Schar School of Policy and Government
George Mason University
Fall Term 2017
As of May 2, 2017

PUBP 710 Blogs, Social Media and Public Policy
Hybrid course—mostly on line
Fall Semester 2017

For a brief video description of this hybrid course click

here

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Phone Ruth: 703 993 1789; home: 703 536 5343 (please no calls
after 8 PM)
Instructor’s Personal site http://icasit.gmu.edu/about-
us/stephen-r-ruth/
Course data base site http://icasit.gmu.edu/course-
databases/pubp-710-005-social-networks-blogs-and-public-
policy/
Face-to-face Classes (2): September 2nd and October 28th
Saturday 1:00 PM to 3:30 PM

Important Note: After week 1 this syllabus
is replaced by on line course site for current
information

Description of Course:

This mostly on line, non-technical, non-geeky course examines the causes, effects and
manifestations of the blog culture and social media. Over the years the instructor has offered
a wide variety of elective courses aimed at studying the public policy implications of
information and communications technology (ICT). Examples are: Islam and the Internet; the
Internet – Technology or Tyranny? ; Facebook and Public Policy; the Technology Tuition
Paradox; Social Networks and Public Policy; and International Issues in E Government. This course for the fall 2017 semester examines what could be considered the most significant ICT interventions now affecting our lives – blogs and social networks. Studies indicate that most people prefer blogs and social media to print and TV news and many of the new and controversial stories that are breaking every day often originate in the millions of blog sites worldwide and are transmitted on social media. Various terrorist groups have found blogs to be a powerful instrument for distributing their troubling ideas. Even more striking is the vast reach of social networks, which have become a standard method of communication throughout the world.

The format of these courses has always been the same. We try to cover the very newest, freshest, most controversial and significant policy issues, and students are given the opportunity to select about a half dozen focal areas for more detailed, personal review. Over the years, the students’ weekly posts have become more and more detailed and interesting and the interactions and insights more energetic and informed. The approach seems to work well for the busy student who wants to learn a lot about a topic but is unable to come to class more than a few times. **The amount of work is identical to that of a face-to-face class**, but the student interactions are more demanding, since everyone is posting all week long on the assigned material.

Students will be able to concentrate on regions and topics of their choosing for several of the class projects. As we examine the impacts of Blogs and Social media—which we’ll abbreviate as BSM—we will be equally interested in good and bad public policy implications. Were Internet-enabled Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street net positives? What are the causes and effects of the challenges in the blogosphere? What are the links between terrorism and social media? Should users receive a fee from Social Media providers? What about so-called “digital empowerment” programs and online “filter bubbles” (shaping search results to user’s profiles without user’s knowledge)? We’ll examine these and dozens more with an open mind.

**Notice about this Hybrid Course—a caution**

It is mostly on line with just three face-to-face meetings—so both student and instructor are required to have a continuous, productive and content-specific communications on line from beginning to end. In fact, 35 percent of the course’s grade is based on the quality and frequency of participation. So if being face-to-face is what you like best in a college course, this section of PUBP 710 may not be for you. There will be extensive class participation—far more than in a face-to-face class—and most of it will be Internet-based.

**The aim** of this course is to examine positive and negative issues associated with key Blogs and Social Media issues of the day--legal, educational, governmental, military, business, health, etc. We will approach this broad subject from three perspectives in order to offer maximum coverage and ample customization of course material to students’ needs. **First**, there will be continuing emphasis on the intellectual territory surrounding Blogs and Social Media. The aim is maximum breadth, to cover as many of the most important concepts, cases and challenges as possible. The course will present, often in on line lectures, some of the well-known thinkers in these areas, and examples of contemporary issues.
The second, and most significant, perspective is that of public policy. There are many questions to be considered. Will Blogs and Social Media play an important part in the November presidential elections? Can Blogs and Social Media be legislated? Is it possible to limit cyberbullying? Are Blogs and Social Media gradually replacing print media? Is the rapid rise of Internet pornography and inevitable feature of the Social Media culture? Will Blogs and Social media be important factors in job displacement? To what degree do Blogs and Social Media, and especially Facebook and Twitter, influence public opinion? How can this influence the measured? We will divide these policy matters into several dozen segments and each student in the course will be able to select areas for further research.

The third perspective is the student's own. An individualized portfolio and a research paper will allow each person in the course to select a subject for more detailed review. This research perspective has the goal of encouraging each student to learn more about a chosen topic within the course's coverage by delving more deeply into the literature surrounding it.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course students should have an understanding of the positive and negative aspects of Blogs and Social Media through these learning activities:

1. Learn the history of Blogs and Social Media across several millennia
2. Discuss and analyze the ICT issues that affect Blogs and Social Media
3. Discuss, analyze and critique the broader Blogs and Social Media debate, including international aspects
4. Review, locate, compare and contrast measures and indices of globalization and other key issues associated with Blogs and Social Media
5. Examine, compare, contrast, and predict regional differences in the use and effects of Blogs and Social Media deployment
6. Discuss and evaluate National Security and defense aspects of Blogs and Social Media.
7. Discuss and analyze the key policy issues that affect the Blogs and Social Media debate
8. Evaluate the potential influences of blogs and social media on the 2016 presidential election
9. Understand the possible role of Blogs and Social Media in the context of terrorist activities

Requirements, Grades and Examinations:

There are four requirements for completing the course:
1. Extensive participation in class discussions 35 percent—throughout the semester
2. Review and analysis of individualized portfolio selection (student chooses portfolio topics) 25 percent—first half of semester;
3. Research project 20 percent—second half of the semester
4. A final exam (take home) 20 percent—end of the semester (distributed at week 11)
1. **Class Participation (35%)**:

   Every week each member of the class is expected to participate actively on the Blackboard discussion site. There are **two types of online participation:**
   
   - **Formal bi-weekly posts** that reflect your views on the assigned readings and your portfolio are in the **minimum** range of **350 or more** words and should have several qualities, like relevance, comprehensiveness, coherence, clarity and focus, in addition to being well written. See sample below. A formal post is due every other week by 7 PM Monday.
   
   - **Informal posts** are expected as part of the discussion and should be about whatever is on your mind, but please remember that a simple post that says something like, "I agree" or "Right on" with no indication of the "because" part is not very helpful. A minimum 4 informal posts are due every week. This covers all aspects of interaction from the first class to the last. As a reminder, about 70 hours of commuting and attendance time are saved through online courses, and formal and informal posts are expected to reflect considerable time and effort, each week.

   Click [here](#) for the instructor’s description of the posting cycle

   Samples of formal and informal posts can be found [here](#) and [here](#)

2. **Blog and Social Network portfolio (25%)**:

   Each student selects a portfolio of several ICT topics during the first half of the semester and reports on the selected material as part of the weekly course discussions: on-line and in-class. At week 8 the student posts a detailed summary of the findings on the six portfolio topics on the class site. Several samples of successfully completed portfolios are to be found at the course site. The Portfolio instructions are at the end of this syllabus and also at the course site. Video tutorial available [here](#)

3. **Research project (20%)**:

   Students select, with instructor’s approval, a short, highly focused research project related to the course material. Target length: 1500 words. Due date: weeks 9 through 12.

4. **The final exam (20%)**:

   The final exam will be a take-home test with five questions. It will be distributed during week 11 and will require about 10-12 hours of preparation

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Missed class sessions

Missing any of the face-to-face sessions is discouraged but sometimes is necessary. Please talk to the instructor if you must miss a class and work out an assignment to demonstrate that you have done the required readings for the week. Normal procedure is a minimum 500 word summary of assigned weekly readings for the missed class.

Required books/readings:


Sherry Turkle, Reclaiming Conversation (Penguin, 2015)


Recommended books:

Sherry Turkle, Alone Together (Basic Books, 2011)

Tom Standage, Writing on the Wall—Social Media, the First 2,000 years (Bloomsbury, 2013)


Mary Akin, The Cyber Effect: A Pioneering Cyberpsychologist Explains How Human Behavior Changes Online (Elsevier, 2016)

Weekly Schedule—please note that actual assignments will be shown at the course web site and the ones noted below are tentative-after week 1 the course web site will replace this syllabus as the basis for assignments.
**Week 1** Scope and importance of Blogs and Social Media –Policy Implications—plus getting used to a hybrid course (Face-to-face) Room 468 Founders Hall 1:00-3:40 PM

**Assignment:** Watch Instructor’s short weekly summary and recommended study and posting emphasis; **Read:** Start with GMU’s Cafe Hayak (conservative, http://cafehayek.com/) and Daily Kos (liberal, http://dailykos.com)-then select at least ten other blogs from whatever political spectrum you wish and keep track of them frequently throughout the course. Here is a list that you can use to begin your selection: Liberal blogs summary: http://www.ranker.com/list/liberal-blogs/blog-loblaw; Watch Instructor’s short weekly summary and recommended study and posting emphasis; **Read:** As an opening exercise in the first week, every student is requested to select about a dozen or more blogs across many categories for review during early weeks of the course and to continue sampling blogs routinely throughout the course. Start with GMU’s Cafe Hayak (conservative, http://cafehayek.com/) and Daily Kos (liberal, http://dailykos.com)-then select at least ten other blogs from whatever political spectrum you wish and keep track of them frequently throughout the course. Here is a list that you can use to begin your selection: Liberal blogs summary: http://www.ranker.com/list/liberal-blogs/blog-loblaw; Conservative blogs summary: http://www.newsmax.com/TheWire/conservative-blogs-newsmax-list/2015/03/24/id/634218/; Top 100 Economics blogs, including GMU’s Professor Tyler Cowan’s Marginal Revolution University; Top 50 policy blogs http://www.mastersinpublicpolicy.org/top-50-public-policy-bloggers/; Conservative blogs summary: http://www.newsmax.com/TheWire/conservative-blogs-newsmax-list/2015/03/24/id/634218/; Top 100 Economics blogs, including GMU’s Professor Tyler Cowan’s Marginal Revolution University; Top 50 policy blogs http://www.mastersinpublicpolicy.org/top-50-public-policy-bloggers/.

**Week 2** Scope and importance of Social Media; brief history; students begin initial, continuing SM review (On-line)

**Assignment:** See course web site for details

**Week 3** Blogs and Social media in the Political Process—Especially this year’s presidential election (Online)

**Assignment:** See course web site for details

**Week 4** Legal and legislative issues associated with BSM – protections, security, etc. (online)

**Assignment:** See course web site for details
Week 5 The Dark Side of BSM—profiling, cyberbullying, pornography and others (online)
Assignment: See course website for details

Week 6 BSM and terrorism—plus Pew studies on BSM (Online)
Assignment: See course website for details

Week 7 BSM and Business—the value proposition—(Online)
Assignment: See course website for details

Week 8 BSM and the presidential election: another assessment and review (Online)
Assignment: See course website for details

Week 9 Dr Sherry Turkle’s perspective: Reclaiming Conversation and Alone Together (Face-to-face, October 29th 1:00-3:30 PM)
Assignment: See course website for details

Week 10 BSM and revolutions (On-line)
Assignment: See course website for details

Week 11 BSM and Hactivism(Online)
Assignment: See course website for details

Week 12 International and supranational issues in BSM
Assignment: See course website for details

Week 13 Thanksgiving Holiday
No Assignment

Assignment: See course website for details

Week 14 Trends and strategies
Assignment: See course website for details

Week 15 Review and Synthesis (Face-to-face)
Assignment: See course website for details
Technology Requirements

Hardware:
You will need access to a Windows or Macintosh computer with at least 2 GB of RAM and access to a fast and reliable broadband internet connection (e.g., cable, DSL). A larger screen is recommended for better visibility of course material. You will need speakers or headphones to hear recorded content and a headset with a microphone is recommended for the best experience. For the amount of Hard Disk Space required to take a distance education course consider and allow for:

1. the storage amount needed to install any additional software and
2. space to store work that you will do for the course.

If you are considering the purchase of a new computer, please go to the GMU computer store site

Software:
This course uses Blackboard as the learning management system. You will need a browser and operating system that are listed compatible or certified with the Blackboard version available on the myMason Portal. See supported browsers and operating systems. Select "Browser Support for October 2014". Log in to myMason to access your registered courses. Some courses may use other learning management systems. Check the syllabus or contact the instructor for details. Online courses typically use Acrobat Reader, Flash, Java (Windows), Windows Media Player, and QuickTime. Your computer should be capable of running current versions of those applications. Also, make sure your computer is protected from viruses by downloading the latest version of Symantec Endpoint Protection/Anti-Virus software for free at http://antivirus.gmu.edu.

Note: If you are using an employer-provided computer or corporate office for class attendance, please verify with your systems administrators that you will be able to install the necessary applications and that system or corporate firewalls do not block access to any sites or media types.

Blackboard Support
Email address for support
courses@gmu.edu

Student support website
http://coursessupport.gmu.edu/students/

Are you looking for quick video help about Blackboard? Visit
http://ondemand.blackboard.com/students.htm

If you can not log in to myMason please contact the ITU Support Center at (703) 993-8870 or reset your Mason NetID password at http://password.gmu.edu

For walk-in support, visit the Collaborative Learning Hub in the Founders Hall, Room B 117B (703) 993-7553 Chris Tilley

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University Requirements:

Academic Accommodation for a Disability

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

SPP Policy on Plagiarism

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of public policy inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university and the purpose of the School of Public Policy. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable. Plagiarism is the use of another’s words or ideas presented as one’s own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another’s work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined. Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one’s professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career.

The faculty of the School of Public Policy takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of “F.” This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in dismissal from the University. This dismissal will be noted on the student’s transcript. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa (eg. F-1, J-1 or J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa. To
help enforce the SPP policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of
course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared
with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School
subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit student’s work without prior permission from the
student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as
well as printed form. The SPP policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason
University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it.
(http://www.gmu.edu/facstaff/handbook/aD.html). See also the university’s academic policy
web site at http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/.

Student Journal: New Voices in Public Policy
The instructor will consider nominating the very best papers in this course for publication in
New Voices in Public Policy. New Voices is a student-and faculty-reviewed journal that
shares SPP's finest student work with the rest of the world.

