Gallatin School, New York University
First-Year Research Seminar: The Digital Commons (FIRST-UG742)
Spring 2013
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00am-12:15pm (1 Wash Place, Room 501)
Office Hours: 9-10:45 Office 416 (in the Gallatin Building)
Instructor: Cecily Swanson
Email: chs5@nyu.edu (email is the best way to contact me)
Phone: 571-529-2146 (please do not call after 10pm)

Course Description:
This course examines how artists, writers, and activists have used both physical and
digital resources to transmit ideas about the world and to the world. What is the future of
writing, reading, and thinking in an era where the Internet has become, in Jennifer Egan’s
words, “th hum tht nevr gOs away”? The “commons” traditionally refers to the cultural
and social goods shared by a public; we examine how the “digital commons” have
transformed our understanding of public participation. What does it mean to be an
audience in a digital environment that favors user interaction and what sorts of users do
online communities reward (and discourage)? How should we best participate within
these shared, but virtual, spaces? In examining the relationship between material
collections (of books, paintings, or film footage) and information available on the
Internet, we consider how written language informs digital text, how blogs interact with
traditional journalism, how political movements take shape through both old and new
media, and how technology alters aesthetic expression. Through this investigation,
students develop strategies for effective research both on and offline.

Office Hours:
I encourage you to take advantage of office hours! Stop by, chat with me about your
ideas, and let me know how your writing and research are progressing. **You may attend
office hours as often as you like, but I require you to come to my office hours at least
twice during the semester: once before week 4 and once before the end of the
semester.**

If you need additional help with your writing, you can contact the Gallatin Writing
Center at 1 Washington Place, room 423. The Writing Center will open in early October.
Make an appointment here:
[http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/undergraduate/writing/writingcenterappointments.html](http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/undergraduate/writing/writingcenterappointments.html)

Required Texts:

Highly recommended:


Optional:
All other readings are available at NYU Classes or are linked below.

**Attendance and Participation:**
Diligent attendance and informed participation are of the utmost importance for this course. Unexcused absences will affect your grade. Tardiness will account against your attendance record, as will consistent lack of participation in class. It is your responsibility to inform me of any other circumstances—illness, family emergency, or religious observances—that will affect your attendance or performance in this class. I may ask for documentation of absences (doctor’s note, etc).

**Writing:**
This course acquaints you with the theories and methodologies of scholarly research. Successful research requires broad familiarity with a range of skills, databases, resources, and approaches. Each week, you will complete small writing assignments (alone and sometimes with fellow students) that will help introduce you to fundamentals of research-based scholarship. Here is a break down of the types of writing assignments you can expect to do this semester:

- **Course Blog:** You will complete seven blog posts during the course of the semester. I have set up a [blogspot](#) for this purpose. Our blog is currently private, but we may choose to make it public at the end of the semester. The blog will be used for writing assignments (and experiments) about ideas from the reading. I hope it will allow you to develop your thoughts about the course material, share with your peers, and facilitate class discussion.

- **Course Wiki:** All your small research assignments will be completed on your own personal page within our course [wiki](#). Think of it as your research portfolio: a place to record the processes of your ongoing research. Sometimes you will be asked to share your personal wiki work on group wiki pages. For example, we will have a shared annotated bibliography page.

- **Essays:** You will write two short essays this semester: a précis (concise summary of a scholar’s argument) and a comparison essay (of two or three journal articles on a related topic). I will explain these in handouts.

- **Annotated Bibliography:** You will submit an annotated bibliography of 10 sources (that concern your final research paper). The draft is due 4/3 and the final is due 4/12. I will explain scholarly annotation in a handout.

- **Final Research Paper:** All of the coursework is geared to helping you research and write your final paper. Your topic should broadly address an issue related to the idea of the commons—information commons, environmental commons, cultural commons, and so on. (I will circulate a handout at the start of Week Two.) You will begin working on this project in the first weeks of the semester, completing a range of writing and research exercises in preparation for it. You will submit an annotated bibliography, a research proposal, and a draft of your
research paper. Each of these three interrelated assignments will go through a workshop process.

Presentations:
Each of you will present your research paper topic to the class. These presentations will be short (no more than 5 minutes) and will require use of either Powerpoint or Prezi (you can get a free Prezi education membership with your NYU email address).

Grades: I will assign your final grade based on the strength of your written assignments, your completion of all course requirements, and your attendance and participation in class.

Incompletes: I strongly discourage incompletes and will grant them only for students facing truly extenuating circumstances.

Anticipated breakdown of assignments:
Participation (includes all short assignments, research presentation, and class discussion): 35%
Essay 1: 5%
Essay 2: 10%
Annotated Bibliography: 10%
Final Research Paper: 40%

Technology in the classroom:
Please bring your laptop to class everyday. Failure to do so will affect your participation grade. We will do all our in-class writing exercises on our wiki space and will frequently explore the blog posts. Logging on to non-course related sites (Facebook, Amazon, email, etc etc) will negatively affect your participation grade and will severely disrupt our coursework. If you are continually distracted by personal technology (phones) or non-course related sites during class, I will contact your advisor.

Academic Integrity:
All the written work you submit in this course must have been written for this course and not for another. It must originate with you in form and content, with all sources fully and specifically acknowledged. Plagiarism, or academic theft, is passing off someone else’s work as your own. You are responsible for not plagiarizing, and for understanding what plagiarism is. I will uphold the University's code of academic and personal conduct for all instances of plagiarism. You may find this code in your NYU Gallatin Bulletin. You can download the bulletin at: http://www.nyu.edu/gallatin/pdf/GallatinBulletin.pdf.

Library Research Sessions:
We have two schedule library research sessions: (1) a general introduction to library research on 2/21 and a visit to the Fales library on 3/26. Failure to attend these sessions may affect your grade.

Museum Visit:
On Sunday, April 7th, we will visit the Museum of the Moving Image. If you can’t make this visit, please arrange to visit sometime before.

**WEEK ONE: Introductions**

**Tuesday 1/29**

In-class writing: How does technology affect the way you write?
In-class reading/viewing: Koch, “You Want a Social Life, With friends + Alan Lastufka’s kinetic typography video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjXHRU1Ke_M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjXHRU1Ke_M)

**Thursday 1/31**

Student questionnaire/ go over syllabus
Discuss short excerpt from Michael Warner, Publics and Counterpublics

Reading:
Habermas, Jürgen. The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964).
(Available on Classes)

Blog assignment: (due the night before class by 9pm 1/30):
In "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," Jürgen Habermas describes the public sphere as a historically contingent phenomenon: public discussions which are “both critical in intent and institutionally guaranteed have not always existed” (50). He illustrates the conditional nature of the public sphere through the example of the press. In the 18th century, he claims, as private individuals began to gather in public to freely discuss social and political concerns, newspapers and journals also transformed. Once the conduits for news, they became a space for the discussion of public opinion—the press was both “a mediator and intensifier of the public itself” (53). He does not see subsequent mass media as operating this way; by the 19th century, it had been taken over by commercial (i.e. private) interests and thus no longer operated as an arena for public debate.

Does the blogosphere function more like an ideal (18th century) public sphere?
Discuss in a paragraph-length blog post. You will need to show that you understand Habermas’s definition of a public. Please also mention (and hyperlink) a few blogs you follow (or, if you don't follow any blogs, pursue the web for a few that seem interesting and hyperlink them).

**WEEK TWO: Searching for the Commons**

**Tuesday 2/5**

Reading due:
Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons” *Science, May 1, 1968*

Wiki Assignment:
Construct a **Boolean search strategy** on the cultural, information, economic, or environmental commons in the United States and run it through the Bobst
Library, JStor, Google scholar.

On your personal wiki page, compare these strategies for the given search. Which worked best? How did you modify the search? What did you learn about your selected topic through this search?

_in class writing: on the group wiki bibliography page, compile a few of your best results_

_in class viewing: Video on the information commons_

Thursday 2/7

Reading due:


Research Assignment + Wiki Writing:
Identify three databases that would be good resources for research one any one of the following:
- Representations of technology in twentieth-century literature
- Caring for the commons
- Public goods in New York City
Select one topic, run it, compare your results, and rank the databases (feel free to slightly tweak the terms of the search).

Wiki writing: Briefly discuss your results on your designated wiki page.

Share your selected databases on our collective database page.

Watch in class: Jonathan Zittrain: The Web as Random acts of Kindness (discuss)

Friday 2/8: PAPER 1 DUE BY 8pm, EMAIL

One page précis of Hardin’s article due, by email, by 8pm. A précis is a clear, concise summary of a written work. It identifies the research question asked by the author, the author’s argumentative premises, the author’s discursive community (audience), and, most importantly, the author’s answer to the guiding research question (the thesis). It might also address any questions the author leaves open for future work. We will discuss more in class.

WEEK THREE: Mediums and Gadgets

Tuesday 2/12

Reading:
Macluhan, Intro to 1st and 2nd edition + the Medium is the Message (5-35).

In class writing (citation assignment): Find a scholarly journal article (through one of the databases we’ve discussed) on a topic that might inform your final research paper. Use the Web of Science (of which the Arts and Humanities Citation Index is a subsidiary)
Citation Index to find articles that make reference to it. **List and describe the results on your wiki page.**  
*This Q&A about Web of Science might be useful.*

**Thursday 2/14**

**Reading:**

**Blog Assignment (due the night before class: 2/13 9pm)**
Macluhan claims that “[a]ny invention or technology is an extension or self-amputation of our physical bodies, and such extension also demands new rations or new equilibriums among the other organs” (67). In a one-paragraph post, describe how a piece of technology “extends” but also “amputates” you. What new ratios or equilibriums does this extension/amputation entail? Please include links and pictures if possible.

*In class viewing: Dialtones: A Telesymphony by Golan Levin and collaborators*

**WEEK FOUR: Open Access Publishing and Research**

**Tuesday 2/19:**

**Reading:**
Wikipedia entry on Open Access


In class video:

**Writing Assignment:** Annotation Exercise (Part 1)  
Find a scholarly journal article of potential interest to you for your final research project.

**On your wiki page,** at the top of the entry, provide full documentation of the source in a correct documentation style (use what the article uses—if you’re not sure, look up the journal information and see what citation style they require). Then provide the following information/answer the following questions:

(A) How did you find a good source on your topic? What are the signs that the author is an expert? How is documentation handled within the article?

(B) Explain the research question that the article is attempting to answer. Then explain the answer (the author’s main claim or thesis) and the strongest evidence supporting the thesis. Do you have any questions about the validity of the claims made in the article? How does the article contribute to your research?

**Thursday 2/21:** Library Research Visit: Meet at BOBST CLASSROOM: PC2
(located on the first lower level of the library).

**Writing Assignment:** Annotation Exercise (Part II) (due on your wiki page by 10am):
Find a scholarly source that disagrees with your first source in some significant way. At the top of your wiki entry, provide full documentation of the source in the correct style of documentation. Then provide the following information/answer the following questions:

(A) Summarize the article’s main question, its answer to the question (the thesis), and the strongest evidence supporting the thesis.

(B) Carefully summarize how the claims and evidence of this article differ from the claims and evidence of the first article. Do they have points of agreement? If so, explain them.

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**WEEK FIVE:** Hacktivism

**Tuesday 2/26**

**Reading:**
- “Cloak and Swagger,” Harper’s Magazine (January 2012)—available on Classes
- “Anon, Anon,” *Harper’s Magazine* (December 2012)—available on Classes

*Watch clip in class: “We Steal Secrets”: Alex Gibney’s New Documentary Explores the Story of Wikileaks.*

*In class exercise: What is a research question?*

**Thursday 2/28**

Draft Paper 2 due in class (email me a copy before class). WORKSHOP.

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**WEEK SIX:** Politics and Social Media

**Tuesday 3/5**

**Reading:**

**Group annotation assignment:**
We’re trying something new with Youngs’ article. I have uploaded it to Classroom Salon (click the link to join), a web-based discussion forum that let’s you annotate documents, respond to your classmates’ annotations, and start discussions about specific lines within a text. Everyone will join Classroom Salon and comment on the text (and their classmates’ comments) before class.

Thursday 3/7

**Guest Lecturer:** Daniel Denvir will speak to our class about journalism online. Daniel Denvir is a reporter at the Philadelphia City Paper and a frequent contributor to Salon, The Atlantic, Cities, The Guardian, and VICE.

**Blog Assignment (due the night before class: 3/6 9pm):**
Explore a few influential blogs (this list from the Guardian might help you get started). Write a one-paragraph post comparing a few that you found interesting. A few questions to consider: do bloggers you selected write in similar styles? Do your blogs share content? What’s their text to image ratio? Do they accept comments?

