incomplete is for extreme cause, to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

7. Originality of Seminar Work
Students should not submit work, even modified work, completed during a previous semester, whether at this institution or another university or college. Instances of “double dipping” will receive a zero. All seminar work is expected to be original and the sole product of the individual seminar participant (see “Academic Integrity,” item 3 above).

VII. Course Schedule
Please note that this schedule, including readings, may change due to class progress or other circumstances. Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and/or by email. When possible, readings should be completed before the class for which they are assigned.
Week 1

Aug. 31  Course Introduction: In Search of an Elusive Concept
Readings  Bucy (2004); Newhagen (2004); Stromer-Galley (2004); Sundar (2004)

Week 2

Sept. 7  Theme A: Social Interaction, Interactivity, and the Face-to-Face Ideal

Theme B: Interactivity in Relation to Television
Readings  Beyer et al. (2007); Holmes (2004); Horton & Wohl (1956)
• see also, Nyre (2006)

Assignment  Research Synthesis Guidelines Distributed (papers due Sept. 21)

Week 3

Sept. 14  Theme A: Videogames, Interactivity, and the Pleasures of Control
Readings  Grodal (2000); Lee et al. (2006); Polman et al. (2008)
• see also, Weber et al. (2014)

Theme B: The Motivating, Prosocial Side of Gaming
Readings  Przybylski et al. (2010); Ryan et al. (2006)

Week 4

Sept. 21  Theme A: Elements of Engagement – Design, Affordances, Content
Readings  Bucy & Affe (2006); Gaver (1991); Gaver et al. (2003), Norman (1988)
• see also, Wellington (2016)

Theme B: Irresistible Technology: The Rise of Behavioral Addiction
Readings  Alter (2017) – chs. 1+3

Assignment  Research Synthesis Papers Due; Field Report Guidelines Distributed (due Oct. 12)

Week 5

Sept. 28  Theme A: Interactivity in the Context of Designed Experiences
Readings  Heeter (2000); Laurel (2000); Screven (1999)

Theme B: Interactive Excellence
Readings  Schlossberg (1998)
Week 6

Oct. 5  Theme A: Presence, Apparent Agency, and Avatar-Mediated Interaction

• see also, Reeves & Nass (2000)

Theme B: Pseudo Interactivity and the Illusion of Involvement

• see also, Lee & Shin (2012)

Week 7

Oct. 12 Theme B: ‘Alone Together,’ Interactive Insurgencies, and Other Digital Maladies

Readings Bakioglu (2012); Carr (2008); Turkle (2012)
• see also, Keller (2003)

Theme B: Social and Interactive Media (Mal)functions

Readings Anderson et al. (2014); Heino et al. (2010); Kirschner & Karpinski (2010)
• see also, Parker & Heller (2014)

Assignment Interactivity Field Reports Due; Take-home Midterm Guidelines Distributed

Week 8


Readings Bucy (2004a); Liu & Shrum (2002); Ophir et al. (2009)

Theme B: The Interactivity Paradox – Closer to Content but Confused?

Readings Bessiere et al. (2006); Bucy (2004b); Vorderer (2000)

Assignment Take-home Midterms Due; Research Project Guidelines Distributed

Week 9


Readings Bucy & Tao (2007); Leiner & Quiring (2008); Richards (2006)
• see also, Sundar et al. (2015) – *Handbook*

Theme B: Putting Interactivity to the Test—Persuasion, Advergaming, and Beyond

Readings Lee et al. (2013); Yang & Shen (2017); Persksy & Blascovich (2008)
• see also, Sohn et al. (2007)

Assignment Short Research Proposals Due and In-class Pitches
Week 10

Nov. 2  Theme A: Interactivity Writ Large – Power, Traffic Flows, Information Overload

Readings  Bordewijk & van Kaam (1986); Castells (2009); Neuman et al. (2012)

Theme B: Big Data and the ‘Industrialization of Interactivity’

Readings  boyd & Crawford (2012); Manovich (2011); Mayer-Schonberger & Cukier (2013)
  • see also, “Data and Discrimination” (2014)

Week 11

Nov. 9  Theme A: Interactivity | Panopticism | Tracking

Readings  Foucault (1979); Lyon (1998); Garfinkel (2001); Andrejevic (2006)

Theme B: Is the ‘Internet of Things’ Really Just a Panoptic Trap?

Readings  Howard (2015)
  • “The Creepy New Wave,” online: http://goo.gl/0NDWXf
  • see also, McKinsey & Co. (2013)

Week 12

Nov. 16  Theme A: Interactivity and Social Life: Digital Nation, meet ‘Generation Like’

Readings  PBS videos (both online)
  • http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/digitalnation/
  • http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/generation-like/

Assignment  Research Results Summaries Due

Week 13

Nov. 23  Thanksgiving break, no class

Week 14

Nov. 30  Research Presentations (last meeting of the semester)

Assignment  Paper Drafts Due

Finals Week

Dec. 13  Final Research Papers Due Date, 10pm
VIII. References & Related Readings


Additional Readings


