Comm 620: Communication and Interdisciplinary Studies: Thinking about Technology, Innovation, and Collaboration

The far-reaching aim of this course is to incubate multi-disciplinary collaborations among students trained in communication and in technological fields, among media critics and new media designers, and among emerging scholars and digital culture producers so that they can imagine new areas of technology-based research and design. The foundation for these collaborations is theoretical: thus we will begin with a presentation of major theories of technology as a context for a more in-depth discussion of an approach that I refer to as “A Reproductive Theory of Technology” that draws insights from critical cultural studies and feminist philosophies of science. This approach develops an anti-essentialist theory of technology adequate to the digital age that can serve as a conceptual and critical framework for the development of a critical and cultivated technological imagination.

A second section will explore the relationship between innovation and culture to discuss the distinctions among innovation, invention and creativity, models of socio-cultural change, and the dynamics of techno-human agency. A third section investigates the nature of collaboration across domains and disciplines. Here we will discuss an ethical approach to cross-disciplinary collaboration, the cultural work of “disciplines” in a digital age, the organization of emergent (new) intellectual formations, and the cultural responsibilities of scholars and designers. We will review different paradigms of “design-research methods” that offer distinct protocols for needs assessment, prototyping, social engagement, production, diffusion, and dissemination. A fourth component of the course features invited presentations by key faculty and scholars who engage in “interdisciplinary” research projects that provide models for the organization of innovative research efforts.

Activities include: Creation of a research-design journal, a Pechu Kucha presentation, the creation of a graphic novel, a written project proposal, and beta-testing a new interactive application.