NEW COURSE PROPOSAL

COMM-104
UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL CULTURE

MARCH 12, 2017

1. **List School, Department, Course Number and Course Title**

   School: School of Liberal Arts  
   Department: Communication  
   Course #: COMM-104  
   Course Title: Understanding Digital Culture

2. **Justification for Course**

   (a) **Objectives for the Course**

   This course is an elective course within the department of Communication. The idea for the course grew out of the recognition that the contemporary digital age has dramatically altered virtually every aspect of our lives (communication, culture, commerce, education, etc.) with the phrase "disruptive technologies" often used to describe these changes. As such, this course provides students the opportunity to explore and analyze these watershed changes as well as providing specific skill-sets necessary for career paths in the contemporary workforce. This course could also serve the proposed minor in Digital Studies, pending future approval of the minor by the UEPC.

   Following are the specific COMM-104 learning goals and learning outcomes:

   **Course Learning Goals**

   This course has two broad learning objectives:

   1. To provide an introductory overview in the study of digital environments, with an emphasis on fundamental concepts and theories of digitally enhanced/enabled communication techniques and technologies
   2. To understand and be able to appropriately respond to the effect of the emergence of the digital on key institutions in the contemporary world

   **Course Learning Outcomes**

   Achievement is based upon a standardized list of general assessment rubrics in which, by the end of this course students, will be expected to be able to:

   1. Describe some of the major questions in, and approaches to, the study of digital culture as an articulated field of study
2. Engage in the critical study and analysis of digital culture in its many forms
3. Apply the knowledge acquired through reading and thinking about the theories described above to texts outside of the classroom
4. Assess the impact of the digital on contemporary society and imagine new ways of integrating the digital into our culture institutions and lives.
5. Produce digital media as ways of engaging with digital culture

(b) Relationship of Course to the School of Liberal Arts

This course is firmly and deeply grounded in both the historic meaning of the liberal arts as well as our contemporary understanding of a liberal education in the 21st century. This course was developed to provide communication majors with a deep investigative inquiry into the meaning of “the digital” in contemporary culture as well as to provide an appropriate amount of technical skills most relevant to liberal arts majors attracted to support positions within the high-tech sector.

3. Student Population

This course will be available to all Communication majors and minors using this course to fulfill one of the two UD Application Elective requirements. This will also be available to any undergraduate student, if they choose to matriculate.

4. Relationship To Present College Curriculum

This course has no formal relationship to the college core curriculum, but is thematically and conceptually aligned with the depth and breadth of the Communication department curriculum.

5. Extraordinary Implementation Costs

There are no extraordinary implementation costs attached to this course. The W.M. Keck Digital Studies Lab will supply necessary hardware and software tools for the program’s students and faculty.

6. Library Resources

The library audit has been completed and is appended to this proposal as an attached document.

Note: The library audit stated:
*It is not evident from the course description and syllabus that students are required to use the scholarly literature on the subject. Still, students should be encouraged to seek help from Reference librarians to find appropriate sources to help in their accomplishment of assignments.*

For the record, the review and inclusion of scholarly citational sources culled from academic journals and resources are built into EVERY Communication course, and are a critical hinge-pin for not only our Writing in the Discipline component in COMM-100,
but horizontally across our entire curriculum beginning with our introductory COMM-002 course through our COMM-196 Senior Capstone.

7. **Course Credit And Grading Options**

This course is assigned a 1.0 UD unit of credit based upon expectations for an:

1. Intermediate level of analytic, critical and reflective writing in both formal and informal writing samples
2. Intermediate level of critical analysis of core readings and mediated digital artifacts
3. Intermediate level of media production of digital narratives reflecting themes discussed in the course

8. **Prerequisites / Corequisites**

No prerequisites.

9. **Catalogue Description**

COMM-104 serves as an upper division elective within the department of Communication. Students will explore key concepts and theories through close a reading of fundamental texts, study of representative examples of digital work (e.g. websites, gaming, networked and immersive environments, media art), and engage in basic digital design and production assignments.

10. **Course Content**

A Syllabus for this course is provided with this proposal.

