Course Description
This course considers communication as a social and historical phenomenon, subject to enormous variations according to time and place, yet always central to human activity. The course is organized into five parts.

Part 1: Orality, Writing, and Early Media. We begin with two classic books that helped to shape the study of communication in history. Harold Innis’s Empire and Communications (1950) was the first and most influential attempt to map the history of communication comprehensively and connect it with the development of media. Innis is perhaps best known for his connection with the 1960s media guru Marshall McLuhan, and a supplementary chapter from Daniel J. Czitrom’s Media and the American Mind (1982) considers Innis and McLuhan’s contributions. Our second classic, Walter J. Ong’s Orality and Literacy (1982), analyzes the development of communication in terms of a fundamental tension between oral and literate societies, and a secondary tension between writing and printing. The opening pages of Mary Carruthers’ The Book of Memory (1990) complicate the story by focusing on memory in the Middle Ages. Whereas Ong and Carruthers emphasize classical Greece and medieval/early modern Europe, William M. Schniedewind, How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel (2004) focuses on the tension between orality and writing in the Hebrew Scriptures (or Christian Old Testament). This section will conclude with Matt Cohen’s The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England (2010), which treats the spectrum of oral and written communication among colonists and native Americans in seventeenth-century New England.

Part 2: The Impact of Print. Elizabeth Eisenstein’s classic work The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe (1983, 2005) identifies and discusses key effects of printing in regard to the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and the Scientific Revolution. Her scholarship is appreciated, but also seriously critiqued, by Anthony Grafton in a review essay of the magisterial work by Eisenstein from which The Printing Revolution was abridged, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change (1979). A different kind of critique of Eisenstein characterizes Adrian Johns, The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making (1998), which focuses on the seventeenth-century English manifestation of printed scientific knowledge in an effort to say important things about the nature of books (and of science) in general; rather than read Johns’ big book, the class will consider a forum involving Eisenstein and Johns in the American Historical Review, introduced by Grafton, which attempts to clarify the key points of disagreement in their debate. Later in 2005 Eisenstein published the second edition of The Printing Revolution with a new Afterword that addresses Johns among other critics of her work. This section of the course concludes with Andrew Pettegree’s reevaluation of much of the ground covered by Eisenstein in his The Book in the Renaissance (2010).

Part 3: Print Culture in the Age of the Enlightenment. The age of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century was not a great era of technological development for media, but it was arguably the golden age of print culture. We will first read Richard Sher’s The Enlightenment and the Book (2006), which deals with the publication and reprinting of Scottish Enlightenment books in the Anglophone Atlantic world. The French Enlightenment occurred in a very different political climate, as we shall see when we discuss Robert Darnton’s study of the failure of eighteenth-century French censorship, The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France (1995).

Part 4: Media, Propaganda, and Conflict. This section treats media coverage of key events in modern history (especially major social, political, and military conflicts), with particular attention to
the relationship between the ideal of “objective” coverage and propaganda. First, Rodger Streitmatter’s *Mightier than the Sword* (1997; 2nd ed., 2008) examines the role of the news media in shaping, rather than merely reporting on, many of the critical events in American history from the colonial period to the first decade of the twenty-first century. This is followed by the thoroughly revised second edition of Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media at War* (2000, 2011), which looks at the ways in which media have served to set off, mythologize, and memorialize different kinds of modern wars.

**Part 5: Modern Information Industries.** This section focuses on the emergence and consolidation of media industries in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America, including newspaper empires, the telegraph and telephone, radio and television, motion pictures, computers and the Internet. Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media* (2004), takes a political approach to the history of American media, although it is often difficult to separate political and economic factors. Tim Wu, *The Master Switch: The Rise and Fall of Information Empires* (Knopf, 2010; Vintage paperback, 2011) looks at attempts to control the media by corporations and cartels.

**Class Performance** (50% of the final grade). This is a reading and discussion class, with no lectures and no examinations. It is therefore essential that students do the assigned readings and come to class well prepared every week. Beyond that, you are expected to be an engaged member of the class, contributing intelligently to class discussion on a regular basis. In addition, every student will serve as discussion leader or facilitator once or twice during the semester. Discussion facilitators will be expected to prepare stimulating questions and to take a leading part in discussions; they may also wish to prepare additional material to present to the class as an introduction. Finally, at the last regular meeting of the semester, each student will make a short (10-minute) presentation on his/her long paper.

**Written Assessment** (50% of the final grade). Written assessment will consist of two analytical/comparative papers on the assigned readings, one short (4–5 double-spaced pages) and the other longer (10–12 double-spaced pages).

The shorter paper is worth 15% of the final course grade and is due on February 20. It should address the question of oral and written/printed communication in Matt Cohen’s *Networked Wilderness* in relation to at least one other reading in Part 1 of the course. The longer paper is worth 35% of the grade and is due on May 3. It should deal with a manageable topic of your choice (after approval by the instructor) and should engage with readings from at least two of the weekly assignments (other than the readings covered in your shorter paper). Additional sources may be used with the permission of the instructor. Both papers should have a thesis and will be graded on the basis of your ability to articulate and sustain it, as well as (1) range and command of the material treated, (2) insight and originality, and (3) style and presentation.

**Assigned Readings:** The assigned texts for this course are all currently in print and can be purchased from amazon.com or other booksellers. Used copies may also be available at significantly lower prices from amazon.com and abebooks.com. In addition to books, items marked with an asterisk (*) will be available as PDFs that I will send you via email. Items listed with double asterisks (**) may be accessed as electronic journals or electronic books in the Rutgers Library System.
MEETINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Introduction

Part 1: Orality, Writing, and Early Media

Week 3 (Feb. 6): Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (Routledge, 2002; the 1986 edition has the same text with different pagination and is cheaper); *Mary Carruthers, The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture (Cambridge U. Press, 1990), pp. 1–19


Part 2: The Impact of Print

Week 7 (March 5): Andrew Pettegree, The Book in the Renaissance (Yale UP, 2010)

March 12: No class (spring break)

Part 3: Print in the Age of the Enlightenment


Part 4: Media, Propaganda, and Conflict
Week 10 (Apr. 2): Rodger Streitmatter, Mightier than the Sword: How the News Media Have Shaped American History (Westview, 1997; 2nd ed. 2008) [Used copies of the 1st edition are much cheaper than the 2nd edition, which contains one new chap. on news coverage of 9/11,* which I can provide as a PDF.].

Week 11 (Apr. 9): Susan L. Carruthers, The Media at War, 2nd ed. (PalgraveMacmillan, 2011) [Be sure to read the second edition, because it is substantially different from the first edition.]

Part 5: Modern Information Industries


Week 15 (Apr. 30): brief presentations on papers in class

May 3: Longer Papers Due