MAS240
Cybercultures
3 Credit points

Unit Guide
Semester 1, 2012

Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies
Undergraduate Unit Guide

Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies

MAS240 Cybercultures

Semester 1, 2012

Credit Point Value: 3

Students in this unit should read this unit guide carefully at the start of semester. It contains important information about the unit. If anything in it is unclear, please consult one of the teaching staff in the unit.

Teaching Staff

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**General enquiries**

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<th>Position:</th>
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**CLASSES**

For lecture times and classrooms please consult the MQ Timetable website: [http://www.timetables.mq.edu.au](http://www.timetables.mq.edu.au). This website will display up-to-date information on your classes and classroom locations.

**Changes Made to Previous Offerings of the Unit**

The topics in this unit have been updated to reflect contemporary technological and cultural forms and practices. Recent academic material has been added to this unit in order to best offer students insight into the rapidly changing media environment, with a particular focus on social and participatory media, new digital economies, and cyber politics.

**ABOUT THIS UNIT**

MAS240 Cybercultures introduces students to debates surrounding the Internet and the World Wide Web. Through close analyses of key technological platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Amazon students will explore the complex relationships between technology and society, and examine how media technologies may shape our contemporary mediascape and our lives.

Students undertaking this unit will learn to analyse cybercultures and engage with key debates surrounding new media technologies.
Students will also learn how to design and create simple websites. The production component of this unit is introductory and does not require any special software or prior knowledge. It is complemented by a theoretical analysis of cybercultures in which key opportunities and threats posed by media technologies are explored.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

All academic programmes at Macquarie seek to develop graduate capabilities.

These are:

**COGNITIVE CAPABILITIES**

1. **Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills**

   Our graduates will take with them the intellectual development, depth and breadth of knowledge, scholarly understanding, and specific subject content in their chosen fields to make them competent and confident in their subject or profession. They will be able to demonstrate, where relevant, professional technical competence and meet professional standards. They will be able to articulate the structure of knowledge of their discipline, be able to adapt discipline-specific knowledge to novel situations, and be able to contribute from their discipline to inter-disciplinary solutions to problems.

2. **Critical, Analytical and Integrative Thinking**

   We want our graduates to be capable of reasoning, questioning and analysing, and to integrate and synthesise learning and knowledge from a range of sources and environments; to be able to critique constraints, assumptions and limitations; to be able to think independently and systemically in relation to scholarly activity, in the workplace, and in the world. We want them to have a level of scientific and information technology literacy.

3. **Problem Solving and Research Capability**

   Our graduates should be capable of researching; of analysing, and interpreting and assessing data and information in various forms; of drawing connections across fields of knowledge; and they should be able to relate their knowledge to complex situations at work or in the world, in order to diagnose and solve problems. We want them to have the confidence to take the initiative in doing so, within an awareness of their own limitations.
4. **Creative and Innovative**  
Our graduates will also be capable of creative thinking and of creating knowledge. They will be imaginative and open to experience and capable of innovation at work and in the community. We want them to be engaged in applying their critical, creative thinking.

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**INTERPERSONAL OR SOCIAL CAPABILITIES**

5. **Effective Communication**  
We want to develop in our students the ability to communicate and convey their views in forms effective with different audiences. We want our graduates to take with them the capability to read, listen, question, gather and evaluate information resources in a variety of formats, assess, write clearly, speak effectively, and to use visual communication and communication technologies as appropriate.

6. **Engaged and Ethical Local and Global citizens**  
As local citizens our graduates will be aware of indigenous perspectives and of the nation’s historical context. They will be engaged with the challenges of contemporary society and with knowledge and ideas. We want our graduates to have respect for diversity, to be open-minded, sensitive to others and inclusive, and to be open to other cultures and perspectives: they should have a level of cultural literacy. Our graduates should be aware of disadvantage and social justice, and be willing to participate to help create a wiser and better society.

7. **Socially and Environmentally Active and Responsible**  
We want our graduates to be aware of and have respect for self and others; to be able to work with others as a leader and a team player; to have a sense of connectedness with others and country; and to have a sense of mutual obligation. Our graduates should be informed and active participants in moving society towards sustainability.
PERSONAL CAPABILITIES

8. **Capable of Professional and Personal Judgement and Initiative**

We want our graduates to have emotional intelligence and sound interpersonal skills and to demonstrate discernment and common sense in their professional and personal judgement. They will exercise initiative as needed. They will be capable of risk assessment, and be able to handle ambiguity and complexity, enabling them to be adaptable in diverse and changing environments.

9. **Commitment to Continuous Learning**

Our graduates will have enquiring minds and a literate curiosity which will lead them to pursue knowledge for its own sake. They will continue to pursue learning in their careers and as they participate in the world. They will be capable of reflecting on their experiences and relationships with others and the environment, learning from them, and growing - personally, professionally and socially.

**Note:** The numbers listed at the end of each Learning Outcome indicate how it is aligned with the Graduate Capabilities.

The learning outcomes of this unit are:
(Link to graduate capabilities in brackets):

A. Understand cybercultures in a contemporary and historical context (1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8)
B. Develop and convey theoretical understandings of cybercultures (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)
C. Develop and apply critical analysis to contemporary cybercultures (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)
D. Understand and critically appraise the relationships between culture, society and media technologies (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)
E. Develop fundamental skills in Web design (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
F. Learn HTML and CSS (1, 2, 3, 4)
G. Engage with the contemporary online mediascape (1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)
H. Develop academic research skills (2, 3, 5, 8)
UNIT REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

Students are expected to attend all lectures and tutorials, and complete all set readings. Students are expected to arrive punctually to lectures, tutorials and workshops. Students are expected to be prepared to engage in tutorial discussion; this requires students to have completed all set readings.

Students are required to submit and pass all set assignments. Failure to pass all assignments will result in an overall grade of fail for the unit.

ASSESSMENT TASKS

Assessment Summary

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Task Name</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tutorial Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tutorial Papers</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Week 5, Week 8, &amp; Week 11 (Submitted online before tutorials)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Major Essay</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>June 8\textsuperscript{th} (Submitted in practical labs)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Website Project</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Week 13</td>
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<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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Task: Tutorial Participation

Weight: 10%

Due Date: Ongoing

Linked Unit Outcomes: A, B, C, D

Linked Graduate Capabilities: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8

Description:

The purpose of tutorials is for students to discuss the weekly topics and readings to enrich their understanding. All students are required to participate in tutorial discussion. This means arriving at tutorials having completed set readings and being prepared to discuss issues arising.

The format of tutorials is based around student-led discussions. Your responses to your peers will form the basis of your participation mark.

Attendance is not the same as participation. Students receive no marks for simply attending tutorials.

Task: Tutorial Papers

Weight: 30% (10% each paper)

Due Date: Week 5, Week 8, and Week 11

Linked Unit Outcomes: A, B, C, D, H

Linked Graduate Capabilities: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

Description:

Students are required to submit three separate tutorial papers during this semester. Each is to be 500 words long and must engage with one of the readings from the unit reader. The first paper must engage with a reading from weeks 2 to 5, the second 6 to 8, and the final paper 9 to 11.

Students must analyse the reading and critically reflect on its key ideas and arguments.
- Students should identify the key concepts and argument. What is the author saying? Why?
- Evaluate the argument. Is this a strong argument? Why/ Why not?
- Contextualise the argument within broader academic frameworks. How is this argument similar or different to what other theorists are saying?

You should not simply summarise the reading, you must explore, expand, and critique the author's major arguments.

Tutorial papers should follow standard academic writing practices, i.e. be formal in tone and reference cited material. Students are encouraged to draw on examples of technological forms and practices they are familiar with to better engage with and build upon the key ideas from the reading.

Students must submit online through the unit iLearn site prior to the start of their assigned tutorial.

Students will be assessed on the following:

- Demonstrated ability to identify and articulate author's key arguments
- Demonstrate ability to critically engage with key arguments
- Demonstrated ability to contextualise article core arguments within broader theory
- Style, coherence, and structure of writing

**Task: Major Essay**

**Weight:** 35%

**Due Date:** 5pm Friday, 8th June

**Linked Unit Outcomes:** A, B, C, D, G, H

**Linked Graduate Capabilities:** 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9

**Description:**

Students are required to submit a 2000 word essay addressing the following question:
MAS240 is concerned with examining the cultures that have sprung up around computer technologies and the networked environment. Select a ‘new media technology’ and critically analyse it with a focus on its history and cultures.

- Briefly describe the historical development of your subject and identify any key actors and moments in its development.
- Critically analyse the cultures that have surrounded and continue to surround its usage and analyse its past and future impacts.
- Examine any conflicts and tensions that may impact the direction of its further development.

**Note:** Essays will be submitted, marked and returned electronically via iLearn.

**Marking Criteria**

- **Choice of Topic:** How useful and interesting is your chosen case study?
- **Research:**
  - What is the quality of your research?
  - Have you identified and made use of appropriate resources beyond those provided in the unit reader?

- **Critical Approach/Analysis:** Whilst part of the essay may be descriptive, the analysis of your chosen technology must make an argument and provide evidence to support it. For example, an analysis of BitTorrent might include statistics about usage (from reputable sources), and evidence about its cultural and economic impact. Do not just describe the technology.

- **Presentation:** Your essay must be clearly written and presented, with appropriate referencing for all cited sources. Before you submit your essay you may want to check off the following points:
Task: Web Site Project

Weight: 25%

Due Date: Week 13 (during timetabled workshops)

Linked Unit Outcomes: D, E, F, G

Linked Graduate Capabilities: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9

Description:

Students are required to plan and develop a Website. Websites are due to be presented in your timetabled workshop session in week 13: This means that your Website must be completed PRIOR to that class. You will not be given any class time in week 13 to complete your Websites and will be penalized as a late submission.

Your Websites should be compressed into a ZIP file (your tutor will show you how to do this) and uploaded to the MAS240 submission page PRIOR to your week 13 workshop session.

You may choose the topic of your Website, for example, you may build an online CV or a fan site for your favourite band or video game. All Websites must satisfy the following criteria:

- Minimum of four (4) pages including a home page
- Home page must be saved as index.html
- Original content
- Any borrowed content or code should be visibly referenced using a separate references page (which will not count towards the mandatory minimum four pages)
- A single CSS document linked to by all HTML documents
- Websites should draw on skills developed during the unit
- Websites should use current approaches to design as taught in the unit. Table-based design is not permitted and will incur significant penalties
- Web sites should use valid HTML code. Use of <b> and <i> and other deprecated tags is not permitted and will incur a penalty
- Images should be resized and optimized for the Web
• Individual pages should utilize titles using the <title> </title> tag

Marking Criteria

Web sites will be marked according to the following criteria:

• Design
  • How aesthetically pleasing is the site?
  • Do the colours complement each other?
  • Are images relevant?
  • Is the text readable and formatted correctly?
  • Does the design reflect the content?
  • Has the box model been used?

• Content
  • Choice of topic
  • Is the content original?
  • Is borrowed content referenced?
  • Does the content make sense?
  • Are there spelling or grammatical errors?
  • Is the site easy to navigate?

• Coding
  • Is the HTML correct?
  • Is the CSS correct?
  • Have CSS styles been employed to control presentation?
  • Do the hyperlinks work?
  • Do images display properly?

Assignment submission

Hard Copy Submissions

Written work must be submitted through the Arts Student Centre (via the appropriate assignment box) on Level 1, W6A (for internal students) or via COE (for external students). Internal students must print and attach a completed coversheet to all submitted work. A personalised assignment coversheet is generated from the student section of the Faculty of Arts website at:

Please provide your student details and click the *Get my assignment coversheet* button to generate your personalised assignment cover sheet. No other coversheets will be provided by the Faculty.

**Return of marked work**

During semester, marked work will be returned to students via tutorials, seminars or lectures.

**Electronic Submissions**

Information about how to submit work online can be accessed through the iLearn unit.

**Examination**

There is no examination in MAS240

**Extensions and Special Consideration**

Extensions may only be granted by the unit convenor in line with University policy.

The Special Consideration Policy is located at: [http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/special_consideration/policy.html](http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/special_consideration/policy.html)

**Applying for Special Consideration**

Students applying for Special Consideration circumstances of three (3) consecutive days duration, within a study period, and/or prevent completion of a formal examination must submit an online application with the Faculty of Arts. For an application to be valid, it must include a completed Application for Special Consideration form and all supporting documentation.

The online Special Consideration application is found at: [http://www.arts.mq.edu.au/current_students/undergraduate/admin_central/special_consideration](http://www.arts.mq.edu.au/current_students/undergraduate/admin_central/special_consideration).

**University Policy on Grading**

University Grading Policy
The grade a student receives will signify their overall performance in meeting the learning outcomes of a unit of study. Grades will not be awarded by reference to the achievement of other students nor allocated to fit a predetermined distribution. In determining a grade, due weight will be given to the learning outcomes and level of a unit (ie 100, 200, 300, 800 etc). Graded units will use the following grades:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>HD</td>
<td>High Distinction</td>
<td>85-100</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>0-49</td>
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**REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED TEXTS AND/OR MATERIALS**

There is a unit reader available for purchase in the Coop Bookshop. All students are expected to have a copy.

**UNIT WEBPAGE AND TECHNOLOGY USED AND REQUIRED**

Online units can be accessed at: [http://ilearn.mq.edu.au/](http://ilearn.mq.edu.au/).

PC and Internet access are required. Basic computer skills (e.g., internet browsing) and skills in word processing are also a requirement.

Please consult teaching staff for any further, more specific requirements.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Academic honesty is an integral part of the core values and principles contained in the Macquarie University Ethics Statement:

Its fundamental principle is that all staff and students act with integrity in the creation, development, application and use of ideas and information. This means that:

- All academic work claimed as original is the work of the author making the claim.
- All academic collaborations are acknowledged.
- Academic work is not falsified in any way
- When the ideas of others are used, these ideas are acknowledged appropriately.

