

A Short Intro

...to The Course With The Longest Title

Kaido Kikkas
SPEAIT, Spring 2019

As they say on the Net: WTF...?

- In the Year One of the IT College (2000 AD), a course called “Risk and Safety Management” was offered to students
- Unfortunately, people did not like it at all. And the then-Rector (who is the Director now) decided to replace the course
- He found an obscure EU proposal for a course with a Really Weird Name, but actually sensible content
- He also found a guy who once did his PhD in parallel with him, and granted him pretty much total freedom to develop a new course in the vein of the EU proposal
- It seemed to work. The rest is history

Still, what's the point?

- Information technology does have influence far outside the technological realm. Sometimes it helps to think about it
- IT is not just boxes n'cables. IT is people as well
- Self-expression is typically not the *forte* of IT guys (akin to a German Shepherd: pretty intelligent, seems to understand most of the speech, can follow orders - but expression is limited to some mimics, barking and wagging the tail)
- In a bit more serious way – SPEAIT is a generic course on various issues in IT culture, plus the first training towards the future thesis (both in writing and presentation)

The topics will include

- Some philosophy (information society)
- Some history (IT, Internet)
- Some psychology (online communication)
- Some law (copyright, patents, licenses)
- Some culture (Internet, FLOSS, hackerdom)
- Some technology (Linux etc)
- Some security and privacy etc

Organization

- Everyone needs to
 - Prepare one (another one is optional) presentation set:
 - A paper (5-10 pages of content) on a topic freely chosen (within the overall course theme, which is really large) but agreed upon with the lecturer before starting)
 - A set of approx. 10 slides for the presentation
 - Oral presentation in a seminar (in the 2nd half-term)
 - Review another student's work
 - Pass the exam – but with enough activity during the term, it may become easy or be omitted altogether
 - Plus optionally
 - Write a course-themed blog (~10 posts)
 - Review some relevant books

- The grading system is a typical one for Estonia:
 - 50 or below - 0 (fail)
 - 51 - 60 - 1 (weak)
 - 61 - 70 - 2 (satisfactory)
 - 71 - 80 - 3 (good)
 - 81 - 90 - 4 (very good)
 - 91 or more - 5 (excellent)
- Presentation sets: first 25+10+15, second 20+5+10
- Review max 10
- Blog max 10
- Book reviews max 10 (5+5)
- Exam max 40 (=> dropping in without points at all does not work)
- Bonus points (1-3 per case) can be awarded for e.g. active participation in discussions)

Some mre regulations

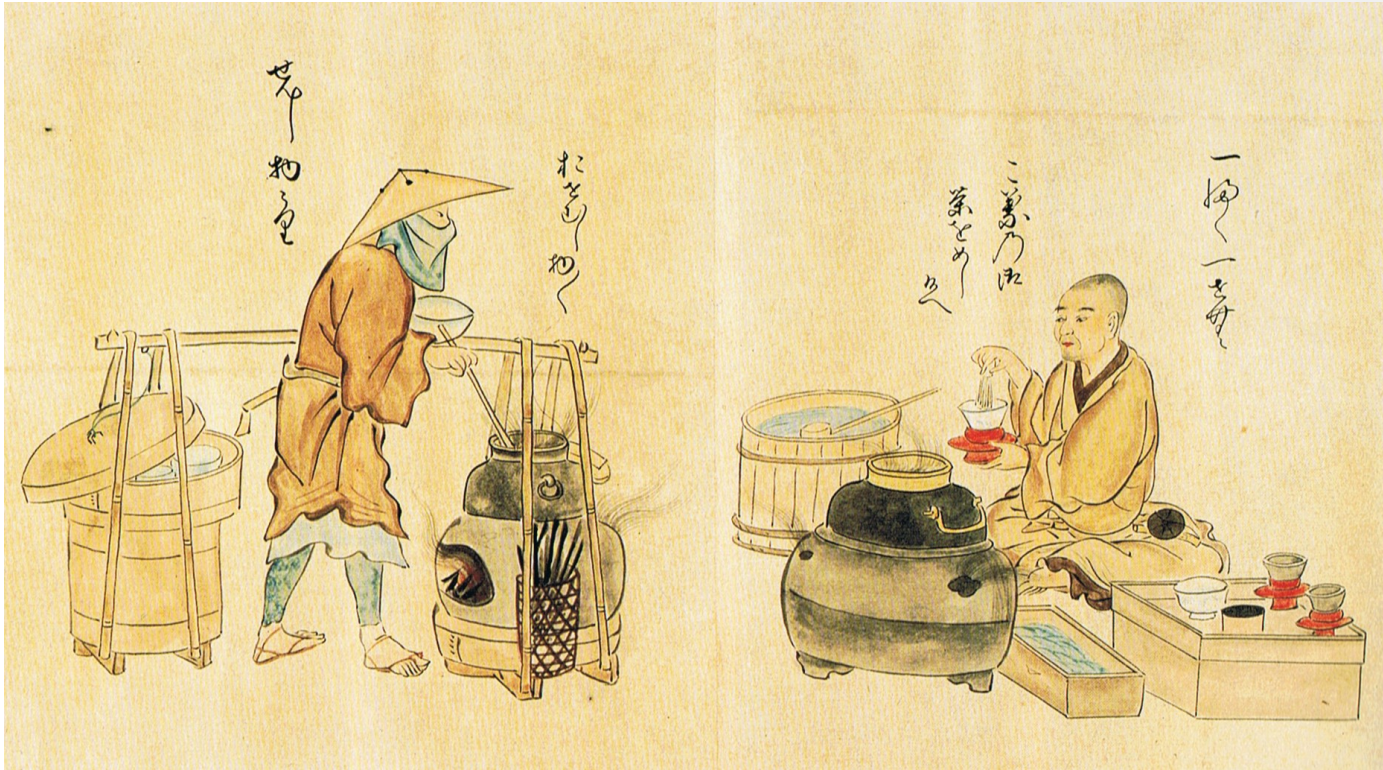
- The time for the first presentation must be agreed upon by Week 7 (March 11) – in person or by e-mail
- To do Presentation 2, the first one must be fully done (all three components)
- The paper must be presented before or with the presentation. Being late will result in losing points every week – 10%/30%/50%/100%
- Optionally, the papers can be written to the College wiki at <https://wiki.itcollege.ee> (previous agreement is recommended)

