

**INF 721:  
INFORMATION & SOCIETY  
CLASS# 8696**

**SPRING 2009  
MON 2:45-4:35 PM  
ROOM 313A, DRAPER HALL  
DOWNTOWN CAMPUS, UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY**

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

Dr. Senem Güney

Center for Technology in Government (CTG)  
187 Wolf Road, Suite 301  
Albany, New York 12205  
Phone: 442-4473  
Fax: 442-3886  
Email: [sguney@albany.edu](mailto:sguney@albany.edu)

**OFFICE HOURS**

By appointment Monday 1:00-2:35 p.m. in Draper Hall Room 141C  
By appointment at CTG

**INTRODUCTION**

“[O]nce a person captures a particular imagination for raising and addressing questions about philosophy, social theory and information systems, the content of such thinking becomes nothing more than an ephemeral instantiation of a longer-lasting and more significant form of knowledge.” (Mingers & Willcocks, 2004; p. 1)

This quote from the first chapter of our textbook describes, maybe a little more poetically than an average textbook quotation, what we will try to do together in this class. We will work to develop the long-lasting and significant knowledge necessary to raise and address questions about the use of information and information systems (IS) in social-organizational contexts. We will learn to pursue these questions as social researchers of IS. The overarching premise in this effort is that IS researchers need to understand and explain the social life, social needs, and social aspirations in which the use of information and the technologies of information are inherently embedded.

All the work you will do in this course will be geared towards illuminating and illustrating this premise. This work will require you to step out of the comfortable space of your existing beliefs about what information and information systems are (ontology) and what we can or should know about them (epistemology) in order to achieve X, Y, or Z in social-organizational contexts. In this course, you will work with different ontologies and epistemologies in IS research so that you can be better equipped to tackle the research problems you would encounter within these contexts.

## OBJECTIVES

After taking this course, students should be able to:

- Become familiar with and conduct cogent discourse about important social-theoretical schools of thinking in the field of IS
- Understand what kinds of research problems are rooted in these different schools of thinking
- Use the foundational knowledge built in this course to develop and explore theoretically significant and relevant questions in conducting social research in the field of IS.

I will help you meet these objectives through creating a learning environment where you develop verbal and written communication skills, critical thinking skills, and research skills as you engage in class discussions and activities and work on written assignments.

## READING MATERIAL

In this course, we will be reading a textbook and a list of articles. You can pick up the textbook from Mary Jane Books near the downtown campus, on Western Avenue at Quail Street. The articles are posted on BLS (click on the tab labeled “Reading Material—Articles” under Course Content).

## ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

### Participation/attendance—(40 points—8%)

Regular attendance and prepared participation are essential for making any class a successful and enjoyable experience for all the participants. This class is no exception to that rule and will require your informed and enthusiastic participation in class discussions and activities. You are expected to complete reading assignments before class and come to class prepared to demonstrate your engagement with the class material—which should *not* be understood to be limited to speaking up when the professor asks a question. Some examples of classroom behavior that show students’ engagement and efforts to participate include asking clear questions, giving comments on specific arguments, offering clarifications for interesting observations from the readings, and relating a class concept to personal experience to improve everyone’s understanding of the material. Missing class more than once, getting into a habit of arriving late or departing early, and not investing enough time in working with the readings will adversely affect our class dynamic and your grade. You are always welcome to ask for my feedback on your participation or my consultation about any aspect of the class throughout the semester.

### Thought Pieces (6 @ 50 points each for a total of 300 points—60%)

You will be required to turn in *six* thought pieces on your choices of the chapters 2 through 11 of our textbook. Each of these thought pieces will be *maximum 750 words* (which is approximately three double-spaced pages, using size 12 font). These assignments are **due on the day of the class discussion on the textbook chapter of your choice**. For example, a thought piece on functionalism would be due on February 9 and a thought piece on structuration theory would be due either on March 30 or April 6.