11. **Review Of Experimental Offerings**

This course has been offered three times as an experimental course under the course number COMM-163- SPECIAL TOPICS. The first course offering was in Fall 2013, the second was in June Term 2015 and the third was in Fall of 2015. Initial funding for these three experimental courses was provided by the original W.M. Keck Foundation grant.

Each iterative phase of the experimental courses offerings was reviewed and revised by the departmental faculty to ensure that the course meets its stated goals. The course syllabus attached to this proposal reflects the latest iteration of the syllabus as offered in the Fall 2015 term.
COMMUNICATION 163
INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL CULTURE

FALL 2015 SYLLABUS

MW
4:00PM-5:45PM
Sichel 104

Dr. Aaron Sachs

Associate Professor, Communication
Office Location: Sichel Hall 105G
Office Telephone: x8197
Email: ads3@stmarys-ca.edu
Administrative Assistance: Lori Erokan (x4048)

OFFICE HOURS

Mon: 2:45-4:00 PM Drop-In
Wed: 1:00-4:00 PM By Appointment Only (No Drop-Ins)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course serves as a gateway to the Digital Cultures minor through an entirely “digital” yet humanities-based introduction to the fundamental concepts of digital culture. The “digital” will be examined as technology, as communicational and expressive medium, as philosophical precept and paradigm, and as political, social, economic, and psychological force. Students will explore key concepts and theories through the close reading of fundamental texts, study of representative examples of digital work (e.g. websites, gaming, networked and immersive environments, media art), and engage in basic design and production assignments. As a significant force shaping life in the contemporary world, it is important that students learn how to examine the effect of the digital. As such, particular focus will be placed on thinking through the role that the emergence of digital culture increasingly plays in some of societies most fundamental institutions, particularly education, as well identity, politics, and community. Consistent with the focus on education, and a key aspect of the exploration of the intersection of the digital with culture, will be the use of several digital technologies during the semester, which will give students ongoing, shared, and first-hand experience with the digitization of education. Assignments will include individual media projects, a wiki glossary of key theoretical terms, significant class discussions and activities, and a substantial critical and creative digital “autocritography” using text, sound, photography, and videography to map the personal impact of digital education.
COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course has two broad learning objectives:

1. To provide an introduction to the study of Digital Culture with an emphasis on the fundamental concepts and theories.
2. To understand and be able to appropriately respond to the effect of the emergence of the digital on key institutions in the contemporary world.

Each student is expected to be able to demonstrate a general degree of introductory to intermediate-level competency of knowledge, application and character development in each of the above course objectives. These competencies will be graded based upon a standardized list of general assessment rubrics in which students are expected to demonstrate:

1. An understanding and comprehension of digital culture, including the relationship between the digital and culture described within the conjunction
2. A knowledge of the historical paradigms and theoretical perspectives within the study of digital culture and an ability to synthesize these paradigms and perspectives into new approaches of inquiry
3. An understanding of the effects of digital communication technologies and paradigms on the construction of society and the ethical development of the common good
4. An recognition of a personal empowerment and responsibility for social justice as resonant with our institutional core mission
5. An understanding of the digital as both a thing—technology, communicational and expressive medium, philosophy, paradigm—and a force—social, economic, psychological, political.
6. An introductory-level proficiency with digital media production

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Achievement is based upon a standardized list of general assessment rubrics in which, by the end of this course students, will be expected to be able to:

1. Describe some of the major questions in, and approaches to, the study of digital culture as an articulated field of study
2. Engage in the critical study and analysis of digital culture in its many forms
3. Apply the knowledge acquired through reading and thinking about the theories described above to texts outside of the classroom
4. Assess the impact of the digital on contemporary society and imagine new ways of integrating the digital into our culture institutions and lives.
5. Produce digital media as ways of engaging with digital culture
REQUIRED TEXTS
1. UDC: *Understanding Digital Culture* by Vincent Miller
2. REAT: *Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology* by Allan Collins and Richard Halverson
3. HEDA: *Higher Education in the Digital Age* by William G. Bowen
4. Additional readings available on Moodle

REQUIRED HARDWARE
1. Access to a computer, reliable broadband internet, Moodle, and Google suite of products
2. Sound and moving image capture device (eg: iPad, iPhone, or Android smartphone; please talk to me if you do not have access to something like this and the Communication Dept may be able to provide a loaner).

