



**COURSE**  
**HANDBOOK:**  
**Digital education in global context**  
**Semester 1, 2020/21**

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## Welcome

Welcome to *Digital education in global context*, a course designed to put digital education into its broader social and political context with a particular focus on the impact of globalization and openness. Over coming weeks we will be looking at changes in online culture and ideologies under the influence of governments, corporations and society at large, the role of educational institutions in those developments, and the potential for digital education to help students negotiate the emerging social and political landscape of the online world.

We will cover a range of topics and themes from political science, sociology, cultural studies, law and education which we hope you will find distinctive and intriguing. Themes include the social, political and economic forces behind the development of the Internet and digital education, digital divides, the role of education in shaping digital citizens, and the intellectual property disputes shaping the future of the Internet and education. Many of these issues have even greater significance in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic affecting us all this year.

Along the way, we will discuss and debate ideas, links and readings in a group weblog, where you will sometimes be expected to take a lead, and in informal synchronous chats; and you'll be able to explore an issue of particular interest in more depth in your final assignment.

We'll be joining in those discussions and providing support over coming weeks, as you engage with your fellow students and the course material. Here's to a semester of spirited debate!



Rory Ewins and Michael Gallagher

## Prerequisites and learning outcomes

Digital Education students will be assumed to have completed *An introduction to digital environments for learning*, but this is not a formal prerequisite and students from other programmes are welcome.

On completion of *Digital education in global context* you will have:

- a critical understanding of distinctive social and political features of the online environment, including its historical and ideological underpinnings;
- an ability to analyse and assess the role of educational institutions in the development of the online environment;
- critical awareness of the social and political context and implications of digital education; and
- an ability to synthesise concepts introduced in the course into an understanding of how change is negotiated in the online world, and how online skills prepare us for such negotiation and change.

## Delivery and workload

*Digital education in global context* is delivered online using the virtual learning environment Moodle and a group weblog, allowing you to fit your studies around work and other commitments. You will need to make a significant commitment to the course in order to contribute to discussions and complete the activities: allow around 7-10 hours a week for discussion, reading and writing, with more for the assignment. Try to log in a few times a week to take part in the blog, as well as setting aside time to do the readings and other course activities.

## Participation etiquette

The main focus of the course discussion will be our collaborative weblog; you will be expected to make regular contributions to these discussions, though the timing of these will be up to you. We will also be holding some real-time chat sessions. These won't be compulsory, but will provide a useful further avenue for discussion.

When taking part in online discussion, please keep your posts polite and try to respond to others' contributions. Your comments and entries don't have to be written in flawless academic prose, but should be reasonably clear and aimed at advancing the discussion. Because readers tend to skim or skip overly long posts, try to keep yours to the point.

## Computer skills and equipment

The Digital Education *Technologies Handbook* outlines the basic computing requirements. This is available from the Programme Handbooks link at our programme Hub:

<http://hub.digital.ed.ac.uk/>

## Course structure and format

*Digital education in global context* runs over ten weeks. A different topic features each week, although inevitably there is some overlap of issues raised in different parts of the course. Beyond the outline given here, you will find more detail in the course Moodle site itself, where links to all the readings will be available.

After week 1, you will be taking turns to co-lead discussion on the blog, according to a schedule we will decide at the beginning of the course.

### **Block A: Contexts** (21 September–11 October 2020)

The first three weeks seek to place digital education and e-learning in historical and global context by examining the history and growth of the Internet and the role played by educational institutions in its development; globalization, and how digital education is both its vehicle and its beneficiary; and the pressures and incentives leading educational institutions to implement digital education. Discussing these more general areas will give us a chance to get comfortable with each other as a group.

#### **Week 1: Origins**

In this week we examine the history and growth of the Internet and the role played by educational institutions in its development. Although the US military is credited with the invention of the Internet, academic researchers played a crucial role in its development, particularly outside the United States, and universities still have a strong influence on the evolution of online culture.

#### **Week 2: Globalization**

Globalization has been a major focus of interest for social scientists in recent years, and the growth of the Internet and the Web has played no small part in that. This section explores the concept and implications of globalization and how digital education is both its vehicle and its beneficiary. Issues of language and culture will be a particular focus this week.

#### **Week 3: The economics of digital education**

Beyond the desire to explore new educational frontiers, what economic pressures and incentives are leading educational institutions to implement digital education? This section looks at the changing education funding landscape and the financial promise and pitfalls of digital education within that international context.

