

I202  
Social Informatics  
MW 2:30-3:20, plus discussion sections

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Office Hours: Hakken T 1:30-2:30, and W 11-12 (Informatics 211)  
Gao: MR 11-12 (Informatics 210)  
Jayashankar: (Informatics 210)  
Weldon: TF 11-12 (Informatics 210)

**Course Description:** Introduces the social and behavioral foundations of Informatics. Theoretical approaches to how technology is used from psychological and sociotechnical perspectives. Examples of how current and emerging technologies such as games, e-mail, and electronic commerce are affecting daily lives, social relations, work, and leisure time.

**Course Narrative:** To define social informatics, it is necessary to first be clear about what “informatics” is. It is likely that informatics will come to be like most other academic discipline’s whose name ends with an “ics” suffix; that is, a disciplined set of guiding practices. These practices will, like other engineering activities, relate a disciplined arena or arenas of knowledge (a “science” or academic study, broadly conceived) to a particular area of activity. If we presume that informatics is about “information,” then the relevant disciplined arena of knowledge can be taken to be all that is known from thinking hard about information, both in its particular forms and in general. At one level, this includes all of human knowledge, but most centrally, the situations in which knowledge is applied. Much of the science of relevance to informatics is thus social science, which focuses on non-random human activity. Since the relevant arenas both of knowledge (e.g., social sciences) and of application (use of information) are extremely broad, the guiding practices at the core of informatics will also have to have very wide purchase.

As suggested in the course description quoted above, “social informatics” is about the social (group) foundations of informatics practices. Social informatics (SI) main contribution to general informatics is to connect explicitly what we know about how information is actually used with what we know about knowledge. Put differently, SI is an effort to apply what we know about the group dimensions of how information is used and to connect this systematically to what we know about groups and about information itself--how what we know about information and the contexts of its use should inform each other. Approached in this way, social informatics is a form of both social and knowledge engineering. That is, SI aims to take what we can say about the connections between information and its use and express it programmatically, for ideas of how we should intervene in both the construction of knowledge and technologies that support its use.

Of course, interest in SI derives from the recent, rapid expansion of computing, of

the deployment of a recently developed set of tools for intervening in the information/use of information dialectic. Computers, programmable devices for storage of data and its manipulation for the extraction of information, are different from other information technologies primarily in that their manipulations take place out of view, they are automated information technologies (AITs). Thus, it is the design or deployment of AITs that are generally the occasion of efforts to articulate a Social Informatics.

Consequently, the aim of this class is to survey what we know about information and its use, especially those aspects of information and use that are highlighted or changed as a consequence of AITs. Most of what we know is conceptual, although we will also deal with some artifacts and tools developed in SI to embody concepts. The survey offered is informed by one additional factor: To convince contemporary social formations to divert substantial portions of their social surplus to the development and deployment of AITs, promoters have promised major impacts on daily lives, social relations, work, and leisure time. People were told that the AIT train was leaving the station, and that consequently they had to either get on board or get out of the way.

The success of these campaigns led to creation of SI as a field, for which we in it are grateful. However, this success meant emphasis was placed on how AITs affect society, only one direction of the technology/society interaction. Reinforcing an existing tendency in social formations like the United States to privilege technological determinisms, little attention was given to how sociotechnical dynamics impact AITs. Consequently, a recurring theoretical task of social informatics is to right this imbalance in accounts of information, to address both how social factors affect AITs as well as how AITs change society.

Student Responsibilities, to be fulfilled in accordance with University of Indiana policies regarding student conduct (<http://dsa.indiana.edu/Code/index.html>):

1. Attend class after preparing by reading the material assigned. Attendance will be noted by regular one minute essays to be completed at the end of class. Normally, more than two absences from class or discussion section will lower your preparation grade (10% of grade);
2. Participate actively in class discussions, especially in your discussion section (10% of grade);
3. Successfully complete two non-cumulative exams, a midterm and a final. Review materials for each, a list of terms/concepts for students to identify as part of the preparation for the exams, will be provided at least a week before each exam (40% of grade);
4. Complete the class project, development of a website that persuasively articulates a defensible university policy regarding electronic file sharing that is both ethical and legal; a schedule of due dates for project development will be distributed shortly (25%);
5. Complete additional SI findings and applications projects as assigned in class (15%):
  - a. Two page essay (500 words): Explain what Lessig means by the “architecture” of cyberspace. Describe a situation in which law and architecture combine either to improve or to disrupt achievement of a “Lessig balance” on the Internet.

Every effort will be made to stick to the following schedule of Monday and Wednesday lectures; discussion sections will meet at the weekly time, date and place for which each student signed up. Additional readings, largely available on the Internet, and other projects will be assigned periodically.

Date	Topic	Reading	Supplementary media
8/30	Informatics as a topic/discipline		
9/1	The threat to free culture	Lessig: Preface, Intro	
9/6	Informatics' field: Automated Information Technologies as a type of techno-engineering		social informatics artifacts
9/8	"Piracy"	Lessig, Chapters 1&2	
9/13	Informatics' field, cont.: The anthropology of Its		IT artifacts shaped by law
9/15	"Piracy," cont.	Lessig, 3&4	
9/20	Informatics' field, cont.: As applied social science/social engineering		Identifying a Social Informatics finding
9/22	"Piracy," summary, and "property"	Lessig: 5&6	
9/27	Key issues in Social Informatics: Technology and science		Engineering an SI finding
9/29	"Property," cont. Lessig: 7-9		
10/4	Key Issues, cont.: Techno-scientific determinism vs. Social construction of technoscience/Actor Network Theory		
10/6	"Property," cont. Lessig: 8&9		Review Materials Lessig video
10/11	Key Issues: Computer Revolution/Information Age Hypotheses The techno-science/social formation dialectic		Lessig paper due
10/13	"Property," cont. Lessig: 10		
10/18:	Review		
10/20	Midterm Exam		
(No discussion section)			
10/25	Open Source Software		

10/27	Puzzles	Lessig: 11&12	
11/1	Open Source Networking Dynamics and Cultural Imaginary		
11/3	Balances	Lessig: 13&14	
11/8	The Economy Formerly Known as “New”		
11/10	An Information Ethic	Lessig: Conclusion:	
11/ 15	Knowledge Management Fatigue Syndrome		
11/17	Design of AITs		
11/22	Distance Learning; Electronic Democracy		
11/24	No class or discussion sections; thanksgiving break		
11/29	Applied Social Informatics: Participatory Design		
12/1	Applied SI, cont.: Organizational Development		Review Materials
12/6	The Social Informatics Research Agenda		
12/8	Review		
12/?	Final Exam		