RECOMMENDED APPS (FOR IPAD and iPhone)
1. Google Tour Builder (free online)
2. Audacity (free download)
3. GIMP (free download)
4. WeVideo (free online)

PRIMARY ASSESMENT
All assignments must be completed and turned in to pass this course. No late work will be accepted for submittal, save for documented medical emergencies or unless PRIOR approval from instructor is granted.

Participation................................................................. 25%
Weekly Moodle Assignments .................................................... 10%
Wiki..................................................................................... 15%
Reflections................................................................. 25%
Digital Autocritography ..................................................... 25%

Participation
Your attendance at all synchronous virtual class meetings and arrival on time is required for full participation in this class. If you need to miss a class, you must give notice ahead of time and provide appropriate documentation, however you are still fully responsible for all of the material, assignments, and information given out during that class meeting (contact others in class to get this information, look on Moodle, and if you still need help, send me an email). While attendance in not graded, unexcused and/or excessive absences or tardiness will result in failure of the class.

Your full preparation for each class meeting, including reading and studying the texts assigned, taking careful notes on them, and bringing both the materials and those notes to class with you is key to full participation in the course. I expect your active participation in class discussions. Though virtual, the class depends on conversation and interaction, so it’s imperative that each student take an active role in class discussions. Understandable, some people like to talk in public more than others, and given the virtual nature of this class there will be more alternative opportunities than in a face-to-face class to participate in non-oral ways. However, it is expected that all students will still actively participate in our synchronous virtual classes. All kinds of questions are encouraged, from the most complex or subtle speculations, to basic requests for clarification, translation, etc. about a text or experience. For those people that “talk” less in synchronous virtual class, there are opportunities for asynchronous written participation on the discussion boards. Work on the class Wiki, individual reflection journal, and in longer weekly Moodle assignments is graded separately and cannot thus replace a lack of participation in our virtual classes. Making additional post on Moodle above and beyond these will help though.
Weekly Moodle Assignment
Each week when we are not meeting synchronously, you will have assignments on Moodle connected to the readings. These assignments are designed to get students “discussing” the readings and key ideas on digital culture presented in the readings. These weekly assignments will mostly be written, though may include recorded audio or video content. They will be range from a few sentences, to a few paragraphs, to a few pages. All will be posted at least 12 hours before the “class period” during which they are due, and will generally serve as asynchronous class time (i.e. they will be instead of meeting synchronously)

Wiki
As a class we will be creating a Moodle Wiki of relevant terms connected to digital culture. While this is a collaborative assignment, I expect every student to participate in the Wiki by both adding new content and editing content written by others. Work on the wiki can include adding new terms, adding citations for terms, adding relevant media clips and external links for terms, and linking terms and entries together, among other activities. Each student should initiate at least two entries during the course as well as endeavor to edit and augment at least four other entries. Moodle allows me to track how individuals are participating in the Wiki, and your grade will be based on both the quantity and quality of your contributions to the Wiki. This work should be done throughout June (as we’re reading), which means I shouldn’t see a flurry of activity right at the end of our class. Wikipedia and other wiki-based sites are good models for what an entry could look like, but I would also suggest that entries contain a definition, citations (course texts) with reflections on how the term is being used in these citations, and links to external sources related to this term (video, images, articles, songs, etc.).

Reflection Journal
This course is not only about the intersection of digital technologies and culture with a particular focus on education, it is also an online course that will allow us to experience this very intersection first hand. As a result, it’s important that we regularly step back and reflect on both what and how we are learning from our experience in this online course. Twice a week you will be asked to reflect on a particular learning experience from the course in the context of what we are learning about digital culture. More information on how these are graded, in addition to the ABC rubric used to assess these reflections, is available on Moodle. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, reflections should consist of substantive and substantial answers in the form of full and complete sentences organized into coherent paragraphs. Reflections will be assigned approximately every other course day and posted as a link in the Moodle syllabus, so it is imperative that students check this syllabus daily.