### **Block B: Divides** (12–25 October 2020)

Weeks 4 and 5 look at the much-discussed issue of digital divides: at how such divisions affect the uptake of digital education, and how digital education can help to address them. The topic itself can be divided in a number of ways: in our case, week 4 will explore domestic divides in the developed world, while week 5 will extend the scope to the 'north/south' divide, looking at which countries are best placed to take advantage of the Internet and digital education and which face significant challenges.

## **Week 4: Domestic digital divides**

In our first week of considering the 'haves' and 'have nots' of the information age, we will ask who are the information rich and information poor in developed countries and how closely this division relates to disparities in wealth. A number of studies have gone beyond simple rich/poor mappings to explore issues of online skills, the 'don't want tos', and divides between young and old. All have implications for education.

## **Week 5: Global digital divides**

This week extends the scope to the divide between rich nations and the developing world, looking at which countries are best placed to take advantage of the Internet and digital education, and which face significant challenges.

## **Block C: Citizens and Ideologies** (26 October–29 November 2020)

In the second half of the course we consider our relationship with online society and our role as digital citizens. Potential topics include how social networks affect digital education and our online identities, what it means to be a 'digital citizen', open source movements and intellectual property issues, and political ideologies and their online expression. A selection of the topics below will be covered, but you will decide the order in which we tackle them over five weeks, using tools like the Moodle forum, the course wiki or Doodle to reach collective agreement by Thursday 22 October. The topics are shown here alphabetically by title.

### **Digital citizenship**

Governments speak increasingly of a 'knowledge economy' and are moving towards online delivery of some services. What does it mean to be a 'digital citizen', and how can digital education prepare current and future generations for dealing with electronic forms of government? To discuss this issue we will also look at current debates about citizenship education in general, and at the relationship between formal and informal electronic education.

### **Ethics and surveillance**

In this section we explore a range of ethical issues around teaching and learning in digital environments, and the related issue of online surveillance—a chance to revisit some questions about Big Data, MOOCs and digital divides.

### **Gender and technology**

This section considers a range of gender issues around information technology and digital education across the world. What difference does gender make to students' and teachers' successful use of technology in education? How might gender barriers in digital education, or in using information technology more widely, be overcome? Do these new forms of education offer particular advantages for women, or for men? Are there gender differences in perceptions of digital education? How might wider cultural debates and conflicts around gender affect digital education?

## **Intellectual property**

This section will look at the contentious area of intellectual property, exploring themes of online copyright, software patents, trademark protection, and the erosion of the public domain. Educational institutions have been at the forefront of disputes between producers and consumers of intellectual property, not least because their staff and students are often both. Copyright clearance in the digital domain is a major cost for digital education. Familiar IP issues such as plagiarism and censorship also take on a greater urgency in the online environment, and both have implications for teachers and researchers.

## **Online ideologies**

This section explores political ideologies and their online expression. The traditional voices of the liberal left and conservative right are certainly heard online, but many online discussions have a distinctively libertarian flavour not as noticeable in offline political discourse and debate. At a time when online debates and distortions have had a dramatic impact on global politics, we will explore the development and educational implications of political discussion and activism online, and will consider whether the Internet is a force for democracy or authoritarianism.

## **Open source**

This section considers the ideological basis of the open source movement, and how the choices being made by educational institutions in the development of educational software and digital pedagogies have political and ideological, as well as economic and educational, underpinnings.

## **Social networks and online society**

What is 'online society', and what changes have been brought to it and to education by social networking? How does digital education in turn shape us as social networkers? What are the implications for online and offline identity, and for privacy? In this section we explore these questions and look at the risks and benefits for students and teachers of social networking.

## **Optional topic**

You can, if you wish, decide on a different topic that you feel has not been sufficiently addressed on the course in place of one of the other topics shown here for Block C. If you collectively choose this option, please schedule it in the final three weeks of the course so that the course organiser has time to research and write about it as well.

## The course Moodle site

<https://www.moodle.is.ed.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1441>

The course site will be available from Thursday 17 September 2020, four days before the course officially starts on Monday 21 September. Please log in before week 1 if possible, to pick up the week 1 readings and to identify subsequent weeks in which you would like to co-lead the group blog discussion.

The course area of *Digital education in global context* contains a range of material. Your main focus will be the sections on each week's topics and readings. A key feature is the White Paper, an overview by the course organiser posted on the Monday of each week to the relevant section of Moodle. In the opening weeks, a list of additional readings for each week will appear on the Thursday before the week begins. For the second half of the course, the readings for all topics (apart from optional topics, if you decide to have one) will be posted before Block C starts.

This course handbook is available from the Moodle site, as well as a link to the course weblog, which you can then bookmark and access directly. Details of chat sessions are also shown on the course site.

## Twitter

As you have seen, we will potentially discuss some of the privacy concerns surrounding social networking sites and issues of the security and ownership of data in this course, which creates a certain tension around building them into it. Many of our staff and students already tweet for or about the programme, however, so if you would like to tweet about something specific to this course, please use the hashtag #degc20.



## Assessment

The course will be assessed in two ways:

1. by your activity on the group weblog (50% of the final mark)
2. by an assignment (50% of the final mark)

### 1. The group weblog

#### Weblog rationale

You will already know blogs in their diary-like form from *An introduction to digital environments for learning*. In this course we will be using a collaborative or group weblog, similar to a bulletin board or forum but with a different focus: rather than consisting mostly of general commentary on the issues of the week, our discussions will focus primarily on individual posts addressing specific web resources, whether these are course readings or other links the poster has found. This weblog is not the private and reflective kind you will have used in other courses: your contributions and comments will be open to other students and staff on the course (though not the general public).

The blog is intended to function as an ongoing, preservable dialogue between you, your fellow students and tutors, growing around your developing ideas and insights. You will have two ways to contribute: by posting a main entry to open a discussion on one or more specific links on a common theme; and by commenting on posts others have made, as part of a thread of discussion around that link or topic.

#### Joining and using the weblog

The blog will be linked from Moodle, but is actually hosted by the university's WordPress blog service. You will be added automatically to the group blog at the start of the course, and can add posts and comments as you would for other WordPress blogs. Access to the blog is restricted to staff and students on this course.

We will begin using the weblog in week 1. Your comments should be regular and frequent. This doesn't mean that you have to make them every single day, but you should aim to add comments to current posts a few times a week. In addition, you will be asked to take a lead twice (once in the first half of the semester and once in the second), meaning that on those weeks you should aim to make one or two substantial entries about the week's topic, and should be particularly active in the ensuing discussion. We will arrange the schedule of this activity in week 1.

How your blogging develops will be very much up to you. You may, for example, decide to contribute relatively formal comments and observations specific to each week's activities. Alternatively, you might decide that a less formal, more open-ended approach suits you better. Part of the enjoyment of a collaborative blog is in seeing how your own style meshes with those of others, and how you influence each other over time.

As part of the netiquette of our group blog, please don't edit your entries (beyond typos and the like) once you've posted them. Doing so

interferes with the history of the discussion as a whole, which can inadvertently affect the work of others on the course.

Your activity on the weblog will comprise half of your final mark. Your posts and discussion during your two leading weeks will be the main basis for this, but your comments on other students' posts throughout the semester will also be taken into consideration; the blog is the main vehicle for assessing the breadth of your learning on the course. You have an opportunity to reuse material from your comments and entries from non-leading weeks in your final assignment if you wish, so please don't hold back from blog discussions for the sake of your final assignment.

### **Weblog assessment criteria**

In assessing your weblog activity, the following criteria will apply. The criteria are based on the university's Postgraduate Common Marking Scheme, which is more fully described in your *Programme Handbook*.

- **Knowledge and understanding**  
Do your entries and comments demonstrate a good understanding of the issues and ideas raised? Do they show an understanding of the implications for educational practice? Have you engaged sufficiently and effectively with the course readings and with other people's weblog entries?
- **Planning and implementation**  
Are your entries and comments in the weblog regular and substantial enough to demonstrate such understanding? Are they spread throughout the duration of the course? Do they contain clearly formulated questions and investigations?
- **Constructing discourse**  
Is the style of your blogging vivid and distinctive? Are your comments and entries well written? Do you support your claims with links and references to appropriate sites and literature?

For example, a contribution graded at 70% or above (an A) would meet the criteria in the following way:

#### **70% - 100%**

##### **Knowledge and understanding**

Writing engages critically and consistently with the content of the course and the course readings. Evidence is shown of reading and thought which goes beyond the immediate course content. The process of developing understanding is coherently described and reflected upon. Insightful connections are made between educational practice and the course content.

##### **Planning and implementation**

Several comments are made a week, and are spread throughout the course. Entries in both leading weeks are well-researched and well-constructed, and contain effective prompts for group discussion.

##### **Constructing discourse**

Writing is grammatical and flows well. Original ideas are well expressed and persuasively argued. A sense of distinctive contribution to the overall blogging group is conveyed.

By contrast, a failing contribution (0-39%) would demonstrate the following in relation to the criteria:

**0% - 39%**

**Knowledge and understanding**

Writing does not engage with the content of the course, and no evidence is shown of sustained reading within course content. There is no evidence of the process of developing understanding. No connections are made between educational practice and the course content.

**Planning and implementation**

Entries and comments are made very infrequently or not at all, or are very unevenly spread throughout the duration of the course.

**Constructing discourse**

Writing is consistently ungrammatical, unsupported by references, and difficult to read. There has been no attempt to contribute to the collective efforts of the group.

**Examples of group weblogs**

If you aren't familiar with group weblogs and how they work, you may find it helpful to have a look at these examples:

*Metafilter*

<http://www.metafilter.com/>

One of the first community weblogs, with tens of thousands of members discussing current events, politics and 'the best of the web'.

*Crooked Timber*

<http://www.crookedtimber.org/>

An academic group weblog with a large community of commenters looking at issues of politics and political science, economics, law, sociology, linguistics and philosophy.

*The Open Rights Group*

<http://www.openrightsgroup.org/blog>

Blog of a UK group aimed at promoting and protecting digital rights.

## **2. The assignment**

### **Rationale and requirements**

In addition to the weblog, you will also prepare a written assignment. The assignment should relate to one of the topics discussed during the course *apart from those of your two leading weeks on the weblog*, although there is room for negotiation if your assignment touches on more than one course topic. You might wish to discuss your plans with the course organiser to ensure that it will meet these requirements.

The form of the assignment can be as experimental or as conventional as you wish, with the proviso that it can be preserved and submitted in a reasonably stable form for assessment. For example, you might choose to present it as a wiki, a personal weblog, or a hypertext or illustrated web essay. A conventional essay is also perfectly acceptable.

The assignment should be between 2,000 and 2,500 words in length, or equivalent. Clearly, if you are using non-conventional forms this can only be a rough guide to the amount of work you should be putting into the piece, and it will be up to you to consider how this length guide translates. Up to a third of your assignment can be adapted from comments and entries that you made on the group blog outside your two leading weeks.

### **Example questions**

The topic and form of your assignment are up to you. Here are some suggestions for the kind of assignment you might consider:

1. Keep a personal blog exploring the effect of different ideologies (as reflected in sample political and academic blogs) on opinions about digital education.
2. Build a hypertext or web essay (with links and images alongside text) to explore different national approaches to digital education and the 'digital divide' issues implicit in them.
3. Write a conventional essay on an issue introduced by one of the readings or suggested by the weekly topics, such as 'Should information be free?' or 'Does knowledge equal power?'

For further inspiration, you can find a list of assignment titles from past instances of the course in Moodle.

### **Assessment criteria for the assignment**

The assignment will be assessed according to four core criteria:

- **Knowledge and understanding of concepts**  
Does the assignment show a critical engagement with the concepts and theories introduced?
- **Knowledge and use of the literature**  
Have relevant key references been used? Have other relevant sources been drawn upon and coherently integrated into the analysis?
- **Planning and implementation**  
Does the assignment frame its questions and aims clearly? Is the investigation coherent and methodical?
- **Constructing academic discourse**  
Is the assignment produced with careful attention to the quality of the writing (and, if relevant, the visual and hypertext presentation) and the skilful expression of ideas?

The Postgraduate Common Marking Scheme described in the *Programme Handbook* gives more detail on how these core criteria are graded.

## Submission dates

Your final weblog contributions should be made by the end of the last week of course discussions, and no later than noon GMT on Monday 30 November 2020. Marks and feedback for the blog component will be returned by the end of Monday 21 December 2020.

Your assignment should be submitted by noon GMT on Wednesday 6 January 2021. Marks and feedback for the assignment will be returned by the end of Wednesday 27 January 2021.

Requests for extensions or for the consideration of special circumstances should be made via the University's Extensions and Special Circumstances Service at the earliest opportunity. We can no longer approve extensions outside this system.

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-administration/extensions-special-circumstances>

## Readings

You are not required to purchase any books for this course. All core readings are provided in the relevant areas of the course site. Most are openly available on the Web or accessible via library e-journals. Beyond the core readings, each topic of study will guide you toward useful further readings.

The collection of resources and readings in the course site is quite large, but please don't feel that you have to read everything. It will always be clear which are the core readings for each week of study. Any that are recommended beyond these are to follow up if you wish, particularly for your two leading weeks and your final assignment, although to get the most out of the course you should try look at some further readings each week.

If you wish to do some background reading before the course begins, you might like to try John Naughton's *From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg: What You Really Need to Know About the Internet* (2012) or Evgeny Morozov's *To Save Everything, Click Here* (2013).

## Course organiser contact information

For help and advice on any aspect of the course, contact the course organiser:

Dr Rory Ewins  
r.ewins@ed.ac.uk  
<http://twitter.com/speedysnail>  
Skype: roryewins