E-learning and digital culture

Credit rating

20 credits, SCQF 11

Course tutors

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Short description of course

This course situates online learning within the context of the emergence of a specifically digital culture. Recent years have seen a growing dependence in the West on digital, networked media in our working, learning and social lives. What are the educational and cultural implications of the new digitally-mediated patterns of participation and learning, and how do these change us as teachers and learners?

The course will draw on theory from media studies, cultural studies and the study of cyberculture, as well as the educational research influenced by these areas of thought. It will explore the emergence of digital culture, look at how it interfaces with learning cultures, popular culture, and ideas of virtual community, and consider how the digital domain forges changes in the way we understand language, identity, embodiment, race, gender and subjectivity.

Alongside the conceptual material, this course will experiment with a 'fragmented' model of delivery, using a combination of blogging, tweeting and lifestreaming (see assessment) – alongside some discussion board work – for course process and assessment. Almost all the course work will take place outside WebCT. **Please note that the ethos of this course will be that most of its process and content will be open to the wider internet, and that it will require the final assignment to be presented in digital, non-conventional format.**

Course learning outcomes

On completion of this course you will:

— have a critical awareness of the key concepts emerging from the study of digital culture
— be able to assess the implications of this thought for the history, development and deployment of online education
— be able to synthesise these ideas in order to develop critically-aware, media-specific pedagogies for online learning
— have developed practical skills in the use of social media and the presentation of academic discourse online

Outline of content

The course will be organised in three blocks. Learning activities throughout will focus on maintenance of an online 'commonplace book' using lifestreaming technology (see assessment), asynchronous discussion, twitter tutorials and text chat. You will develop one online visual artefact (block 1) and one ethnographic

'story' using an online application of your choice (block 2), in addition to the final assignment.

Block 1: Popular cyberculture, visuality and new literacies
This first block will consider the over-arching narratives which have driven our understanding of digital culture and its relation to learning.It will connect these to notions of visuality and media literacy in education, considering how learning and literacy is represented in popular cyberculture texts, and how such representation continues to inform our understanding of the nature of e-learning.

At the end of this block, you will produce an online representation of the themes covered, using visual methods only (creating a composite digital image, making a Flickr photostream or a YouTube video, curating a web gallery etc – guidance will be provided). The artefact will be reviewed by peers and will feed into your assessed lifestream 'commonplace book'.

Block 2: An ethnography of virtual community
This second block will consider the concept of virtual community. Readings will be provided on the concept of virtual community particularly within the context of education, and on virtual ethnography as a method.

Over this period of the course, you will conduct a small scale virtual ethnography of an online community of your choice, and will end your work on the block by creating an ethnographic snapshot of this community using an online application of your choice (again, guidance and suggestions will be provided). This will also feed into the assessed lifestream.

Block 3: Cyborg learners: critical perspectives on digital culture
In the final block we turn to work which considers how our understanding of gender, race, power and subjectivity is affected by our engagement with the digital domain. We approach this first of all through the figure of the cyborg, considering the idea that human subjectivity is altered through our relationship to, or 'fusion' with, technology and considering the substantial body of work on the implications of this idea for gender and power relations. In particular, we spend time considering the concept of the 'cyborg learner' and how we might develop pedagogies appropriate to the altered modes of selfhood we can experience online.

Work during this block of study will feed into the final assignment.

Indicative reading

Gouch, N (2004) RhizomANTically Becoming-Cyborg: Performing posthuman pedagogies, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, vol 36, no 3, pp. 253-265(13)

Hand, M. (2008) *Making Digital Cultures*. Aldershot: Ashgate

Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs and women: the reinvention of nature*. London, Free Association Books.

Hayles, N. K. (1999). *How we became posthuman: virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature and informatics*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual ethnography*. London, Sage.

Kennedy, B. and Bell, D. (2007) *The Cybercultures Reader*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge

Kress, G. (2003) *Literacy in the new media age*. London: Routledge

Nakamura, Lisa. (2007) *Digitising Race: visual cultures of the internet*. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press.

Poster, M. (2006). *Information Please: culture and politics in the age of digital machines.* Duke University Press.

Rheingold, Howard (1994) *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. London: Secker and Warburg.

Silver, D. and Massanari, A. (2006) *Critical Cyberculture Studies*. New York: New York University Press

Turkle, Sherry (1997) *Life on the Screen*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Usher, R and Edwards, R (1998) Lost and found: 'cyberspace' and the (dis)location of teaching, learning and research
http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000000742.htm

Teaching methods

The course will be delivered online using a combination of asynchronous discussion, twitter tutorials, text chat, peer review and lifestreaming.

Course assessment

1) **Commonplace book 'lifestream'** (50%): The course adapts the 17th century practice of 'commonplacing' (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonplace_book), in which individuals collated sayings, quotes, proverbs, images and thoughts in a single scrapbook-like collection. For the purposes of this course, the digital equivalent is the 'lifestream' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lifestreaming). This is a means whereby an individual's twitter tweets, blog postings, del.icio.us bookmarks and other feeds can be pulled together into a single stream. For this course, you will be supported in setting up and maintaining a lifestream which brings together all the digital fragments of knowledge generated by your studies. The visual artefact (block 1) and virtual ethnography (block 2) will feed into this, as will any blog postings or other fragments you choose. You will be required to write a 500-word statement about your lifestream on submission, and you will be able to edit the content of the stream before you submit it for assessment. You will be expected to maintain the lifestream from week one to week twelve of the course. Please note that full support will be given in creating your stream, and that you will not be disadvantaged if this is a technology which is currently unfamiliar to you.

2) **Digital essay** (50%): Participants will submit an essay in digital form. Similar to the opportunities for assignment submission for 'An introduction to digital environments for learning', this might be a web essay, a video, a build in Second Life, and so on. You will be supported in choosing a technology which is most suitable to your own levels of technical ability – for example, you might choose to author your own series of web pages, or you might decide to use a wiki space. As with the lifestream, those who do not consider themselves technically advanced will not be disadvantaged.

Resource requirements

You will be required to have regular access to a networked computer with a broadband connection. A course space for blogging and lifestreaming will be provided (not WebCT, though this may be used in a small way for course administration).