Digital Autocritography
According to Michael Awkward in Scenes of Instruction, an autocritography is “a self-reflexive, self-consciously academic act… an account of individual, social, and institutional conditions that help to produce a scholar and his or her professional concerns” (7). We will be using education as our primary site for looking at the intersection of the digital with culture. As such, you will be using various digital technologies to create an “autocritography” that critically and creatively reflects on your own relationship to education in the digital age. The overall project will be housed within a Google Tour, and include a combination of text, sound, photography, and video. Labs throughout the course will introduce you to the basics of each of the above media as well as helping you create particular artifacts to add into your Google Tour. In the end, you will have a “tour” that creatively and critically “maps” the intersection of digital technologies with your own educational experiences through at least seven “sites” including at least one examples each of text, sound, photography, and video.
Be aware that education is a dynamic process that transcends formula. Every attempt will be made to objectify the grading process. However, the instructor reserves the right to adjust a grade up or down based upon warranted subjective reasons.

GENERAL DEPARTMENTAL GRADING GUIDELINES
*Excerpted from the 2001-2002 Communication Department Handbook*

The major in communication requires substantial commitment. Therefore, working hard in your communication classes must be a standard practice. Although the workload for some courses is heavier than others, you are expected to do significant out-of-class preparation for each meeting of every course. You are expected to budget your time so that you can adequately prepare for each class. When you have an assignment such as a paper or exam that requires a heavier than usual time commitment, you should plan ahead so that this does not adversely impact your performance in other classes.

Our intent in the grading process is to provide students with a fair evaluation of their academic progress. We understand the dangers of inflated grades – grades that are poor measures of academic accomplishment.

The final outcome of your effort in each class is a letter grade indicating mastery of material. Precise criteria for achievement are designated by each instructor and can be found in each course syllabus. In addition, the department has general guidelines listed below to assist you in understanding what is required to obtain specific letter grades.

Before describing the guidelines for specific letter grades, let us consider minimum requirements for your work in any communication class. To achieve C or better in any course, students must fulfill the following criteria, and maintain a balance in all of these areas rather than excellence in one or two:
1. Students must have a command of substantive material.

2. Students must have the ability to diagnose strengths and weaknesses in written and oral communication.

3. Students must creatively engage in an exploration of relevant ideas and concepts.

4. Students must actively participate to enrich the experience of both students and faculty in the classroom.

Course letter grades are as follows:

“C” is an average grade indicating that you have an adequate command of the substantive material of the course and that you have engaged in the exploration of the ideas and concepts. This is generally demonstrated through class participation and through satisfactory completion of class assignments and examinations.

“B” is a good grade, indicating your involvement with the course and its material has been more than just adequate. “B” work is very good – significantly above average.

“A” work is more than simple mastery of course material. It represents a very active and sophisticated engagement with every aspect of the course, demonstrated through sophisticated analysis or creative treatment of the ideas and data covered in the course.

“D” work is less than adequate. For instance, a “D” may indicate that you failed in one or more areas of the course or that you have slipped below a satisfactory level of work in all areas.

“F” indicates a failure to meet the requirements described above.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
Student Disability Services extends reasonable and appropriate accommodations that take into account the context of the course and its essential elements for individuals with qualifying disabilities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Student Disability Services Office at (925) 631-4358 to set up a confidential appointment to discuss accommodation guidelines and available services. Additional information regarding the services available may be found at the following address on the Saint Mary’s website: http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/sds.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Saint Mary’s College expects the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical performance from students. It is particularly important that you are aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, submitting a paper to more than one instructor, or submitting a paper authored by anyone other than yourself. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade and be reported to the Office of Advising. If you have any doubts or questions about these policies, consult the student handbook and/or confer with the professor.

