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420-01 Information Systems in Global Context

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INFO 420 INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN GLOBAL CONTEXT (3CR)
COURSE SYLLABUS (Summer 2018)

CLASS LOCATION AND TIME: ONLINE

INSTRUCTOR:

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Office Hours: By appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on social implications of information systems (IS) from global perspectives. This course primarily examines economic and organizational dimensions, work life, electronic communities, privacy, safety, ethics and professionalism, Information Technology (IT) and education, gender issues in IT, democracy and empowerment and other related topics. The course also explores the interaction of race, gender, and class in structuring the consumption and production of information systems in a variety of domains. The course is designed for students with interest in (1) contemporary diverse organizational environment and (2) the development, implementation and management of information systems in diverse environments. The course expands the issues of domestic business operations to include global issues like time, standards, regulations, identity and culture. The course extensively covers social issues in information systems especially as they affect online community, social media, e-commerce and cross-cultural IS projects. These issues will be discussed through assigned readings, case examples (discussions), projects and presentations.

MISSION

At Williams College of Business, “*we educate students of business, enabling them to improve organizations and society, consistent with the Jesuit tradition*”. In this course, we provide students with an understanding of the social implications of Information Systems to individual, group, organization and society”. Our discussion of the social, ethical and legal implications of each topic provides students with broader perspectives that transcend conventional business goals and prepares the students to apply this knowledge for greater goods of others, by being able to address social issues in information systems in diverse organizational environment and in society at large.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Describe major social issues involving the impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in contemporary society.
- Examine how ICT shape and are shaped by organizations
- Analyze the implications of the usage of electronic communications and social media by individuals, groups and organizations.
- Describe how the usage of ICT affects invasion or personal privacy
- Identify key elements of major ethical theories or value systems used to build viewpoints related to ICT use in the workplace and society in general.
- Analyze ICT on the dimensions of security, reliability and ease of use.

Reading Materials

Texts

- Avgerou, C. (2002). *Information Systems and Global Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kling, Rob (ed.). 1996¹. *Computerization and Controversy: Value Conflicts and Social Choices* (2nd Ed.) Boston: Academic Press.
- Walsham, G. (2001). *Making a World of Difference: IT in a Global Context*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Some journal articles from

- The Information Society <http://www.indiana.edu/~tisj/>
- Computers and Society <http://www.acm.org/sigs/sigcas/>
- Journal of Social Informatics <http://www.ris.uvt.ro/>

Please note that the required articles and chapters from the texts will be made available on Canvas. You are not required to purchase any of the textbook except for your personal use.

Canvas

Canvas class web site - <https://canvas.xavier.edu/>

The course will be completely delivered online using Canvas as the Network Learning Environment.

Grading Criteria

Module 1 - 35 points	Grade Distribution:	
Module 2 – 40 points	Grade	Points
Module 3 - 35 points	A	95-100
Module 4 – 35points	A-	90-94
Module 5 – 35 points	B+	87-89
Project - 20 points	B	83-86
	B-.....	80-82
Total.....		
Grade pts – Total pts/2		
i.e. 200pts/2 = 100pts		

Grade	Points
C+.....	77-79
C.....	73-76
C-	70-72
D.....	60-69
F.....	below 60

Failure to complete any of the above categories will result in either a grade of incomplete (see university catalog for when this is appropriate) or a fail. A brief description of these assignments is given below; we will discuss them further during our first class meeting.

Research Project Write-up

You will work throughout the course on one of the project topics (see page 6). You will select a topic which directly relates to the content of the course or from the list presented. The paper should generally address the topic and specifically answer the questions (if applicable). You are responsible for choosing a research project; if a topic is selected outside the suggested topics, the topic must be related to the issue of race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, socio-economic class, religion, physical/mental abilities and information

¹ The book remains a classic on the topics of interest to the course and some dated cases shall be replaced with more recent cases from the journals.

systems and you should get approval from the instructor before continuing with the topic. More information on the project is available in the relevant modules.

Plagiarism:

Research projects should represent the students' best effort in academic and business research and writing. Plagiarism is illegal and not tolerated so be careful to correctly cite and provide references for the sources you use. Plagiarism will cause the grade on any written assignment to be zero (0). Generally speaking, plagiarism should be considered the copying of more than three words in succession from the material being used, without placing the words in quotation marks. Since the written projects in this course include summarizing and discussing other peoples' materials, the assignments should include very few exact quotes.