Importance of Good Writing and Presentation Skills. From the outset, the highest
standard of writing will be expected. Here are some of the criteria that will be used to
measure submitted written work, especially the team research project:

- Quality of Content: analytical clarity/persuasiveness; objectivity; quality of source
  material; use of evidence/methodology.

- Tone, Structure and Organization: focused introduction, thesis, conclusion; use of
  transitions, headings and other cohering strategies; logical paragraphing in support of
  main points.

- Mechanics: Correct citation and documentation; required elements like title page,
  works cited, page numbering; grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. All work should be
  submitted in MS Word Times New Roman 12 or 14 pt. format single or double
  spaced, depending on the style guide selected

- Structure: The normal breaks between paragraphs will be observed, using any style
  guide you choose. The Chicago Manual of Style is available and another popular
  choice is Diana Hacker, A Pocket Manual of Style, (New York, St. Martin’s Press,
  latest edition). Work should be neatly arranged with clear demarcation of sub-units.

- Grammar: Impeccable word usage and grammar will be expected in all submitted
  work. Students may wish to show early work to someone else—a friend or colleague
  or the instructor—for a review of style, grammar and other details. Papers with more
  than a very small number of errors in grammar and word usage will be returned.

- Method of submission: All papers will be submitted to the instructor by email as MS
  Word attachments using a clear description in the subject line of the message. For
  example: Julia Jones, Assignment 3.
**Grading**: The grade of A or A minus is reserved for a high level of achievement; B and B plus grades indicate good mastery of the material. Grades of B minus and below indicate incomplete achievement of an assignment’s requirements. On a 100% scale, A is equal to 95%, B 85%, C 75%

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**PUBP 710 Fall Term 2017  Individual Student BSM Portfolio Preferences (25 % of course grade) Video tutorial available here**

Each student in the class can specialize within the immense variety of course themes and focus on individual interests with respect to these three areas: **policy level topics (select 2), specific IT topics (select 3) and regions** (select 1). You are requested to make selections from each of the three parts and notify the instructor of preferences before the end of week 2. Once that is done, weekly class sessions can offer the opportunity for you to share your growing expertise of these topics as a segment of the weekly required posts. After you have selected your six portfolio options (two from part 1, three from part 2, and one from part 3) you will be expected to stay current on the topics selected.

Note— samples of completed portfolios are available at the class web site in the section titled “BSM Portfolio”

**Part 1 – Policy level topics (feel free to propose others) (Select two from this group)**

- Globalization—Key BSM issues
- Regulatory Issues in BSM
- BSM replacing print journalism—key policy issues
- BSM and terrorism- key policy issues
- Government policies about BSM
- Defense issues with BSM
- Productivity issues in BSM
- Job Displacement issues and BSM
- Religion and BSM
- BSM and revolutions
Protection of Users of Social Media
Socio-economic differences & Social Networks

Part 2 – Specific IT topics

Select three from this group (feel free to suggest others)

BSM and surveillance
BSM and Cyberbullying
Filter bubbles and similar interventions in web searches
BSM legislation—state and local
BSM legislation—National
Strengths and weaknesses of Reclaiming Conversation perspective
BSM and Terrorism
BSM and Anonymous (Hacker group)
BSM and Wikileaks
Google.Facebook dominance—
Demographics of BSM –policy implications
BSM-related legal cases
BSM and Cyberwar
BSM and Racism
BSM’s influence on Public Opinion
BSM and mourning
BSM and the classroom
BSM and pornography
BSM and Internet Dating

BSM and revolutions (Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, etc)

Part 3 – Regional focus beyond the US.

Select one nation or region. Examples: India or Brazil or Middle East or European Union

What to include in the portfolio -- The format of the portfolio can be of any type that suits the student's interest, but the essential ingredients are these:

First, multiple descriptions of examples of the topic, past and present.

Second, URLs and explanations for some of the salient issues associated with the topic. **Note: all URL’s in the portfolio must be clickable**

Third, clear view of the topic's importance and relevance in terms of public policy. (This need not be rigid or didactic, since some topics may have modest policy impact)

Fourth, a description of the very latest manifestation of the topic, which might be called "late-breaking stories"

In the past, most students have chosen to use a PowerPoint or Prezi approach, like those shown in the examples provided, but any format that achieves the goals is suitable. All the portfolios will be displayed at the class site starting the end of week 8

Submitting your portfolio preferences to the instructor—before January 30th at latest, inform the instructor of your choices by this simple email format

Typical short email notification of portfolio selection to instructor:

“Part 1— Government policies about BSM; Defense issues with BSM  Part 2— BSM and Terrorism; BSM and Anonymous (Hacker group); BSM and pornography; Part 3-- Middle East”