

# Web 2.0: The Content Generation Final Paper Assignment

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MIT 3771-001  
Instructed by: Brian Brown  
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The final paper is your opportunity to communicate the knowledge that you have acquired throughout the semester. In particular, try to apply the lessons that you learnt through the readings and in the group presentations regarding the formal and organizational elements of an academic paper.

Write an **original, well organized, well researched, and well argued** academic paper dealing with one of the questions, topics, or subjects listed below. Consult the various presentations done by yourself and your colleagues throughout the semester and try to apply some of the formal and organizational elements of academic writing gleaned from these presentations to your own research paper.

Remember that some of the most important attributes of a well written research paper are: *i*) a clear statement of the problem or question you are writing about, *ii*) a clear and concise account of your position on this problem or question, and then *iii*) a well organized presentation of evidence or theoretical argumentation that supports your particular stance while taking into account the other perspectives on the argument as well.

The paper should be double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, with standard margins, and should be 13-17 pages long – *not including your reference list*.

The questions/topics/subjects below should be considered as provocations. You are encouraged to go further or outside of the questions so as to tailor the paper to your particular interests. Give yourself enough time to take advantage of the research process and allow it to take you to the places you find most interesting and compelling. This latitude should not result in an unfocused and/or rambling paper, but is meant to allow you to concentrate on what you find most intriguing. If you find that your research is going too far off into uncharted waters, get in touch with me and we will get back on course together.

You are required to use a recognized citation style (APA, MLA, etc) and you are required to use it accurately. There are handouts detailing the intricacies of all these citation styles as you pass through the gates in Weldon.

Please take note: this is a **research** paper. You will need to consult a wide variety of sources (academic, popular press, online, etc.) if you are to be successful. Be sure not to let sources from the popular press or from digital media overshadow the academic sources which inform your paper.

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**The paper is worth 40% of your final grade  
and is due on December 8, 2008 at 4:00 p.m.**

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1. It is always a good idea to write a final paper regarding some issue or topic that you are personally interested in or excited about. This makes the research and the writing much more appealing, enjoyable, and, often, beneficial in terms of the evaluation of the paper itself. Is there something or some issue that has bothered or fascinated you throughout the semester? If so, try to identify the issue(s) that are personally/scholastically intriguing to you and jot down a few ideas about it/them. Come to office hours or have a word with me after class and we can come up with a research question together that will fulfill the requirements of the assignment. For a few ideas, spend some time on the “[Links](#)” page on the course website and pick out three or four articles that appeal to your interests for one reason or another and try to find a few of the connections that tether them together.
  2. Do a critical comparison of how the various political parties in Canada, the United States of America, or another country are making use of Web 2.0 technologies and User-Generated Content (UGC) to reach and/or involve the electorate. What is the effect of incorporating UGC into their online communications? Have the parties really made use of UGC as it has been defined by the OECD, O'Reilly and others? Or have they just piggybacked on the excitement that surrounds Web 2.0 sites and services? Has UGC had an effect on political campaigns and the ability to control their message? If so, what are the adverse effects of UGC? Have Web 2.0 technologies proven to be effective political tools? How do these issues relate to Citizen Journalism? Construct your argument by making reference to the theoretical literature regarding Web 2.0 and a number of other sources that you have uncovered through your research into this subject.
  3. Kolbitsch and Maurer claim that the rapid rise of Web 2.0 has more to do with a “fundamental mind shift” on the part of users rather than any kind of technological advances that may have taken place. Choose an object of study (BitTorrent, Creative Commons, Flickr, Twitter, etc...) that reflects this fundamental mind shift and explain what makes it different. Delve into the details of the object, how it fits within the existing literature of Web 2.0, how it reflects (or does not reflect) the
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mind shift alluded to above, what the advantages of this new piece of technology are, why it might be problematic, who is using it and for what purpose? For example, what impact has this object of study had on the theory of Immaterial Labour, the law, private property, copyright, creative production, the arts, or the media? How does this fundamental mind shift that Kolbitsch and Maurer speak of manifest itself in online environments? Has a fundamental mind shift even taken place?

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4. What are the fundamental differences between the iPhone, the BlackBerry, and the “Google Phone” when examined by the light shed on these kinds of devices by Zittrain and others? Compare these three hand-held devices by making reference to the body of literature that we have read this semester. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the design elements of each product? Construct a compelling and well organized argument that identifies the impact that the differences between these devices have had on the theoretical literature that we’ve dealt with this semester. O'Reilly, Kelly, Zittrain, the OECD, and/or others would all be appropriate sources to reference.
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5. In light of the argument made by Zittrain in his book *The Future of the Internet – And How to Stop It* (2008), what are the positive and negative implications of Cloud Computing? Reference a significant body of the theoretical and technological literature that we've addressed this semester to substantiate your position and to construct a clear and well presented argument. Does Cloud Computing spell the end of the generative features of the Personal Computer and the Internet?
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6. What impact have Web 2.0 technologies had on copyright? Examine in detail traditional copyright regimes and compare them with the [Creative Commons](#) copyright licensing schemes. You may want to make reference to Jonathan Zittrain's book *The Future of the Internet – And How to Stop it* (2008), Lawrence Lessig's [Code: Version 2.0](#) (2006), any number of journal articles and the productions of a variety of Hip-Hop artists or DJ's such as GirlTalk, DangerMouse, or DJ Reset to name but a few.
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■ Web 2.0 sites and services rely on the labour of their users to produce and maintain them. On sites like Flickr, Facebook, and YouTube a massive amount of unpaid labour goes into maintaining the website and keeping content fresh and new. In the past, media corporations would have had to pay an unlimited workforce around the clock to accomplish this same productive output. Taking into consideration the fact that the users do not get paid for their labour, what do they get for all of their efforts? Other than the social relationships required for Immaterial Labour to take place (Lazzarato) and the riches generated for the company who owns the particular website or service that channels this labour (Terranova & Cohen), what else is produced by the immaterial labour of content generators? What is in it for them? Defend your position by making reference to the literature dealt with all semester and the research that you have done on your own.

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■ It has been argued that Citizen Journalism is an outcome of the development and commercial availability of the technologies that allow individuals to gather news in places/locations that traditional news media outlets have difficulty accessing. Others argue that Citizen Journalism (and blogs more precisely) are only a rehash of the daily news offered by the mainstream media and an echo-chamber that has no real effect on public opinion other than 'preaching to the converted.' Why would amateur citizen journalists be able to access places/locations that the professional news media have had difficulty accessing? Do Web 2.0 technologies threaten the dominance of the mainstream mass media as our primary information providers? How have the mainstream mass media responded to this new source of information regarding current events? What impact does all of this have on the theoretical issues addressed throughout the class? Take a firm position on some of these debates and argue for your position by making reference to the readings done in class and some examples that substantiate your point of view.