Info 420 Summer 2018 Tentative Schedule

Module 1 - Week 1&2: Introduction - Studying IT in Global Context

This introductory module will use lecture, discussion and assignment to show how the world is highly diverse in terms of human characteristics such as gender, race, religion and culture, and that this diversity is something to be celebrated and to learn from. That globalization does not mean imposing homogenous solutions in a pluralistic world but it instead mean giving a global vision and strategy, but it also means cultivating roots and individual identities. It means nourishing local insights, but it also means re-employing communicable ideas in new geographies around the world. The wide gap in the availability and use of information systems across the world, and the influences information systems exerts on globalizations, raise questions about whether globalization entails homogeneity for organizations and societies in global world. It also raises questions about the feasibility and desirability of efforts to implement the development of information systems through the transfer of best practices from Western industrialized countries to developing countries, and whether organizations can utilize information systems in accordance with the socio-cultural requirements of the contexts. The module will also examine social controversies of information and communication technologies. The module examines some fundamental images of role of ICT in social life, ICT revolution and concept of Information Society

Topics to be discussed includes:

- The institutional nature of ICT and Organizational Change
- The Social-technical nature of Information systems innovation
- Multiple situated rationalities
- The Global, the local and the disembedded
- Reflexive Modernization
- Globalization and Diversity
- The Information Age
- Improvisation and Appropriation
- Power and Politics

Module 2 – Week 3: Safety, Security and Reliability

While the career of Information Technology may not seem as hazardous as more physically demanding jobs, there are health and safety issues just like any other job. However, with proper care, an IT worker can prevent potential injury in the workplace. Awareness of safety issues is a vital part of a computer technician's training. There are many safety factors to take into account when working with computing equipment. There are safety issues regarding where to locate a computer system and also how to use it. If you are building or repairing computer systems then safety issues are very important. Safety affects us from choosing the computer system, through building it, to locating and then using the completed system. Safety concerns can be relatively straightforward - such as those for a family using a computer system in their home. They can also be more complex - such as those for a company manufacturing systems or an IT manager choosing and locating hundreds of PCs for other users

Can the systems be both secure and accessible/easy to use. How much reliability can we build into systems, and how much MUST we build in especially now that our lives mostly depend on information systems. In this module, you will learn about how modern organizations address these issues and step being taken to balance security, reliability and ease of use.

Module 3 - Week 4: Electronic Community and Social Media

Applications on the Internet and their corresponding benefits are numerous. But Social media is a phenomenon that is also radically changing our view of interactions, relationships, communications, networking, and socialization in the first decade of the 21st century. Social media is pervasive and enables creation and exchange of user-generated content on the spectrum of low- to high-end devices, even in the resource-poor regions of the world. Before Web 3.0 enabled social media, we had platforms where no one was accountable for what they said because they could hide behind a generally unidentifiable user name. However, contemporary social media often require visible identity which includes names, photographs, valid email addresses, and phone numbers. The renewed emphasis on Identity in social media is to explicitly link the user-generated content to the creators and to also maintain a level of integrity of services that requires a level of trust that can only be established with a known, valid identity.

The variety of social media and ease of publishing content attracts many people and lends itself to the increased use of fake identities and deception in interactions and communications. Deceptions enable unethical and immoral acts that include defrauding and defaming, bullying, spreading spam, and lying. However, on a positive note, these deceptions, in a repressed environment, can provide a means for individuals to express their opinions and views without fear of retribution. Deception enables political dissidents who live in a repressive society to speak without harassment and provides protection for victims of abuse, members of harassed communities (e.g., LGBT), members of religious groups who have suffered discrimination, and members of the political opposition in politically-intolerant states. This module will specifically answer the following questions:

Does the use of electronic communication and social media improve the sense of community which people experience, or does it leave them feeling alienated. For whom, do which kinds of changes take place, and under what conditions? Could Social media be a platform of unethical practices that anonymity and digital deception can encourage?

Module 4- Week 5: Privacy and Social Control

Does the use of computerized communication and information systems often lead to invasion of personal privacy? What is the definition of Privacy in contemporary knowledge society? Could we balance the benefits of information systems with the perceived invasion of privacy? PATRIOT Acts, TIA (Total Information Awareness). This module will attempt to answer the questions and address related issues.

Module 5- Week 6: Ethics and Professional Responsibilities

While most people may feel that they know what is right and what is wrong, few will have worked out a systematic ethical theory. Are ethical rules, including codes of professional practice absolute? When there are ethical conflicts between what is good for your family or company and what is good for your clients and the society at large, how do you resolve them? This module will help students to think carefully about some important issues they will face in the working and professional life. The discussion will reflect the semester's work--and to point out that the entire course has dealt with professional and ethical issues from the first day of class.

