

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

### THE HACKER ETHIC

#### Understanding Online Culture and its Social Effects

A “computer hacker” is popularly understood to be a sinister character, an unseen outlaw slipping illicitly into other people’s computer systems and leaving digital chaos in his wake. Historically, however, the term identifies a more productive, though in many ways no less disruptive, cultural type: The eccentric, driven programmers whose passion for digital technology has, from computing’s earliest days, helped transform the computer from a specialized tool of business and science into the ubiquitous phenomenon it is today. This course begins with an introduction to the value system of the hacker subculture – sometimes known as the hacker ethic – and uses it as a guide to understanding the social significance of contemporary digital technology. Attentive particularly to two central principles of the hacker ethic – its insistence on freedom of access to technology and its celebration of computers as vehicles for creativity and fun – we will follow the ramifications of these principles through a survey of today’s most transformative online phenomena. Topics to be explored include online “piracy,” open-source software, the rise of remix and mash-up culture, the increasing significance of online games and their economies, the reorganization of the media industries, and the reorganization of knowledge itself by the likes of Google and Wikipedia. More broadly, we will be learning to understand these phenomena not as mere effects of technological development but as the outcomes of complex encounters between technology and culture.

### ASSIGNED BOOKS

Steven Levy, *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*

Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*

Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*

Julian Dibbell, *Play Money: Or How I Quit My Day Job and Made Millions Trading Virtual Loot*

### COURSE OUTLINE

DAY ONE: Hackers: The History of a Dangerous Idea

Selections from Levy. Also:

Bruce Sterling, “The Digital Underground.” In *The Hacker Crackdown*

[http://www.dina.kvl.dk/~abraham/crackdown/crackdown\\_5.html#SEC5](http://www.dina.kvl.dk/~abraham/crackdown/crackdown_5.html#SEC5)

Paul Lamere, “Inside the Precision Hack,”

<http://musicmachinery.com/2009/04/15/inside-the-precision-hack/>

DAY TWO: Free as in Speech: The Origins and Implications of Free/Open Source Software

Selections from Lessig and Shirky. Also:

Richard Stallman, "The GNU Manifesto," <http://www.gnu.org/gnu/manifesto.html>

DAY THREE: Rip, Mix, and Burn: The Work of Art in the Age of the Remix

Selections from Lessig. Also:

Julian Dibbell, "Unpacking My Record Collection,"

[http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/feed\\_records.html](http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/feed_records.html)

DAY FOUR: Everything Is Miscellaneous: The Rise of Google, Wikipedia, and Other  
New Ways of Knowing

Selections from Shirky and Stross. Also:

Julian Dibbell, "Portrait of the Blogger as a Young Man,"

[http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/feed\\_blogger.html](http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/feed_blogger.html)

DAY FIVE: For the Lulz: Computers, Games, and the Power of Play

Selections from Dibbell. Also:

Chris Landers, "Serious Business Anonymous Takes On Scientology (and Doesn't Afraid  
of Anything)," <http://www.citypaper.com/news/story.asp?id=15543>