In these thought pieces, you will answer the following question:

- What are three fundamental elements that an IS study should have in order to be grounded in the framework of X (where X stands for a social theory discussed in a chapter of the textbook)?

In your answer, you will describe what needs to go into the design of an IS study (as research questions are formulated, data collection and analysis methods are chosen, or the focus of a study's contribution to the literature is determined) so that it can be labeled as a "functionalist" or a "phenomenological" or a "structuration theoretical" study.

You can turn in as many as seven of these assignments if you would like to have the opportunity to drop the one with the lowest grade from the calculation of your total points. Your total points for these assignments will be based on six thought pieces with the highest grades.

Review Assignment (Part 1: Outline/Rough Draft @ 40 points; Part 2: Full text @ 120 points for a total of 160 points—32%)

You will also complete a review assignment where you will compare and contrast two or three of the social-theoretical frameworks we will discuss in this class. This assignment will have two parts. **Part 1** will be a substantive outline or a rough draft of your review-in-progress and will be **due on April 27**. **Part 2** will be the final draft of your review. This draft will be *maximum 2,000 words* (which is approximately 8 double-spaced pages, using size 12 font) and will be **due by email on May 11**. I will give more detailed instructions about both parts of this assignment later in the semester.

Your final grade will be based on a scale of 500. The grading scale will be as follows:

Grade	Points
A	500-475
A-	474-450
B+	449-430
B	429-415
B-	414-400
C+	399-385
C	384-370
E	369-0

#### **LATE/MISSED WORK, ABSENCE, AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Please consult the Graduate Bulletin and go to [http://www.albany.edu/grad/requirements\\_general\\_admissions.html#academic\\_standards](http://www.albany.edu/grad/requirements_general_admissions.html#academic_standards)) for the criteria to be considered to receive extensions for late work and to understand what counts as excusable absence. "Computer problems," for example, no longer qualify as reasonable excuses for late work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. You will need to provide documentation and talk to me—at least one week in advance—for your late work or absence to be excused. The Graduate Bulletin also provides information regarding cheating, plagiarism, or disruption of class. Please read this information and understand that your failure to comply with the University's published code of student conduct shall result in disciplinary penalties that range from failing a class assignment to dismissal from the University.

**SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings/Assignments</b>
<b>1/26</b>	Course introduction	
<b>2/2</b>	Social theory and philosophy & the IS discipline	(Huff, 2009) (Mingers & Willcocks, 2004)—Ch. 1 <i>Recommended:</i> (Lyytinen & King, 2004)
<b>2/9</b>	Functionalism and neofunctionalism	(Mingers & Willcocks, 2004)—Ch. 2 (Orlikowski, 2000)
<b>2/16</b>	<i>No class</i> — <b>Winter break</b>	
<b>2/23</b>	Phenomenology	(Mingers & Willcocks, 2004)—Ch. 3 (Arnold, 2003) <i>Recommended:</i> (Mingers, 2001)
<b>3/2</b>	Hermeneutics	(Mingers & Willcocks, 2004)—Ch. 4 (Butler, 1998) <i>Recommended:</i> (Cole & Avison, 2007)
<b>3/9</b>	Critical theory—Adorno	(Mingers & Willcocks, 2004)—Ch. 5 (Päiväranta, 2001)
<b>3/16</b>	Critical theory—Habermas Social shaping of technology	(Mingers & Willcocks, 2004)—Chs. 6 and 9 (Pozzebon, Titah, & Pinsonneault, 2006)
<b>3/23</b>	Theorizing of power and knowledge	(Mingers & Willcocks, 2004)—Ch. 7 (Winokur, 2003)
<b>3/30</b>	Structuration theory	(Mingers & Willcocks, 2004)—Ch. 8 (Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005)
<b>4/6</b>	Structuration theory cont. Short discussion of the Review Assignment	(Jones & Karsten, 2008)
<b>4/13</b>	<i>No class</i> — <b>Spring break</b>	

