

New Media and Communication Theology  
Syllabus  
Five Week Online Summer Session  
Pacific School of Religion  
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**Course Description**

Emerging technologies such as the printing press, radio, television, and today's newer media of computers, mobile phones, and the Internet have influenced human communication at many levels, including in the church. With the Internet as our living library, course participants will search out definitions of what is "new media" and will find the data helpful for understanding the scope and impact of these media on culture and church. We'll use the phenomenon of online social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter as a laboratory for defining the work of "communication theology" as first named by Latin American and Asian theologians. After some reflections on impacts of cultural transitions from oral to print, and print to digital communication, we'll search out how and whether new media and, in particular, social networking sites, may be used for connecting people and communities into essential ministries of peace and justice.

**Course Goals**

1. To introduce the concept of "new media" as it is currently defined in academic and popular culture settings.
2. To become familiar with research tools aimed at identifying rapidly changing patterns of the use of digital new media among the general population and in church communities.
3. To investigate the scope and impact of online social networking sites on interpersonal communication and social change.
4. To become familiar with "communication theology" as introduced by Asian and Latin American theologians as distinct from "a theology of communication."
5. To identify and understand the intended and unintended consequences of cultural transitions from oral to print culture, and from print to electronic/digital media culture, while being alert to diverse cultural perspectives.
6. To share examples of online social networking media used for consciousness raising and peace/justice efforts, and develop criteria for evaluation.

### **Texts (Web resources are provided directly through the course)**

The “texts” will be resources readily available on the Internet, including video and print resources selected by the instructor and supplemented by the online research of those taking the course.

### **Course Requirements and Grading**

The course may be adapted to differing requirements for various levels of learning: M.Div. students, D. Min. students, CEU/Certificate students, and/or continuing education for pastors and educators.

1. Reading/viewing all assigned material and participation in online discussion forums.
2. Short written assignments on a regular basis.
3. A final project/paper on some aspect of the course material in relationship to the subject of new media and communication theology.
4. Grading will follow a typical rubric.

### **Course Syllabus**

The weekly assignments will include readings of articles and web resources plus material in audio/video formats.

Topics will include:

#### **Week One: Introduction to New Media Studies**

What is “new media,” who is developing “new media studies,” and why, and what are the social, cultural, political, economic, racial, ethnic, gender and theological issues involved?

#### **Week Two: Digital New Media and the Church**

Using data from the Nielsen Company’s quarterly *Three Screens Report* on television, Internet, and mobile device usage, research from the Barna Group on emerging technologies and the church, and Duke University’s *National Congregations Study*, we’ll investigate convergences of culture, church, and new media.

#### **Week Three: Online Social Networking and Communication Theology**

Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter have become recognizable names in the world of social networking. What accounts for their popularity, who is using them, and where do we find effective use in the church and religious organizations? This week we’ll learn about these sites and look at the research available to understand the scope and impact of this communication form on culture and the church. Using these sites as a source for

reflective practice, we'll let our experience with them become the laboratory for defining the difference between a "theology of communication" and "communication theology."

#### **Week Four: Oral, Print, and New Media Cultures**

Media theorists and theologians have noted how oral culture and electronic culture are more similar to each other than they are to print culture. What are the similarities and differences between pre-literate oral communication patterns, literary-print communication, and electronic/digital communication (new media)? What might an understanding of this mean for today's religious organizations? What are the consequences when cultures transition from one communication pattern to another, and back again?

#### **Week Five: Integration**

##### Towards a Working Definition of Communication Theology

We will work to pull together the various aspects of this course including the survey of new media studies, online social networking, cultural transitions from oral to print and electronic media, and attempts to define the field of "communication theology." How would we describe (in word, sound and image) the concept of "communication theology" to today's church?

##### Survey of Online Networking For Social Change

The class will locate and share examples of online social networks developed for consciousness-raising, social issue awareness, or justice/peace promotion.

##### Final Project Sharing and Discussion

Students will develop, produce, and share their research in this course with an eye towards naming new directions for Communication Theology as it feeds into theologies of indigenous peoples, prophetic/social justice issues, and progressive theology.