

Syllabus for the course: Internet Giants: The Law and Economics of Media Platforms

A course for the undergraduate students of educational program “Journalism”

Course type: elective (blended)

The part of course: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/internetgiants/home/welcome>

Course description

This seven-week course will explore the relationship between law and technology with a strong focus on the law of the United States with some comparisons to laws around the world, especially in Europe. Tech progress is an important source of economic growth and raises broader questions about the human condition, including how culture evolves and who controls that evolution. Technology also matters in countless other ways as it often establishes the framework in which governments interact with their citizens, both in allowing speech and blocking it and in establishing exactly what the boundaries are between private life and the government. And technology itself is powerfully shaped by the laws that apply in areas as diverse as copyright, antitrust, patents, privacy, speech law and the regulation of networks.

Course plan

Introduction to the Course

This is a course on the law and economics of media platforms. Media delivery is frequently organized around a set of tools that bring together different parties to interact. Edison’s phonograph and wax cylinders did that, bringing together music producers and consumers wanting to listen to music at home, but so does Microsoft Windows, which sits between software developers and computer users.

Microsoft: The Desktop v. The Internet

In this module, we will focus on Microsoft and its arc from start up to dominance and repeated antitrust target. We will look at the technology leading to the personal computer and the release of the IBM PC in August, 1981 and then the rise of Microsoft from there. We will turn to antitrust actions against Microsoft, first in the United States in 1994 for its MS-DOS licensing practices and then again in the United States in 1998 for its response to the Internet and Netscape Navigator. We will then turn to two competition policy actions against Microsoft in Europe.

Google Emerges (and the World Responds)

In this module, we will focus on Google and its arc from 1998 start up to dominance and repeated antitrust target. We will look at the underlying tech, two-sided markets and auctions and then at antitrust investigations in the U.S. and the EU.

Smartphones

In this module, we will focus on the emergence of the smartphones platform. That is an interesting mix of government policy (especially regarding spectrum), collective private activity (standard setting, such as that for the 802.11 standard and for Wi-Fi), and individual private actions (such as that leading to the Apple iPhone and the Android platform).

Nondiscrimination and Neutrality

In this module, we will focus on the issue of network neutrality, or, as the U.S. Federal Communications Commission likes to put it, the open Internet.

The Day the Music Died?

In this module, we will focus on different platforms for distributing music. That will start with the great home technology of the early 1900s—the phonograph and the player piano—before turning to radio and the ASCAP and BMI licensing regime for public performances. We then will turn to a failed technology and legal regime, digital audio tape and the Audio Home Recording Act of 1992. We will then switch to MP3 players, from the relatively obscure (the Diamond Rio) to the ubiquitous (the iPod) and to Apple’s digital rights management regime. We will then switch to the issues raised by peer-to-peer software like Napster and Grokster and then close with an examination of the switch from physical distribution media to digital and subscriptions like Spotify.

Video: Listening and Watching

In this module, we will focus on the different platforms for delivering video to the home. We will start with the history of TV in the U.S. in the 1940s and then jump to the copyright issues associated with the creation of cable TV in the 1960s and 1970s. We will then switch to considering two devices (the VCR and the DVD player), two services (Netflix and Aereo) and then creation of digital TV.

The Mediated Book

In this module, we will focus on the emergence of digital books and digital libraries. Three topics loom large: (1) Google’s efforts to copy millions of books and bring them online through Google Books; (2) Amazon’s creation of the Kindle ebook platform; and (3) Apple’s launch of the iPad with its associated bookstore and the resulting antitrust lawsuit over that launch.

Course Review

We review the entire course in this last module.

Internet Giants: Experimental

Done with the course? Wondering what comes next? Me, too, but this is where the experimental module comes in. A module to test other ways to interact and to explore ideas that might appear in future versions of the course.

Mandatory Continuing Legal Education Information

This course has been approved for continuing legal education credit in Illinois and this section describes the process for obtaining that credit.

Reading list

a. Required

1. Christopher T. Marsden. Network neutrality: From policy to law to regulation. Manchester University Press, 2017 – URL: <http://www.oopen.org/view?docId=622853.xhtml>
2. Stephanie L. Albertson. Open Internet for All: Free Speech and Network Neutrality. LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2012 – URL: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hselibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1057787&query=network+neutralityRoni>

b. Optional

1. Lynn C., Paul K. Who Needs Books? : Reading in the Digital Age. The University of Alberta Press, 2016 – URL: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hselibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4827163&query=digital+books+>

Grading system

Cumulative grade according to 10-point system includes all the for required assignments. The cumulative grade will be determined in advance of the final exam. It includes percentages for the various activities as follows:

Graded Quiz - 6%

Final exam – 58%

When converting the grade into a 10-point grading system to determine the final result, the following formula will be applied.

Final grade is formed as follows:

- Cumulative grade – 80%;
- Final exam – 20 %.

The final exam contains questions studied during online course.

Special Equipment and Software Support

Special equipment is not required.