In this course, we will explore together the concept of culture as seen through its forms of communication. Beginning with the oral tradition, we will read Walter Ong’s work on orality and literacy and develop a critique of his framework for technological development and also examine the impact of writing on the spoken word in Plato’s Phaedrus. The Bhagavad-Gita will provide an alternative world-view on the meaning of knowledge and the tension between spiritualism and materialism. Marshall McLuhan’s seminal work, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, will orient us towards the epistemological biases of different media and allow us to generate questions surrounding the impact of one medium on another. The course will conclude with an examination of digital culture in terms of its cognitive effects as described by Nicholas Carr in The Shallows as well as the effects of social media on identity, community and culture through selected readings in Ziti Papacharissi’s A Networked Self. Contemporary themes on the issue of privacy in the age of big data and the role of technology in democracy will be addressed through more recent articles. Our discussions will often focus on forms of communication as they have emerged historically as well as how they coexisted in time. How do these technologies compete with one another and as a result how are they transformed? Most importantly, how are we transformed in how and what we communicate to one another and to ourselves? Please try to
raise meaningful questions which may have only approximate answers rather than seek answers to wrong questions.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES/LEARNING GOALS:**

1) Critical reading of texts in terms of (a) thesis; (b) assumptions; (c) methodology; and (d) findings.
2) Critical assessment of differing theories on the impact of communication technologies on culture.
3) To demonstrate in clearly articulated writing an understanding of the major ideas in the texts as they apply to specific phenomena associated with the role and effects of technology.
4) To apply the knowledge gained from the texts and class discussions to develop your own critique of technology and its impact on culture

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Required Texts:

Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word
Plato, Phaedrus translated by Nehemas and Woodruff
The Bhagavad-Gita by Barbara Stoler Miller
Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man
Nicholas Carr, The Shallows
A Networked Self edited by Zizi Papacharissi

For certain topics, there will be handouts of appropriate reading material. Selected films may be shown.

**ATTENDANCE:**

Attendance will be taken in every class. You are allowed 2 absences for the semester for which there is no penalty. If you exceed this number, you will need to speak to me and provide a valid
reason for your absence. Excessive absences will result in a lowering of your grade. If you come to class 15 minutes late, it will count as half an absence; a later arrival will count as a full absence. Absences due to religious holidays carry no penalty.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING CRITERIA:
You will be asked to write 3 response papers based on the readings and class discussions. Each paper must be 7-10 pages, double-spaced. Suggested topics will be given for each paper along with the due dates. A valid reason must be provided for late papers. Each paper is worth 30% of your grade (total 90%). Attendance, class participation and an occasional in-class writing assignment will be worth 10% of your grade. As a general rule, I prefer not to give an Incomplete Grade for the course. An I grade will be given only under special circumstances and requires that the student has submitted at least some work required for the course.

POLICY ON PLAGIARISM:
“As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website, (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/about/bulletin/undergrad/policies/integrity.html)

USE OF DIGITAL DEVICES IN THE CLASSROOM:
You may use your digital device to read or refer to the required textual material for the course or to take notes on class lectures and discussions. Inappropriate use of digital devices will negatively affect your final grade.
Readings and Class Session Topics:
All readings must be completed prior to class. Please bring the assigned text to class.

Wednesday, September 7
Introductions and course review

Read for Monday, September 12
Ong: Introduction and Chapter 1

Monday, September 12
Ong’s framework on technology
Definition of terms
Orality of language

Read for Wednesday September 14
Ong: Chapters 2 and 3

Wednesday, September 14
Characteristics of oral cultures

Read for Monday, September 19
Ong: Chapter 4

Monday, September 19
Technology and the structure of consciousness

Read for Wednesday, September 21
Ong: Chapter 5

Wednesday, September 21
Print and its impact on orality and writing
**Read for Monday, September 26**
Ong: Chapter 6

Monday, September 26
Structure of narratives in oral cultures

Wednesday, September 28
Overview of Ong and critique

Monday, October 3
Film: Being There by Hal Ashby

Wednesday, October 5
Film: Being There cont’d

**NO CLASS MONDAY, OCTOBER 10**

Wednesday, October 12
Discussion of Being There

**Read for Monday, October 17**
Plato: Phaedrus: Introduction to end of Socrates’ First Speech

Monday: Role of rhetoric in philosophy

**Read for Wednesday, October 19**
Finish Phaedrus

Speech, writing and persuasion

**RESPONSE PAPER 1 DUE WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19**

**Read for Monday, October 24**
Miller: The Bhagavad-Gita: Introduction through The Ninth Teaching

Monday, October 24
Philosophy, Discipline, Knowledge and Action in Hinduism

**Read for Wednesday, October 26**
Finish Bhagavad-Gita

Nature and the spirit of humankind
Monday, October 31
Comparison between Phaedrus and Bhagavad-Gita

**Read for Wednesday, November 2**
McLuhan: Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2
Wednesday, November 2
McLuhan’s framework for media

**Read for Monday, November 7**
McLuhan: Chapters 3 and 4
Monday, November 7
Narcissism and hybrid media

**Read for Wednesday, November 9**
McLuhan: Chapters 5, 6, and 7
Wednesday, November 9
Rendering media effects visible
Monday, November 14
Critique of McLuhan
McLuhan and the digital age
Wednesday, November 16
Review of Ong, Plato and McLuhan

**Read for Monday, November 21**
Carr: Prologue, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4
Monday, November 21
Carr’s framework for technology

RESPONSE PAPER 2 DUE ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21
THANKSGIVING RECESS (NOVEMBER 23-27)
Read for Monday, November 28
Finish Carr
Monday, November 28
Critical assessment of Carr
Read for Wednesday, November 30
Papacharissi: Part 1: Chapters 2 and 3
Networked Publics and Labor Value
Read for Monday, December 5
Papacharissi: Part 2: Chapter 6 and Part 3: Chapter 9
Social Capital and Civic Engagement
Read for Wednesday, December 7
Papacharissi: Part 3: Chapter 12 and Conclusion: A Networked Self
Narcissism and Identity in Social Media
Read for Monday, December 12
Selected articles on privacy, big data
Implications for the future in a digital world
Tuesday, December 13
Review of course texts
Wednesday, December 14
Last Class
Self-Assessment and Self-Reflection on Course Material

FINAL PAPER DUE WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 14 (NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED)