

CSCI E-2A Project Proposal — due Sunday, November 9 at 11:59 pm EDT

Please email your proposal to cscie2a@googlegroups.com Please attach your work as a file, either a pdf (preferred) or a .doc file. Please name the file as follows:
Lastname_Firstname_Project_Proposal.ext (e.g., *Moore_Tyler_Project_Proposal.pdf*)

The final class project will be due on Jan 12, 2009. This project is likely to be very different from the term papers you are used to doing. The paper will be short and the subject matter should be narrow. The write-up will be ten pages at most, but we would like you to do some searching, some reading, some interviewing, and some thinking before you start writing. (The write-up will have to include a list of sources be they books, articles, web sites, or human beings; that list will not count against the page limit.)

The subject matter of your project is of your own choice. It should concern some aspect of society, industry, the arts, education, etc., that is being transformed by the information revolution. Ideally your topic would be something that is being done differently today than it was five years ago and will have been further transformed five years from now. Don't make the topic too big. "Basketball" would be too big; "How college recruiting is changing because of the availability of statistical data on high school basketball players" might be about right. "Politics" would be too big, but something about precinct data are used in your home town mayoral elections, or how your local congressperson ran his last election might work. You may get the most out of taking a single news story and trying to drill down on what is behind the journalist's vague words, rather than trying to "cover" some topic.

One of the key components of a project will be evidence that you have talked to people involved in the activity and they have explained to you how it used to be and how it is now. The interviews do not need to be in person, but you should take good notes and record the names and times so you can include that information with your list of sources consulted.

Your write-up need not be highly mathematical but it should have some quantitative content. How much information is being used? At what daily rate is it coming in or going out? Is it being saved or discarded? Who can see it? Does the public have a right to see the information or is it for sale? Can it go on like this for another 20 or 50 years or will things have to look different downstream? How? Is there some algorithmic discovery or some specific technology development that has made the change possible or is it mainly that data are available in digital form?

Perhaps a good way to think about what we want is in terms of a framework like this. It may not fit every project idea perfectly, but it should be a good guide in most cases.

1. How are people using information and communication now?
2. How did they used to do it, before there were computers and databases and rapid communication of digital data?
3. How will this part of the world have changed in five years if the trends continue as they have? (Not only technology trends, but related trends in the world of business, law, etc.)
4. How *should* things be in the future?

The most important single factor in evaluating the final project will be the quality and extensiveness of your outreach, so you should be thinking about whom you will talk to or visit to get first-hand information. Other factors will include the clarity of your prose and your use of quantitative measures to support your argument. Item (4) is also important. We want you to take a well-considered moral position. There is still time to seize the opportunity to set policies, or to thwart policies relating to information and communication. We want you to think about what you can do now to influence the way society will work in the future.

For the proposal due November 9, we would like a two paragraph statement of what you propose to do. We will read the proposals and provide feedback during the November 16 class. Our objective is to have the proposals firmed up by November 30, leaving you six weeks to work on the project.