Project Topics (Suggested)

1. **Worklife.** Is adoption and utilization of Information Systems likely to improve or degrade the quality of jobs for managers, professionals and clerks? How do different approaches to designing computer systems and their social environments alter the character and quality of jobs? Can computer and telecommunications systems improve the flexibility of work by enabling employed people to work at home part or full time? Information and communication technologies have been strongly implicated in profound changes in the nature of work in contemporary society. The identity of individual workers, and their identification with particular occupational and professional groups, is affected by, and affects, the nature of work they carry out, and how they conceptualize themselves and their work role.
2. **Power and Control.** What approaches are attempted to increase surveillance and control through IT in the globalized world, but also what opportunities exist for resistance?
3. **Social-Cultural Context .** It is often assumed that the impact and implementation of ICTs will or should be the same in all situations with little regard to the particular social cultural context and the nature of organizational diversity in which ICT innovation takes place. While IT makes a world of difference in the sense that it is important in the contemporary world, IT could also be used to support a world of difference in which diversity is respected. Could IT design and implementation reflect local aspirations, concerns and action as well as the multiple institutional influences of globalization?
4. **Class Divisions in Society.** To what extent is our increasingly computerized society fostering an underclass of functionally illiterate and disenfranchised people -- as jobs require new skills, and using computerized services requires expertise in negotiating with complex organizational procedures when things go wrong? Are there plausible ways of structuring extensions to our National Information Infrastructure which will more effectively enable more people to participate in the mainstream of society? To what extent do electronic publications and digital libraries enhance or diminish the tendency of our society to foster an underclass of functionally illiterate and disenfranchised people -- as information-related tasks require new skills, and using computerized services requires expertise in negotiating with complex organizational procedures when things go wrong?
5. **Human Safety and Critical Computer Systems.** How safe are people who rely on computer systems such as those which help manage air traffic control or calculate radiation treatment plans for cancer patients? Should computer systems designers who work on such systems be licensed, much like the professional engineers who design bridges and elevators in skyscrapers?
6. **Democratization.** To what extent do computer and telecommunication systems offer new opportunities to strengthen democracy through on-line access to the records and reports of government agencies? To what extent does computerization undermine democratic processes in work and public life because the costs and expertise of large computerization projects may lead to centralized control and domination by groups who can control the selection of equipment and expertise.
7. **Employment.** How does computerization alter the structure of labor markets and occupations? What kinds of understanding of computer systems are really critical for people who wish to develop different kinds of careers? Do the skill mixes for computer-oriented work help create a lower class with fewer jobs and more barriers for improving their situations? Is computerization creating a "hollow economy" with fewer jobs overall?
8. **Education.** To what extent can interesting computer-based programs give students the intellectual and motivational advantages of one-on-one tutoring in a way that is economically affordable? Will access to the Internet transform K-12 schools into more effective learning places? And what drawbacks might there be in the widespread introduction of computers into the curriculum?
9. **Gender Biases.** Why are women more likely to be found feeding data into computer systems, while men are more likely to be in the position of specifying the requirements for, and designing, computer-based systems? Is there any special reason why professional positions held largely by women (i.e. librarians

and K-12 educators) are more likely to be eliminated by the introduction of electronic approaches to information management and education, while men are more likely to be in the professional positions of specifying the requirements for, and designing, computer-based electronic publishing systems?

10. **Military Security.** To what extent do swift hi-tech weapons and complex computerized command and control systems amplify the risk of accidental nuclear war by shortening the response time for people to decide whether a perceived attack is real? To what extent does the public overestimate the ease and safety of electronic warfare?
11. **Health.** To what extent do computer systems pose health hazards through low level radiation, noise and repetitive strain injuries? To what extent do computer related jobs have special health hazards when they require people to work intensively at keyboards for grueling time periods? Are eye-strain or crippling muscular injuries necessary occupational hazards for people who spend long hours at terminals -- programmers and professionals, as well as clerks? If there are serious health problems associated with computer equipment or computer-related jobs, should there be tough regulation of equipment or workplaces to enhance people's health and well-being?
12. **Computer Literacy.** Must all effectively educated citizens have any special knowledge of computer systems? If so, what kinds of insights and skills are most critical -- those that are akin to computer programming or those that are akin to understanding how organizational information systems function?
13. **Privacy and Encryption.** To what extent do powerful encryption algorithms provide people with exceptional privacy in protecting their communications? Should the public, including career criminals and potential terrorists, be able to communicate in ways that make it impossible for police agencies to monitor?
14. **Scholarship.** How easily can electronic publishing give scholars more rapid access to wider audiences? Does it help scholars if readers can access a wider variety of materials which are more up to-date? Can the quality of information be adequately maintained as academic publications transition to electronic formats? To what extent are electronic libraries and electronic publications most usable by faculty and students with funds to buy services and/or adjunct computer equipment? Is electronic publishing likely to modify the criteria for academic career advancement and its tie to publication in paper-based journals?
15. **Climate Change.** There is a general belief that information systems can contribute to combating climate change and its consequences by playing an important role in environmental protection. For instance, besides working to reduce its own emissions, which are estimated to be around 2 – 2.5 per cent of the total of GHG emissions, information systems could help indirectly to reduce GHG emissions belonging to other sectors. Information systems could help in climate monitoring, farming, helping to avoid further deforestation and setting up the necessary communications networks in the major emergencies and disasters around the world. What is the impact of the products and services of the information systems sector in developing countries on climate change? How could information systems help reduce emissions in other sectors such as transport and power in developing countries? What are the challenges facing developing countries in combating climate change induced by information systems products and services?