Saint Mary’s College expects every member of its community to abide by the Academic Honor Code. According to the Code, “Academic dishonesty is a serious violation of College policy because, among other things, it undermines the bonds of trust and honesty between members of the community.” Violations of the Code include but are not limited to acts of plagiarism. For more information, please consult the Student Handbook at http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/your-safety-resources/student-handbook.
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<th>DAY/DATE</th>
<th>THEME / ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>READING</th>
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| **WEEK 1** | - Introductions  
- Syllabus  
- Learning Goals and Outcomes | | |
| **MON 8/31** | **UNIT 1** | **THE BASICS** | |
| **WED 9/2** | The Basics  
- Digital Natives  
- Autocritography | 1. *UDC*: Introduction  
2. Palfrey and Gasser – *Born Digital*  
"Introduction" (Moodle) | |
| **WEEK 2** | **LABOR DAY** | NO CLASS | |
| **MON 9/7** | | | |
| **WED 9/9** | Culture  
- What is culture? | 1. Barker – “Questions of Culture and Ideology” (Moodle)  
2. Thinkmap Visual Thesaurus – “Culture” (Moodle) | |
| **WEEK 3** | **Digital** | - What does “digital” mean?  
- bits vs. bytes  
- Turing tests | |
| **MON 9/14** | | 1. DNA of Information” (Moodle)  
2. Turing – “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” (Moodle) | |
| **WEEK 4** | **Lab 1: Sound in Audacity** | 1. Tutorial  
2. Review sample sound artists | Complete Sound Project tutorial (Moodle) online before class |
<p>| <strong>MON 9/21</strong> | | | |</p>
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<tr>
<th>UNIT 2</th>
<th>DIGITAL CULTURE THEORY AND PRACTICE</th>
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<td>WED 9/23</td>
<td>NO CLASS: YOM KIPPUR</td>
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<tr>
<td>WED 9/30</td>
<td>Digital Economics</td>
<td>1. <em>UDC</em>: Chapter 2</td>
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<td>WED 10/7</td>
<td>Digital Inequality</td>
<td>1. <em>UDC</em>: Chapter 4 2. Hargittai and Hinant ‘ “Digital Inequality”’ (DRP)</td>
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<td>WED 10/14</td>
<td>Privacy and Surveillance -Governments</td>
<td>1. <em>UDC</em>: Chapter 5 2. Macaskill and Dance – “NSA Files Decoded” (online) OR watch <em>Citizenfour</em> (iTunes or HBO GO)</td>
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<p>| WEEK 5 | Key Concepts | 1. <em>UDC</em>: Chapter 1 2. Recommended: Barney – “The Network Society” (Moodle) | Due: Sound Lab 1 and Reflection |
| WEEK 6 | Convergence Culture | 1. <em>UDC</em>: Chapter 3 2. Jenkins – “Worship at the Altar of Convergence” (Moodle) |</p>
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| WED 10/21 | Information Politics, Protest, and Warfare | 1. *UDC*: Chapter 6  
2. Howard and Hussain “The Role of Digital Media” (DRP)  
3. Palfrey and Gasser – “Activists” |
| WEEK 10   | Identity                                   | 1. *UDC*: Chapters 7  
2. Palfrey and Gasser – “Identities” |
| MON 10/26 |                                            |                                                                         |
| WED 10/28 | Community                                  | 1. *UDC*: Chapters 8  
2. Papacharissi – “The Virtual Geographies of Social Networks” (DRP)  
3. Wang et al – “Understanding Online Community Participation” (DRP) |
| WEEK 11   | Lab 3: Digital Video with WeVideo          | 1. WeVideo Tutorial  
2. TBD  
3. Watch The Cutting Edge |
| MON 11/2  |                                            | Complete Video Tutorial (Moodle).                                      |
| WED 11/4  | The Technological Body                     | 1. *UDC*: Chapter 9  
2. Wegenstein – “Body” (Moodle)  
3. Recommended: Haraway – “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” (Moodle) |
| WEEK 12   | Conclusion: Digital Culture Foundations    | 1. *UDC*: Conclusion  
Due: Video Lab and Reflection |
<p>| MON 11/9  |                                            |                                                                         |
| UNIT 3    | DIGITAL EDUCATION                          |                                                                         |
| WED 11/11 | Digital culture and education: K-12        | 1. <em>REAT</em> Chapters 1-3                                                 |
| WEEK 13   | Digital culture and education: History of  | 1. <em>REAT</em> Chapters 4-6                                                 |</p>
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<td>11/16</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>11/18</td>
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<td><strong>WEEK 14</strong></td>
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<td>MON 11/23</td>
<td>K-12 in the Digital/Information Age</td>
<td>1. <em>REAT</em> Chapters 7-10</td>
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<td><strong>WEEK 15</strong></td>
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| MON 11/30  | Higher Education in the Digital Age      | 1. Watulak – “You Should Be Reading, Not Texting” (Moodle)  
                      |                                           | 2. Kuznekoff & Titsworth – "The Impact of Mobile Phone Usage on Student Learning" (Moodle) |
| WED 12/2   | The “Problem” of Education in the Digital Age: Cost | 1. *HEDA* Chapter 1 |
| **WEEK 16**|                                          |                                            |
| MON 12/3   | The “Fix” of Education in the Digital Age: Online Courses | 1. *HEDA* Chapter 2 |
| WED 12/5   | Course Wrap-Up                           | 1. *HEDA* Responses                        |
|            | - Responding to education in the digital age |                                            |
|            | - Review of Course Goals and Outcomes    |                                            |
|            | - Course Evaluations                     |                                            |
| Finals Week|                                          |                                            |
| MON 12/10  | Final Presentations: Tours               | Due: Autocritography GoogleTour            |
| 4:30-6:30  |                                          |                                            |
Digital Studies is a relatively new area of research, scholarship and teaching. Like some other areas of Communication study its boundaries are diffuse. The term “digital studies” might be interpreted to refer to analysis of the cultural effects of any of a wide variety of applications of the digital communication technologies that pervade society. Bernard Stiegler’s seminal call for digital studies in 2012 tied study of the cultural effects of digital media to the work of cultural scholars long cited in Communication study as Walter Ong and Jack Goody as well as more recent work such as that of Maryanne Wolf (*Proust and the Squid*) connecting neurological research on the interaction of communication technologies with neuroanatomy. However, in practice the course appears to mix high-level epistemological analysis with indeterminate levels of student sophistication and praxis.

