

**COM12  
INFORMATION SOCIETY**

Second Semester 2008-2009  
Room SS280

MWF | 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM (SECTION A)  
MWF | 09:30 to 10:30 AM (SECTION G)

**Instructor:** Andrew Albert J. Ty [eldritch1313@yahoo.com](mailto:eldritch1313@yahoo.com)  
**Office Hours:** Tuesdays | 10:30 to 11:30 and 1:30 to 3:30 BY APPOINTMENT

**1 COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course aims to analyze the ideas and synthesize the experience of the contemporary condition that has come to be labeled “the information society.” This exploration includes variant ideas like “the global village,” “the network society,” “the information age,” “the era of late capitalism,” “post-industrialism,” and “the postmodern condition.”

It also deals with associated issues and concepts like “the society of the spectacle,” new media, surveillance, interactive technologies, visual culture, the simulacrum and virtual reality, and globalization in its political, economic, and cultural facets. The interdisciplinary nature of the course will encompass ideas taken from communication studies, political science, philosophical thought, and other fields.

**2 COURSE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

By the end of the course, the student should have gained an understanding of the diverse and sometimes contradictory notions that have generated the many discourses that attempt to deal with the informatization of contemporary life. He or she should be able to actively participate in these discourses using his or her ability to think critically and argue cogently about a wide variety of such ideas. Proficiency in the written word as a rhetorical form for expressing these ideas—especially the many possible interconnections between them—is essential.

**3 GENERAL FORMAT AND METHODOLOGY**

The language of instruction for this course is English. Lectures, discussions, and assignments will be in English, following the standard conventions of its use in a formal and academic setting.

Given the breadth of the course topic, the general structure for the course to follow is based on our guided reading of *Pattern Recognition* by William Gibson, first published in 2003 by G. P. Putnam’s Sons. In the process, we will also attempt to annotate the elements in the novel, making these efforts available online.

While the book is a novel and should hopefully be entertaining, we will primarily read *Pattern Recognition* as a report on the state of the world today, a world characterized not just by the increasing prevalence of information issues but also by the convergence of several other factors including, but not limited to, marketing, globalization, terrorism, consumerism, and new media.

(This does not mean that *Pattern Recognition* is an accurate piece of reportage masquerading as fiction all of the time, but we should be able to critically assess the moments when the novel is spot-on, and when it is not.)

Unless specified otherwise, each thrice-a-week one-hour class periods will assume that the assigned chapter for that day has been read. Though there will be lectures here and there, our primary activity for the course will take the form of discussions in class and online.

#### 4 **ASSUMPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS**

While this course is required for BS Comtech majors, you did have a choice in signing up for and staying with that degree program. As such, I am assuming a genuine interest in the general and specific topics that form the subject matter of COM12.

As a corollary to this, I expect you to be open-minded in class. You do not have to agree with every single idea from me or your classmates, but you should be able to engage with them in a serious and thoughtful manner. Personal taste toward the novel we are reading is not always an unimportant consideration, but it should never be allowed to get in the way of learning:

In other words, if the novel fails as entertainment for you, I leave you responsible for making it continue to work as an educational text from which you can learn about contemporary society.

I am assuming your proficiency in the English language in the spoken and the written forms. The recurrence of major lapses in the rules and conventions of standard English usage—grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, argumentation and flow, etc.—will count against you.

While I will ask you to make assessments and declarations in your class recitation and written assignments, I also place a high value on the power of questions to spark discussion and insight. At the very least, it will help you think things through in this course. Practically speaking, this means that asking questions in class will be considered part of recitation.

I assume a critical and discerning research capability, especially when using the Internet. You are not just expected to know how to surf the World Wide Web but to be able to surf it well. Any resource must be properly assessed as reliable and significant; Web sites like Wikipedia are to be considered only as starting points for your research and not main sources themselves. The same goes for general dictionaries and encyclopedias, online or off-

As part of an educational experiment, we have a course site for both sections at this URL:

<http://eldritch00.wikidot.com/com12>

Take note that in this online adjunct to our class, you will in effect be “virtual classmates” with the other COM12 section I am teaching this semester. This should add another interesting layer to your learning experiences in this class.

You are required to set up a Wikidot account and to learn the basics of using it, in order to be active in developing our course site. Take note that this is a public site and thus retrievable by search engines; keep this consideration in mind so you can do the online requirements well.

