



Course Title: Information Technology from Movable Type to Machine Learning

Course Code: HIST 109

Instructor Name and Bio: Thomas S. Mullaney

Thomas S. Mullaney is a Guggenheim Fellow and curator of the international exhibition *Radical Machines: Chinese in the Information Age*. His most recent book, *The Chinese Typewriter: A History*, received the 2018 John K. Fairbank Prize for the best book on East Asian history since 1800. Mullaney received a PhD from Columbia.

Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times: Wednesdays, 7:00-8:50 PM (PT)

Meeting location: Zoom (details will be shared with registered students prior to first class meeting)

Choose one:

The class sessions will be recorded (but live participation is strongly advised)

Course Features: (delete the items that are not applicable, add/edit as needed)

- Live session
 - Lecture with some Q&A
- Assignments & Coursework
 - Assignments and course materials posted in Canvas

Course Summary

Humans rely on information and information technologies to make, preserve, and transmit knowledge and meaning. But what is “information,” and what counts as an “information technology?” While conventional wisdom might bring to mind 1s and 0s, bits and bytes, pixels and protocols, the word “information” itself suggests an alternate definition that is both more specific and more expansive: Information is, quite simply, any set of entities, physical and conceptual, that have been put in a formation for the purposes of forging, preserving, and sharing meaning, and information technology is any process or practice employed along the way. Information, furthermore, is the act of maintaining these “formations” in a universe that is always tending toward entropy and deformation. Thus, while magnetic tape and Morse code are forms of information technology, to be sure, so too are formaldehyde and footnotes, papyrus plants and page numbers, semiotics and storytelling.

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
 365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305
 continuingstudies@stanford.edu
 650-725-2650

This course charts the history of information from 1400 to the present. Subjects include both “classic” forms of information technology (for example moveable type, telegraphy, typewriting, and personal computing), but also ones that tend to be omitted from “bits and bytes” histories (music notation systems, phone books, weaving, and more). Students will leave the course with a new perspective on what information is and how it shapes—and is shaped by—culture, nationality, gender, ethnicity, economy, and environment.

**Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

Grade Options and Requirements

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
 - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
 - Students must attend at least 8 class sessions
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
 - Students must attend at least 8 class sessions and complete the final project (a short research paper or research grant proposal on a topic of the student’s choice in consultation with Prof. Mullaney).

○
**Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

Textbooks/Required Materials

None required

Tentative Weekly Outline

Week 1: What is Information?

Week 2: The Rise of the Book

Week 3: The “Avalanche of Numbers”: Statistics, Surveillance, and the Criminal Origins of Modern Identity

Week 4: Communicating at a Distance: The Postal System, The Newspaper, Telegraphy, Radio, Stoplights, Street Signs, Graffiti...

Week 5: The “-Graphics” Explosion: Photography, Phonography, Cinematography, and Beyond

Week 6: The Tyranny of Buttons: The Rise of the Keyboard

Week 7: Computers Were Women (So Why Were Computer Scientists Men)?

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305
continuingstudies@stanford.edu
650-725-2650

Week 8: Broadcast, Microcast: Satellite Television, the Walkman, and Everything in Between

Week 9: Nothing is Virtual: The Environmental and Labor History of Networked Computing, Artificial Intelligence, and Social Media

Week 10: The Future of Information