Friday 3/8

FINAL DRAFT of Paper 2 due by email 8pm

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**WEEK SEVEN: Digital Tools for Research**

**Tuesday 3/12**

**Reading:**
Check out this page of tools for digital research (Penn Library Guides).

Ben Schmidt, “Age Cohort and Vocabulary Use,” April 11, 2011.


*In class demonstration: Google books Ngram Viewer*

*In class writing assignment: Construct Ngram search for your research project. Write a short wiki entry about what it might reveal about your research.*

**Thursday 3/14:**

Research Paper PROPOSALS due in class. WORKSHOP.
*In class text analysis assignment with research proposals using Voyant. Post findings on your wiki page.*
### WEEK EIGHT
**SPRING BREAK!** You might want to start reading *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (it’s fun!)

### WEEK NINE: Archives: Material and Born Digital

**Tuesday 3/26**
Visit to the Fales Library. Meet at the seminar room on the third floor of Bobst.

**Thursday 3/28**
**Reading:**
Kate Theimer, “Archives in Context and as Context,” *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1.2 (Spring 2010).

**Meta Data Description Assignment:**
Find an object (a material object, but not a book) that relates in someway to your research project. Use Visual Resource Association Core description to describe your image. Upload your description, with an image (and associated image description) to your wiki page. You might find this VRA Corp example helpful.

### WEEK TEN: Literature in a Digital Age

**Tuesday 4/2**
**Reading:**
Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*: 1-91.

**Blog Assignment (due the night before class: 4/1 by 9pm):**
Many of Egan’s characters seem painfully—but also brilliantly—self-aware. Discuss a moment of self-awareness and describe how Egan reinforces it with her language and story structure. Your post should also try to account for how the moment of self-awareness functions: does it redeem the character? Cause shame? Facilitate connection? Why and to what broader effect?

**Wednesday 4/3**
Annotated bibliography of 10 sources due to pre-assigned group by 6pm. Email me a copy.

**Thursday 4/4**
**Reading**
*A Visit from Goon Squad*: 91-165.
In class bibliography workshop.

### WEEK ELEVEN Art in a Digital Age

**Sunday 4/7**
Museum of the Moving Image visit (4:00pm – meet in the lobby of the museum):
http://www.movingimage.us/about/

**Tuesday 4/9**
**Reading:**
Blog Assignment:
Write a short post answering the question “who is the Goon Squad”? Next, turn your post into a 140-character tweet. Then rewrite your tweet into what Egan calls “pure language” (or text language).

Thursday 4/11 NO CLASS
Blog Assignment (by end of day)
Prepare a blog post on one of the artists you enjoyed at the Museum of the Moving Image. Please incorporate hyperlinks, images, and, if possible, video.

Friday 4/12
Annotated bibliography due to 8pm, by email. Please include your filled out peer-review sheets (the ones you received from your group—not the ones you sent to group members). Please also upload your annotations to the group wiki.

WEEK TWELVE: Maps
Tuesday 4/16
Guest Lecturer: Matt McCormick, award winning filmmaker and video installation artist, will discuss electronic art, music videos, and found footage. [date subject to change]

Thursday 4/18: Presentations 1-3
Reading
Experiment with the Google Map Labs (you’ll need to turn the function on).

Blog Assignment (due the night before class: 4/17 by 9pm):
Find a street on Google maps you’ve never been (anywhere in the world). Get as much detail about it as you can from the map and write a paragraph-long post describing all you can perceive about this location. Include an image.

WEEK THIRTEEN: Creativity and Collaboration
Tuesday 4/23

Thursday 4/25 Presentations 4-6
Reading:
Jennifer Egan, “Blackbox” (a twitter short story) The New Yorker June 4, 2012 (access through library database)
Other reading TBA (StoryScribes?)

GRAMMAR AND STYLE REVIEW

WEEK FOURTEEN: Education and Collaboration
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| **Tuesday 4/30** | **Presentations 7-9**  
Collaborative wiki writing: What is the Commons?                                                    |
New York University TIME/LOCATION TBA                                                              |
| **Thursday 5/2** | **Presentations 10-12**  
**Reading**  
| **WEEK FIFTEEN:** | **Conclusions**  
**Tuesday 5/7** | **Presentations 13-16**  
Collaborative wiki writing: What is the Commons? (finish)  
**Thursday 5/9** | **Final Discussion** |
|             | **Sunday 5/12** | Research Paper due by 6pm, email please |