

BLACKBOARD: I will be using blackboard.angelo.edu to post information about the course as the semester proceeds. Any modifications of the material contained in this outline will also be posted. Test and quiz scores will also be posted here.

¹The instructor reserves the right to modify this course outline at his discretion.

²**Angelo State University expects its students to maintain complete honesty and integrity in their academic pursuits. Students are responsible for understanding the Academic Honor Code, which is available on the web at: www.angelo.edu/forms/pdf/honorcode5.pdf**

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: Persons with disabilities which warrant academic accommodations must contact the Student Life Office, Room 112 University Center, in order to request such accommodations prior to their being implemented. You are encouraged to make this request early in the semester so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

ADDENDUM: Should any topic or class discussion cause a student discomfort please contact the professor immediately.

Technology and the Problem of Divided Attention

In recent years the saturation of cell phones, text messaging, and laptops, combined with the broad availability of wireless in classrooms, has produced something called *the problem of divided attention*. A March 25, 2008 article in the *New York Times* summarized recent studies of productivity in business settings. Researchers found that after responding to email or text messages, it took people *more than 15 minutes* to re- focus on the “serious mental tasks” they had been performing before the interruption. Other research has shown that when people attempt to perform two tasks at once (e.g., following what’s happening in class while checking text messages), the brain literally *cannot do it*. The brain has got to give up on one of the tasks in order to effectively accomplish the other. Hidden behind all the hype about multi-tasking, then, is this sad truth: *it makes you slower and dumber*. For this reason alone you should seek to avoid the problem of divided attention when you are in class. But there’s another reason, too: technology often causes us to lose our senses when it comes to norms of polite behavior and, as a result, **perfectly nice people become unbelievably rude and insulting**.

For both these reasons, then, **turn off your cellphones or set them on silent mode** when you come to class; it is rude for our activities to be interrupted by a ringing cellphone. Similarly, **text messaging will not be tolerated in class; any student found to be sending or checking text messages during class will be invited (quite publicly) to make a choice either to cease the texting or leave the classroom. Repeated violations of this policy will negatively affect your final grade.** You are welcome to bring your laptop to class and use it to take notes, access readings we’re discussing, and the like. You are *not* welcome to surf the web, check email, or otherwise perform non-class-related activities during class. Here’s my best advice: If you aren’t using it to perform a task specifically related to what we are doing in class at that very moment, *put it away.*²