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings/Assignments</b>
<b>4/20</b>	Critical realism	(Mingers & Willcocks, 2004)—Ch. 10 (Volkoff, Strong, & Elmes, 2007) <i>Recommended:</i> (Mingers, 2004)
<b>4/27</b> <b>Due:</b> <b>Review</b> <b>Assignment</b> <b>Part 1</b>	Complexity theory	(Mingers & Willcocks, 2004)—Ch. 11 (Maitland & van Gorp, 2009) <i>Recommended:</i> (Campbell-Hunt, 2007)
<b>5/4</b>	Wrap-up	(Sidorova, Evangelopoulos, Valacich, & Ramakrishnan, 2008) (Klein & Hirscheim, 2008)

**Review Assignment Part 2** is due on **Monday May 11 by 6:00 p.m.** to [sguney@albany.edu](mailto:sguney@albany.edu).

I reserve the right to alter this syllabus with timely notice to students. I will announce any changes in class and/or post them on BLS in sufficient time to avoid misunderstandings.

#### **COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Arnold, M. (2003). On the phenomenology of technology: the "Janus-faces" of mobile phones. *Information and Organization, 13*, 231-256.
- Butler, T. (1998). Towards a hermeneutic method for interpretive research in information systems. *Journal of Information Technology, 13*, 285-300.
- Campbell-Hunt, C. (2007). Complexity in practice. *Human Relations, 60*(5), 793-823.
- Cole, M., & Avison, D. (2007). The potential of hermeneutics in information systems research. *European Journal of Information Systems, 16*(820-833).
- Huff, A. S. (2009). Ontology and epistemology. In *Designing research for publication* (pp. 108-126). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Jones, M. R., & Karsten, H. (2008). Giddens's structuration theory and information systems research. *MIS Quarterly, 32*(1), 127-157.
- Klein, H. K., & Hirscheim, R. (2008). The structure of the IS discipline reconsidered: Implications and reflections from a community of practice perspective. *Information and Organization, 18*, 280-302.
- Lyytinen, K., & King, J. L. (2004). Nothing at the center?: Academic legitimacy in the information systems field. *Journal of the AIS, 5*(6), 220-246.
- Maitland, C., & van Gorp, A. (2009). Beyond harmonization: ICT policymaking in regional economic communities. *Information Society, 25*(1), 23-37.
- Mingers, J. (2001). Embodying information systems: The contribution of phenomenology. *Information and Organization, 11*, 103-128.
- Mingers, J. (2004). Real-izing information systems: Critical realism as an underpinning philosophy for information systems. *Information and Organization, 14*, 87-103.

- Mingers, J., & Willcocks, L. (2004). *Social theory and philosophy for information systems*. West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons.
- Orlikowski, W. J. (2000). Using technology and constituting structures: A practice lens for studying technology in organizations. *Organization Science*, 11(4), 404-428.
- Päivärinta, T. (2001). The concept of genre within the critical approach to information systems development. *Information and Organization*, 11, 207-234.
- Pozzebon, M., & Pinsonneault, A. (2005). Challenges in conducting empirical work using structuration theory: Learning from IT research. *Organization Studies*, 26(9), 1353-1376.
- Pozzebon, M., Titah, R., & Pinsonneault, A. (2006). Combining social shaping of technology and communicative action theory for understanding rhetorical closure in IT. *Information Technology & People*, 19(3), 244-271.
- Sidorova, A., Evangelopoulos, N., Valacich, J. S., & Ramakrishnan, T. (2008). Uncovering the intellectual core of the information systems discipline. *MIS Quarterly*, 32(3), 467-482.
- Volkoff, O., Strong, D. M., & Elmes, M. B. (2007). Technological embeddedness and organizational change. *Organization Science*, 18(5), 832-848.
- Winokur, M. (2003). The ambiguous panopticon: Foucault and the codef cyberspace. *CTheory.Net*, March, 1-25.