

The Digital Divide

LIS 490 / AFRO 498

Class W 6-8:50 pm with 7:30-7:45 break
in LIS 131 (except for 9/3 and 9/10 in 109)

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Overview

The current debate and research about the digital divide is about social inequality at an early stage of development of the information society. In other words, the world is going through a technological transformation, and some sectors have been more involved than others, hence those not yet taking up digital technology and going online are considered digitally divided. There are many approaches to this question – Access? Skill? Literacy? Usage? Local versus global? Etc.

This course is taking two approaches to the study of the digital divide. We will be reviewing some of the basic analyses and datasets to give us a historical and an analytical understanding of the digital divide. Secondly, we will have a series of speakers from positions of institutional policy and practice regarding the various ways the digital divide emerges in the community and what is being done about it in each case. This will be a time to interact with policy makers and think with them about the problems they face with the digital divide.

The first four class sessions will be reading and discussion intensive. Students are expected to have read the material and be prepared to discuss – to state the main point and have at least one question to go deeper. The class will begin with each student having a turn to speak, and then the instructor will lecture and lead a discussion. This is 10% of your grade.

The next set of class sessions will feature guest speakers. The basic preparation for this part of the course will be three reports on the next stage of computation, hence the next stage of the digital divide (Atkins, Unsworth, and Alkalimat). The last set of class sessions will return to broad theoretical concerns – space, agency, and democracy.

Texts

1. Lisa Servon, *Bridging the Digital Divide: Technology, Community, and Public Policy* (Blackwell, 2002)
2. Jan A. G. M. van Dijk, *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society* (Sage, 2005)

3. Mark Warschauer, *Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide* (MIT, 2003)
4. Kate Williams, ed., *eChicago 2007*
5. Abdul Alkalimat, *Cyberorganizing*
6. *Atkins Report*
7. *Unsworth Report*

8. *Alkalimat Report*

Background reading

The basic assumption for this course is that we are undergoing a fundamental transformative process of change, a revolutionary change. As background reading for this basic point of view, consider the following:

1. Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A brief history of the twenty-first century* (2006)
2. Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *Revolutionary Wealth: How it will be created and how it will change our lives* (2006)
3. Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams, *Wikinomics: How mass collaboration changes everything* (2006)
4. Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and circuits of struggle in high-technology capitalism* (1999)
5. Jim Davis, et. al, *Cutting Edge: Technology, Information, Capitalism and Social Revolution* (1997)
6. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 3 volumes (~2003)
7. Dan Schiller, *Digital Capitalism: Networking the Global Market System* (1999)

Requirements

Everyone is being asked to do the following:

1. bring the course texts to class the weeks we read them
2. read and take detailed notes on all assigned material – maintain a notebook
3. actively participate in all class discussions
4. carefully read the media and bring reactions to current events about the digital divide to class discussions

For grad students at 2 credits and undergrads at 3 credits:

1. Select either *eChicago* or *Cyberorganizing* to make a report in class (12/3 or 12/10). This means reading a three page paper that you have written.
2. Critical response to all speakers
3. Prepare an annotated bibliography on a key aspect of the digital divide (at least 20 entries with annotation), nothing before 2000, and must include primary and secondary data, media and policy. Examples: Gender and the digital divide, the digital divide in Mexico, or the digital divide in rural America.

4. GRADING: one third for each of the above (A=90%+, etc)

Critical response to each speaker: To complete this assignment, send answers to these four questions to instructor the day after class in the text of an email. Keep them in mind as you participate in class.

1. What were the main points of the presentation (bullet points/outline)
2. What were the weaknesses? Silences?
3. What are the two most important questions that did not get asked?
4. Did anything change your mind? Why?

For grad students at 4 credits:

1. Prepare an annotated bibliography on a key aspect of the digital divide (at least 20 entries with annotation), nothing before 2000, and must include primary and secondary data, media and policy. Examples: Gender and the digital divide, the digital divide in Mexico, or the digital divide in rural America.
2. You will be assigned to a speaker as a research assistant. You will help them prepare their talk, with power point, and then arrange with OITR for audiorecording. A few weeks later, you will get the text transcription and work with the speaker to turn it into a fully researched article with footnotes, bibliography, webliography, and relevant and current empirical data. With joint authorship – by <speaker> with with the assistance of <student> -- it will be published in a monograph via the CI Lab.
3. Grading: paper = 75%, annotated bibliography = 25%

Course schedule: topics, readings, speakers

8/27 Topic: Definition: What is the digital divide?

Read: Servon, pp 1-24

Warschauer, pp 1-31

Van D, pp 1-27

(browse to get familiar)

Suggested reading:

9/3 (meet in 109)

Topic: Measurement: What is the size and diversity of the digital divide?

Read: Servon, pp 24-45

Warschauer, pp 31-49

Van D, pp 45-95

(browse)

Suggested reading:

9/10 (meet in 109)

Topic: Bridges: How are people using computers and getting online? What do they do?

Read: Servon, pp 45-77

Warschauer, pp 153-199

Van D, pp 145 – 163

Suggested reading:

(read one recent report of interest)

- 9/17 **Topic: Policy: How can government and civil society make sure democracy survives in the information society?**
Read: Servon, pp 199-232
Warschauer, pp 199-216
Van D, pp 181-219
e-government
Suggested reading:
- 9/24 **Topic: Public computing in Champaign**
Speaker: Kate Williams, Assistant Professor, GSLIS, UIUC
Read: **to come**
- 10/1 **Topic: Building community technology centers**
Speaker: Martin Wolske, Lecturer, GSLIS, UIUC
Read: ** to come**
- 10/8 **Topic: Critical perspective of a community activist**
Speaker: Imani Bazzell, Champaign Urban League
Read:
- 10/15 **Topic: Public computing in the Champaign Public Library**
Speakers: Amy Al-Shabibi, Technology Manager and Kristina Hoerner, Director of Adult Services, Champaign Public Library
Read: Technology Plan:
- 10/22 **Topic: Computing in the Champaign public school system**
Speaker: Roger Grinnip, Director of Information and Instructional Technology, Champaign Public Schools
Read: 2006 – 2009 Technology Plan

- 10/29 **Topic: The Digital Divide at UIUC**
Speaker: David Ruby, Manager of Computer Labs, CITES, UIUC
Read: ** to come **
- 11/5 **Topic: Making and Implementing City Policy**
Speaker: Fred Halenar, Information Technology Officer, City of Champaign
Read: ** to come **
- 11/12 **Topic: Broadband Access for Illinois**
Speaker: Ryan Croke, Policy Advisor, Office of the Lt. Governor, Illinois
Read: Illinois Broadband wiki:
- 11/19 **Topic: eChicago: a case study**
Read:
- 12/3 **Cyberorganizing: the role of agency**
Read:
- 12/10 **Digital divide and presidential politics**
Read: