ECONOMICS OF INFORMATION
LISCI 691, Sec. 209 & 210, Online

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for an appointment (face to face, online, or by telephone), contact me at sbonline@uwm.edu

NOTES: Make sure to print out this syllabus in case you need to refer to it if your on-line connection fails or you are away from your computer. Links underlined and in blue below can be clicked on to get additional course information. Answers to questions you may have about this course that aren't directly addressed here can be found in the FAQ (frequently asked questions) section of the website. You are responsible for all of the material in the FAQ, which is an extension of this syllabus. Additional information of importance to you about the course will come to you in emails from the professor and in items posted on the announcements page (the home page) of the course website. Additional support materials for the course can be found in the content section on the course website. The announcements page (the home page) on the course website and regular emails from the professor also include information about the class which you will need to know.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

People have been talking about the transformation of the industrial economy to an information economy since the 1960s. What is an information economy? What does this change mean for how we do business and live our economic lives? What types of new businesses are emerging? And what has happened to the types of businesses we lived with for so long? How do these changes affect choices I make for myself regarding jobs, the transactions in which I engage, and how I protect or share my personal property? What does living in an information economy mean for how I manage a business? For how I make meaning out of the media messages I receive? For the nature of consumption? For how I relate to those with whom I buy or sell? How does the information economy look from a critical, or cultural, perspective? Is the information economy global in nature and, if so, does it work in the same way across cultures? What is a commodity, anyhow? What do the creative commons and open source software and knowledge production communities tell us about the future of the information economy?

The transformation to an information economy has required us to rethink many of the economic concepts that emerged over the course of the industrial era and has brought information to the center of all economic activity. Students who take this course will learn different ways of conceptualizing the information economy and the policy and decision-making implications of these different conceptualizations. You will become familiar with fundamental economic concepts as they are applied to – and often problematized by – information, communication, and culture. You will gain a broad overview of the development of the economics of information and understand key issues. You will learn how to identify the market, users, and economic impact of particular informational goods and services. And you will be introduced to the effects of the law on the economics of information and the information economy, and be familiar with contemporary legal problems that face the economics of information.
Neither previous courses in economics nor mathematical skills are required for success in this course.

The materials for this course are available to you either on D2L or on the university's electronic reserve system, which you access through the library’s home page at www.uwm.edu/libraries. If you are already in the D2L system the class should be available to you; if you are new to D2L you need to contact the UWM help desk (229-4040) and make sure that you are entered into the system. Instructions for how to work with D2L have been sent to you by e-mail, a manual is available to you on the course website, and instructions for how to print out material on the course website is among the course resources.

COURSE ACTIVITIES AND GRADING

Required Readings

Each week you will read a 20-40 page unit that is available to you on the course website. For some units, additional materials with more detailed information on specialized subjects will also be required, and these also will be available to you on the course website.

Recommended Readings

For topics you wish to pursue in more depth, each week two or more recommended readings are also available to you, either on the course website or on electronic reserve. If you choose to read these additional items, you may want to do so in the order in which they are listed for you. Reference lists for each unit also identify items you may want to read to go further with any additional subject.

Additional Resources

Links to a number of additional resources for the study of economics are provided in the course resources. Endnotes in Unit 2, on "Basics," include references to basic textbooks in micro- and macro-economics as well.

Study Questions

Each unit is accompanied by a set of study questions. ALL TEST QUESTIONS WILL BE DRAWN FROM THESE STUDY QUESTIONS. Because all test questions are available to you ahead of time, this is a course in which it is possible for everyone to earn an A.

Guidelines below for how to study in order to be as successful as possible in this class emphasize that you should develop full written answers to each of these questions in order to make sure you understand the concepts and information presented. One thing we have learned in the information society is that every time information is processed, value is added -- and this is as true in studying as it is in the corporate world.

The discussion board on the course website has a "course content" forum, which includes a topic for each unit where you can talk about the material, pose questions that will help us expand on what we are learning and apply it to our daily lives, and discuss answers to the study questions. The discussion board is asynchronous, meaning that you can join in the discussion whenever it is convenient for you to do so. (The alternative would be a synchronous conversation, which would require us all to be online at the same time.) The professor checks into the discussion board regularly to respond to any questions that may
have come forward that others in the class haven’t yet answered, and to participate in
discussion about any issues that may have been raised.

Students regularly report that how well they do on exams depends on how thoroughly they
have worked with the study questions. An entry in the FAQ section on studying discusses
the various types of study questions you will encounter throughout the semester; some are
directly answered by the text, but others require you to think about what you are reading,
or to connect what you have read in one place with what you are learning in another.

Doing well in this class begins with close reading, an approach to reading that ensures that
you get out of a text all of the information that is there. You will find a handout on close
reading on the course website. Make sure that you have done a close reading of a unit
before posting a question to the discussion board to make sure that it is not answered in the
text. Close reading also is useful when you are reading the study questions themselves.

If you are uncertain about the meaning of a study question, post that question to the
discussion board as early as possible. The time to clarify the meaning of both text and
study questions is before exams, not after.

You are not required to post comments to the class discussion on the discussion board.
However, you are expected to read whatever is posted there, just as you are expected to
pay attention when others speak in a face to face class.

Experience has shown that those students who are most active on the discussion board are
also the students who get the best grades in the course. Asking questions, adding your own
comments, and responding to questions asked by others are forms of active learning that
are quite valuable. Similarly, during sections of this course that have lively discussions,
grades for the class as a whole also rise.

Group Research Project

Graduate students in the course will participate in a group research project that will provide
in-depth exposure to the economics of one information industry. This semester that project
will examine the economics of the geographic information systems (GIS) industry. Details
about this group research project are in a separate handout in the course resources section
of the website and specific instructions as the project unfolds will be included in each week's
unit, beginning with week 2 of the course.

Undergraduate students in the course can join the project for extra credit. Please let the
professor know by email during the first week of class if you wish to do so.

Exams

You will take 4 midterm exams, each including 40 questions and worth 40 points. The
questions on those exams will largely be multiple choice, though there may be a few
true/false questions. All test questions will be drawn from these lists of study
questions.

Grading

It is a university requirement that there is a difference between the requirements for
graduate students and those for undergraduate students in a U/G course, so there are two
separate grading schemes. Unfortunately the UWM grading system does not permit us to assign an A+, but I'll certainly let you know if you earn one!

**Graduate Students:**

4 x 40 points for the 4 midterm exams 160 points

4 x 10 points for group research project 40 points

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**Undergraduate Students**

4 x 40 points for the 4 midterm exams 160 points

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**HOW TO STUDY: DEEP LEARNING**

It is possible to study quickly and to learn things well enough to keep the information in short-term memory. In this class, though, the goal is deep learning, which requires actively working with the ideas and concepts to which you are being introduced so thoroughly that you will remember and know how to use them. You will be most successful in this class if you take the following steps as you study:

1. Read the FAQ about studying.
2. Start by reading each unit through to get the big picture. Read the items in the order in which they are listed under contents on the course website.
3. Reread the unit, taking notes and/or outlining it.
4. Write out answers to each study question. (Review the discussion of the different types of study questions in the FAQ.) Having your notes and/or outline in hand along with the texts themselves will help you develop your answers to the questions quickly.
(5) If you have any questions about the material, or difficulty answering any of the study questions, post those questions to the discussion board forum for that unit.

(6) Follow and participate in the conversation on the discussion board regarding each unit to deepen your understanding, help other students master the material, and offer your own additional insights and knowledge. Posting your questions to the discussion board ensures that everyone can benefit from the conversation around that topic and from group development of answers to the questions. Other students will be offering their own insights and answers to questions, along with the professor.

(7) After you’ve read posts to the discussion board, go back to the answers you’ve developed to the study questions and revise if necessary.

(8) Once you’ve developed answers to the study questions in which you are confident, memorize your answers. Many students find using flash cards useful.

(9) Expect the study process to take time.

HOW TO TAKE MIDTERMS

The midterms each have 40 multiple choice questions, for a total possible 40 points. ALL OF THE QUESTIONS UPON WHICH YOU WILL BE TESTED COME FROM THE STUDY QUESTIONS PROVIDED FOR EACH UNIT.

You will take the midterms on-line, in the “quiz” section of the course website. The midterms will be available to you for 24 hours, essentially from 12:01 am to midnight on the day of the test. You will have 60 minutes to take each test once you start.

We can continue to discuss study questions and course materials up until the point at which the exam period begins, and again after the exam period closes, but of course not during the exam. You should review the instructions in the syllabus and the FAQ regarding what to do in case there are technical difficulties during the exam, and the FAQs on taking quizzing as you prepare for your first test.

Save after submitting your answer to each question to ensure that you do not lose your work if there is a technical problem. You can still go back and change your answers on any question up until the point at which you submit the entire test. When your test has been submitted, you will receive a confirmation note that it was submitted.

One hour after the close of the exam period, you will be able to see what the correct answers were for each question along with your answers to each question. If you do not understand why one answer was correct and another was not, please raise your question on the discussion board area for that unit.

PLEASE NOTE THE TEST DATES AND ENTER THEM INTO YOUR CALENDAR NOW. If for any reason you must make alternative arrangements for testing, those arrangements must be in place before a test period begins.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Tuesday is the first day of each study week. Exams are given on the Monday that concludes the period during which you have focused on the units for that test.

9/2   Unit 1: Introduction
9/9   Unit 2: Basics
9/16  Unit 3: Information
9/23  Unit 4: The Information Economy
9/30  Unit 5: Capital
10/7  Unit 6: Property
10/14 Unit 7: Markets
10/21 Unit 8: Firms
10/28 Unit 9: Networks
11/4  Unit 10: Production
11/11 Unit 11: Labor
11/18 Unit 12: Consumption
11/25 THANKSGIVING
12/2  Unit 13: Innovation
12/9  Unit 14: Legal & Policy Issues

USING THE COURSEWARE (COURSE SUPPORT SOFTWARE)

Basic information and advice about how to use the Desire to Learn (D2L) software that supports this course, and where you can go for more help should you need it, can be found in the First Day Handout and in the support for students found on D2L itself.

This semester we will be working with these software functions:

- **Content**: You'll need to be able to access and download course content.

- **Discussion**: You'll need to read posts to the discussion forums and to post your thoughts, both to initiate new threads and to respond to posts from others. Please note that by clicking on the image of a talking face towards the upper right of the screen from within any module you'll be taken directly to the discussion forum for that module.

- **Quizzes**: You'll need to be able to access and complete an exam on-line.
- **E-mail:** You may want to contact other individuals in the course "back channel," privately, to follow up on a conversation begun in the discussion forum or in on-line chat. The courseware makes it easy for you to do that.

- **Dropbox:** You will use the dropbox to submit your thought questions. There is a separate folder for each unit.

- **Announcements:** The course website opens onto an announcements page. Do check in to these announcements regularly as you are responsible for any news regarding the class that is posted there.

- **FAQ:** Answers to questions that students frequently ask can be found in the FAQ (frequently asked questions) section of the website. The FAQ has four sections, for questions dealing with course materials, how to study, quizzing, and course mechanics. Occasionally the professor will add items to the FAQ during the semester; when this happens, it will be announced to the class. You are responsible for knowing the material in the FAQ.

- **Surveys:** At the close of the course, a “survey” button will be added to the course website that will link you to the anonymous course evaluation. You will be required to complete that evaluation before you take the fourth exam. This function of the course website operates just like the testing function in how it works and in that you can only take it once.

Four short exercises, explained in the first day’s handout on "Mastering the Courseware," are required on the first day of class as a means of ensuring that you are comfortable with using the courseware upon which this class depends, and as a way of evaluating attendance for purposes of course registration. These exercises will not be graded, but if you do not complete these four exercises you may be administratively disenrolled for lack of attendance at the opening of the class. They will take very little of your time. Some additional exercises are described in "Mastering the Courseware" that you may want to experiment with if you are not already familiar with D2L.

There are several ways in which you can set D2L settings to your own preferences. Doing this with a couple of settings may be helpful for this course.

- On the opening screen of the discussion board, you can choose to set it so that you are only presented with discussion topics for which new postings that you have not yet read appear. This saves you time scrolling through each of the many topics to see if anything new has shown up.

- When you enter a discussion topic, on the upper right you have a choice regarding how the postings are displayed. If you set that to "threaded," you can follow each conversation easily, including all of the responses to a post (and all of the responses to the responses). I believe that once you have set that for one discussion topic, the preference works on all topics so you need only set it once.

**UNIVERSITY RULES AND REGULATIONS**

All students must comply with university rules and regulations regarding conduct both within and outside of the context of this course detailed in the Student Handbook. In particular, your attention is drawn to rules regarding academic conduct, for cheating in any form will not be tolerated; see [Academic Misconduct](#). You are also responsible for rules
established by the university that pertain to use of its computer network; you will of course be using that network every time you participate in this course. See the UWM Computer Policy and the UWM Web Policies. If you have any disabilities that are pertinent to the course, please let the professor know during the first week of class. The university respects the needs of religious observance. You can access links to all university rules and regulations here.

DEALING WITH TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

It is your responsibility when you take an online course to ensure that you have sufficient access to a working and networked computer that you can access the course materials whenever you need to and that you can take each quiz during the 24 hours it is available to you.

It is strongly recommended that each of you locate a back-up computer at which you can access course materials and take quizzes in case you have technical problems with the computer you normally use. There are computer labs all over campus, for those of you who can reach campus, and some are open 24 hours/day, 7 days/week.

You are also responsible for being able to manage the courseware, and successful completion of the first week’s exercise has as its purpose letting you demonstrate that competence.

The syllabus makes clear that there are no make-up quizzes unless arrangements for a verifiable and legitimate reason have been made BEFORE the quiz period starts. The syllabus also strongly suggests that you take a quiz early enough in the quiz period that you will have time to get to your back-up computer if you face computer problems during a quiz.

IF YOU HAVE COMPUTER PROBLEMS BEFORE A MID-TERM EXAM

1 - Print out the screen that reports the problem you are having or copy down any information that is on the computer screen that helps identify the problem.

2 - IMMEDIATELY contact the technical support people. If you believe it is a problem with the university network or with D2L, the courseware, call the university help desk at 414-229-4040. This help line is available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. If it is a problem with your own computer, call the appropriate technical support.

3 - Get a ticket number and a time/date stamp on that from the technical support people. Whether it is the campus or a computer vendor, everyone will have that information and be able to time/date stamp it.

4 - Call the professor as soon as you have the report ticket number in hand at 414-229-3238. You can call any hour of the day or night. Describe the problem you are facing, provide the ticket number of the problem report, and provide the date and time you are calling.
5 - Follow-up this telephone call with an e-mail to the professor as soon as your e-mail is working. Remember that the e-mail system will also provide an accurate time and date of that message.

6 - Organize your plans so that you will be able to take the quiz at the back-up computer you have previously located.

7 - IF AND ONLY IF you have taken all of these steps BEFORE A QUIZ and can demonstrate that it is impossible for you to get to another site from which to take the quiz, a make-up test -- that will be completely different from the test taken by other students -- will be arranged once you are able to function technologically again.

8 - Keep communicating with the professor throughout the problem resolution process so that you can document your progress with these technical problems and when they have been resolved.

IF YOU HAVE COMPUTER PROBLEMS DURING AN EXAM

1 - Print out or otherwise record the information that you see on the computer screen with details of what the problem is.

2 - Since you will have planned for this possibility and taken the quiz early enough in the day to travel before the quiz period is over, go immediately to the back-up computer you have previously located to take the quiz.

3 - If you are unable to get to your back-up computer for a verifiable and legitimate reason, IMMEDIATELY call the computer help desk at UWM at 414-229-4040 to report your problem.

4 - Make sure to get the ticket number from the technical people who will be helping you resolve your problem, and make sure they have date and time stamped that ticket number.

5 - IMMEDIATELY call the professor at 414-229-3238 to report the problem. Include the problem ticket number and the date and time of that problem ticket number report in the telephone call. That number can be called at any hour of the day or night.

6 - As soon as your e-mail is working again, or you can reach the university's or another public e-mail system, send the professor a message documenting the problem and including the problem ticket number and the time and date that the problem ensued.

7 - Only if all of these steps have been taken and you have a verifiable and legitimate reason why you could not have reached your back-up computer site during the quiz, will a make-up quiz be scheduled. This quiz will be completely different from the quiz that will be taken by other students in the course.

8 - Keep communicating with the professor throughout the problem resolution process so that you can document your progress with these technical problems and when they have been resolved.