**Books** (Numbers in parentheses following each subject category indicate how many titles are cataloged in the Saint Mary’s College Library collections)

- Information technology--Social aspects (186)
- Internet--Social aspects (190)
- Internet and teenagers (23)
- Digital media--Social aspects (64)
- Online identities (4)
- Social media (274)
- Online social networks (114)

**Reference Works**

- *International Encyclopedia of Communication* -- see articles on e.g. “Digitization and Media Convergence”, “Internet and Popular Culture”, “Avatars and Agents”, “Rhetoric and Technology”
- *21st Century Communication: A Reference Handbook*

**Journals**

Many journals in the Library’s collections in the field of Communication may have relevance.

**Databases**

*Communication Abstracts* (Subject search on “Internet and teenagers” yields 292 articles in academic journals)

*Sociological Abstracts* (Abstract search on “online social network” yields 766 articles while Subject search on same topic yields 126 articles. Subject search on “Internet and teenagers yields 33 articles of which 18 were published in 2016.)

**Library Instruction**

It is not evident from the course description and syllabus that students are required to use the scholarly literature on the subject. Still, students should be encouraged to seek help from Reference librarians to find appropriate sources to help in their accomplishment of assignments. Instruction sessions/ workshops with the Communication librarian are also available on request by the faculty member at appropriate points in the course.
March 12, 2017

Hi all,

I have reviewed the revised proposal to make Communication 104: Understanding Digital Culture a permanent course offering and am happy to lend my endorsement. The course appears well-designed and has been successfully piloted. It serves a growing area of interest will not, as I understand it, require an additional allocation to work it into the departmental offerings.

I circulated the proposal to SOLA chairs and directors but received no feedback.

Cheers,

Sheila

Sheila Hassell Hughes
Dean, School of Liberal Arts
Saint Mary's College of California

* NOTE: This letter was sent via email on March 12, 2017