While you are encouraged to “play” with the site and use it to help you in the course, any form of disruptive activity will not be taken lightly. This also applies to classroom activities, including basic considerations of common courtesy, *e.g.*, keeping all mobile communication devices in silent mode at all times, paying attention to whoever is speaking, etc.

I will not entertain any last-minute appeals regarding problems with grades and attendance. If you wish to do well in the course, you must be prepared to do so from the very beginning. As soon as you start to encounter problems that will affect your performance, please take the initiative to speak with me about it immediately, so these problems will be nipped in the bud.

Any other relevant matters will be raised later in the course.

## 5 **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

You are required not just to attend class on time but to exert an effort to make it a valuable learning experience for you. This entails taking the course requirements seriously.

Attendance is checked at the beginning of class and strictly conforms to University policy. You are marked absent if you do not respond when I call your name.

If you come in late—not more than ten minutes after attendance check—you are responsible for informing me that you are actually present for the day. Failure to do this will cause you to accumulate absences, of which you are allowed a maximum of nine.

If you arrive so late as to leave me no choice but to already mark you absent, you are still encouraged to attend class to avoid missing much of the day’s lecture/discussion.

Class participation is essential for a thorough comprehension of the ideas discussed throughout the course. If you have been marked absent for the day, you may still earn credit for class participation if you are physically present to share insights and opinions. You will also be given credit for asking relevant questions in class.

In addition, class participation also includes your online contributions towards developing the Wikidot site for the course. You are expected to participate throughout the semester, and not just for the chapter I will specially assign each student to annotate and discuss. This participation can take the form of forum (message board) activity or the editing of pages to include relevant URLs, short commentary, embedded media, questions for discussion, etc.

The chapter annotation will be assigned after a few weeks of class and will take the form of a Wikidot page that you will develop, possibly with an “online partner” from the other section. I may also require an offline activity for this, perhaps a short and simple presentation to your respective section. More details will be given during class hours, especially with regard to the template and format we will be using to establish consistency throughout the annotation pages.

Course readings to supplement the novel may be assigned or suggested by me or chosen by you. I will provide resources in class and on our Wikidot site. I expect you to find helpful readings too, resources you will share with the rest of the class (and even the other section).

Reviews of *Pattern Recognition* may or may not always be helpful, but there are usually insights to be found by the discerning reader. In addition, many other Web resources apart from reviews are available, not just for the novel but—more importantly—for the ideas it conveys. As always, be discerning and critical with what you turn up online. Be wary of plot spoilers, too.

Essays form a bulk of the course requirements, and you will be assessed by how you think about these information society issues. This question of “how you think” necessarily includes not just your grasp of key ideas and insights but the way you communicate them using standard rules and conventions of English grammar and usage.

Be mindful of the possibility that instead of an essay proper, I may assign a take-home exam instead. This will most likely take the form of questions for you to think about and answer in short paragraphs. Both of these requirements have much in common, actually.

**SUGGESTION:** A book journal may help you organize your thoughts for the requirements, as well as all the thinking you will be doing throughout the semester. My suggestion is for you to take notes for every chapter in the book. While this might seem like a lot to do, the manner in which *Pattern Recognition* is divided into many short chapters means that journal entries are both necessary (because of the number of chapters) and yet easy to do (because they are short.)

The journal, unlike the other course requirements, is allowed to contain informal writing, since it will be for your eyes only. Take note, however, that this is not tantamount to incoherent writing. If it does not work for you as a resource because you cannot understand what you wrote a week later, then there is no purpose in doing the journal. In addition, if the journal entries are already coherent, you can more easily share what you write there on our Wikidot site and consequently earn credit for class participation.

## 6 GRADING SYSTEM AND BREAKDOWN OF REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation	20%	A	92-100
Chapter Annotation	25%	B+	87-91
Midterm Essay	25%	B	83-86
Final Essay	30%	C+	79-82
TOTAL	100%	C	75-78
		D	70-74
		F	69 and below