The link below has more details about the policy, procedure and schedule of penalties that will apply to breaches of the Academic Honesty Policy which can be viewed at:

http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html

**STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES**

Macquarie University provides a range of Student Support Services. Details of these services can be accessed at:

http://www.deanofstudents.mq.edu.au/
or
http://www.campuslife.mq.edu.au/campuswellbeing

Another useful support service is provided by the Learning Skills unit which you can find at: http://www.mq.edu.au/learningskills/.

**Arts Student Centre**

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Centre staff are there to smooth the way into university life; answer questions; give informed advice; provide a sympathetic ear; de-mystify uni ways and procedures.

The Faculty Assessment Coversheet and Arts online submissions for Special Approval, Special Consideration, Grade Review and Grade Appeal are located at: www.arts.mq.edu.au/current_students/undergraduate.
UNIT SCHEDULE

Week 1 – Introduction

The first lecture for MAS240 will introduce students to the unit and go through assessment tasks and deal with any questions.

There are no tutorials or workshops in this week.

Week 2 – Introduction to Cybercultures

What are cybercultures? How do we define and categorise them? What kinds of things do they involve? How do cybercultures impact on your life?

READING:


Week 3 – Facebook: Virtual Communities

This week we will be exploring the concept of virtual communities. Through a close examination of the social networking platform Facebook we will ask: Can there be online communities? How are they like or unlike other social groups? Are there benefits or dangers in socialising online?

READING:


Week 4 – Facebook: Online Identities

Our second week looking at Facebook will explore the notion of online identity. What role does Facebook play in shaping how we understand ourselves? Can, and should, we distinguish between our virtual and 'real world' identities? How are our
lives influenced by the kinds of self-representation offered by Facebook? What would happen if Facebook suddenly went offline and we lost our profiles?

*READING:*

Turkle, S. (1996). ‘Who Am We?’


**Week 5 – YouTube: Participatory Culture**

This week we will begin looking at YouTube and the idea of participatory culture. How is society altered by everyone and anyone being able to share their thoughts and ideas? Is YouTube a democratising force, giving everyone a voice, or simply a dumping ground for mindless, trivial and banal content? Is the quality of what we watch declining? Are new forms, genres, and viewing practices emerging?

*READING:*


**Week 6 – YouTube: Memes, Viruses, and Contagious Media**

YouTube requires us to rethink how we access and learn about media content. What do we watch on YouTube? How do we find out about it? Why do some videos become so popular when others are instantly forgotten? How does the content that become popular on YouTube differ from what is popular on TV? Why?

*READING:*


**Week 7 – From Bittorrent to Amazon: New Digital Economies**

In the information overload of the internet how do we find material that interests us? What new economic models, legal and illegal, have developed? What are we willing to pay for? What do we want for free? How are traditional business models adapting? What do these new digital economies mean for the type of content we can access?

*READING:*


**Week 8 – From Bittorrent to Amazon: Digital Rights and Wrongs**

Is copyright obsolete in the digital era? Can piracy possibly be regulated? Is digital rights management a viable and fair option? What kind of rights should consumers be able to exercise over their purchased media?

*READING:*


**Week 9 – Wikileaks: The Politics of Information**

How is power exercised in the digital world? Who has the right to collect and distribute information? What right to privacy do individuals have? What right to control information do governments have? Whose responsibility is it to safeguard our information?

*READING:*


**Week 10 – Mobile Phones: Mobs and Mobility**

How has the technology of the mobile phone changed our lives? What does the fact that we can communicate on the move mean for our social relationships? What unique problems does mobile technology cause police and governments?

**READING:**


**Week 11 – Online Gaming: Crowds, Clouds, and Distributed Intelligence**

The rise of cybercultures brings with it new types of entertainment. This week we will be looking at Alternate Reality Games and exploring how this form relies upon and builds strong virtual communities. We will ask: What is the power of the crowd? What can communities achieve that the individual cannot? Does the distributed intelligence witnessed in games like 'the beast' reveal new possibilities not just for games but for society more broadly?

**READING:**

Mcgonigal J (2003). 'This Is Not a Game': Immersive Aesthetics and Collective Play

**Week 12 – The Future of Cybercultures**

This week we will be looking back over the key themes of this unit, and drawing together the various ideas to explore the future possibilities of cyberculture. Can we predict where society is heading? What are technologies that are most likely to shape our lives, our country, and our world in the years to come? What will the major battles, and key areas of debate when it comes to technology in the future?

**READING:**

No readings for this week, but all students must bring a 300 word essay plan to their tutorials. It must outline your argument and three key theoretical resources you will be using.

**Week 13 – No lecture**

Tutorials this week will focus on essay preparation. You should be well underway with researching and writing your essay. This week will offer you a chance to sit down with your tutor and troubleshoot any problems you are having.