## COURSE OUTLINE AND TIMEFRAME

<p>Week 1:  <b>10 November 2008</b>  <b>12 November 2008</b>  <b>14 November 2008</b></p>	<p>Course Introduction  Shaviro on <i>Pattern Recognition</i> (<a href="http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=40">http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=40</a>)  NO CLASSES</p>
<p>Week 2:  <b>17 November 2008</b>  <b>19 November 2008</b>  <b>21 November 2008</b></p>	<p>Chapter 1: "The Website of Dreadful Night"  Chapter 2: "Bitch"  Chapter 3: "The Attachment"</p>
<p>Week 3:  <b>24 November 2008</b>  <b>26 November 2008</b>  <b>28 November 2008</b></p>	<p>Chapter 4: "Math Grenades"  Chapter 5: "What They Deserve"  Chapter 6: "The Match Factory"</p>
<p>Week 4:  <b>01 December 2008</b>  <b>03 December 2008</b>  <b>05 December 2008</b></p>	<p>NO CLASSES  Chapter 7: "The Proposition"  Chapter 8: "Watermark"</p>
<p>Week 5:  <b>08 December 2008</b>  <b>10 December 2008</b>  <b>12 December 2008</b></p>	<p>NO CLASSES  Chapter 9: "Trans"  Chapter 10: "Jack Moves, Jane Faces"</p>
<p>Week 6:  <b>15 December 2008</b>  <b>17 December 2008</b>  <b>19 December 2008</b></p>	<p>Chapter 11: "Boone Chu"  Chapter 12: "Apophenia"  Chapter 13: "Little Boat"</p>
<p><i>CHRISTMAS BREAK</i></p>	
<p>Week 7:  <b>05 January 2009</b>  <b>07 January 2009</b>  <b>09 January 2009</b></p>	<p>Chapter 14: "The <i>Gaijin</i> Face of Bikkle"  Chapter 15: "Singularity"  Chapter 16: "Going Mobile"</p>
<p>Week 8:  <b>12 January 2009</b>  <b>14 January 2009</b>  <b>16 January 2009</b></p>	<p>Chapter 17: "Making Mayhem"  Chapter 18: "Hongo"  Chapter 19: "Into the Mystic"</p>
<p>Week 9:  <b>19 January 2009</b>  <b>21 January 2009</b>  <b>23 January 2009</b></p>	<p>Chapter 20: "<i>Uber-Bones</i>"  Chapter 21: "The Dead Remember"  Chapter 22: "Tarn"</p>
<p>Week 10:  <b>26 January 2009</b>  <b>28 January 2009</b>  <b>30 January 2009</b></p>	<p>Chapter 23: "Dickheads"  Chapter 24: "Cyprus"  Chapter 25: "Sigil"</p>

Week 11: <b>02 February 2009</b> <b>04 February 2009</b> <b>06 February 2009</b>	NO CLASSES Chapter 26: "SIGINT" Chapter 27: "The Shape of the Enthusiast"
Week 12: <b>09 February 2009</b> <b>11 February 2009</b> <b>13 February 2009</b>	Chapter 28: "Within the Meaning" Chapter 29: "Protocol" Chapter 30: ".ru"
Week 13: <b>16 February 2009</b> <b>18 February 2009</b> <b>20 February 2009</b>	Chapter 31: "The Prototype" Chapter 32: "Participation Mystique" Chapter 33: "Bot"
Week 14: <b>23 February 2009</b> <b>25 February 2009</b> <b>27 February 2009</b>	Chapter 34: "Zamoskvarech" NO CLASSES Chapter 35: "КОФЕИН"
Week 15: <b>02 March 2009</b> <b>04 March 2009</b> <b>06 March 2009</b>	Chapter 36: "The Dig" Chapter 37: "Kino" Chapter 38: "Puppenkopf"
Week 16: <b>09 March 2009</b> <b>11 March 2009</b> <b>13 March 2009</b>	Chapter 39: "Red Dust" Chapter 40: "The Dream Academy" Chapter 41: "A Toast to Mr. Pollard"
Week 17: <b>16 March 2009</b> <b>18 March 2009</b> <b>20 March 2009</b>	Chapter 42: "His Missingness" Chapter 43: "Mail" Wrap-Up + <i>Spook Country</i>

Take note of the following **deadlines**:

26 January 2009:           **Midterm Essay** (or Take-Home Exam)  
27 March 2009:           **Final Essay** (or Take-Home Exam)

## 8 ONLINE RESOURCES: STARTING POINTS

The *Pattern Recognition* page on William Gibson's official Web site contains the first chapter:  
<http://www.williamgibsonbooks.com/books/pattern.asp>

The Wikipedia page for *Pattern Recognition* contains plot spoilers, but many of the footnotes provide cogent assessments of and, more importantly, essays on the novel:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pattern\\_Recognition\\_\(novel\)#Footnotes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pattern_Recognition_(novel)#Footnotes)

'PR'-otaku: Logging and annotating William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* by Joe Clark  
<http://fawny.org/pr/>