...

- In some years, there was a steep drop in attendance before the end of the term. Few people => boring seminars
- So now we have an attendance check – everyone should pass at the lecturer sometime during the seminar (in general, beginning or end), identify him/herself (student card or other) and get the attendance registered
- To pass the exam, at least 5 seminars out of 8 must be attended (so there is some room for maneuvering)

“Gaaah! Why the attendance check...?”

- There is the Oriental story about ten guys having a tea party...



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_tea_ceremony#/media/File:Kan%C5%8D_Osanobu_71_utaawase.jpg

One more note on attendance

- Formally, lecture attendance is optional
- All lectures are recorded, so it is possible to be retroactive
- Still, it makes sense to attend, as
 - you can ask questions and give feedback on-site
 - if you fall between two grades at the exam, seeing or not seeing someone in the class may tip the balance
 - you may actually learn something new

Homework: the paper

- Like your future thesis, it should contain both referred material and your own contribution
- The volume is 5-10 pages of content (+ title page etc)
- Proper language and looks
- **References!** Who has no experience so far, should start to get familiar with proper academic style
- A big recommendation: pick a topic that actually matters to you! The lecturer does not know your experience and interests (yet), so asking for a topic is a bit problematic – although asking for opinions and guidance is absolutely OK

Homework: slides and presentation

- For many, it may be the first public speech – but definitely not the last. So it is the place for practice
- The duration has been 15-20 minutes – but depending on the total number of presentations, we can extend it a bit
- A good idea is to rehearse – you could work in pairs and present to each other as a training measure
- Warning: all kinds of errors (from punctuation to questionable statements) will have worse effect on screen than in written text!

Homework: review

About one page, evaluating a peer's effort (at least the paper, but can also review the presentation)

- Both form and content (main points, terminology, language, speaking skills...)
- You are welcome to send the review to the author as well and ask questions, although it is not mandatory
- Everyone will choose the reviewed work by him/herself (the rules do not allow lecturers to forward papers to other people)

Optional: blogging

- Blogging, and writing in general, is a good way to improve both thinking and expression skills
- Can be useful for documenting a lengthy process (e.g. people have developed their thesis in blogs)
- Can be a good venue for discussion
- Helps to maintain mental discipline (no one likes comments in the style of “Dude, WTF?”)
- For this course, both dedicated new blogs and relevant writings in existing ones may be submitted
- Points will be given according to the work (a rule of thumb for relevant posts might be “one post, one point”)

Optional: book review(s)

- The point is to make people read some books that may prove useful later on
- About one page
- Contains: short data on the book, short overview, opinions, questions/arguments. Harsh (but argued) criticism is absolutely fine
- In principle, a more extensive book review can also be done as a paper

What to review

- The book should be relevant to the course or at least have some influence in tech culture in general. Examples include
 - *Hacker Ethic* by Pekka Himanen
 - *The Wealth of Networks* by Yochai Benkler
 - *Viral Spiral* by David Bollier
 - *Hackers: the Heroes of the Computer Revolution* by Steven Levy
 - *Neuromancer* by William Gibson
 - *Little Brother* by Cory Doctorow
- The list is by no means closed!

A word of warning

- An Estonian quality is to be slow to start and slow to stop... At first, nobody wants to speak, later everyone does
- Note: there will be some prep time for everyone, as seminars start on March 25
- One seminar can have 4-5 presentations at most. It means 8 times 5 or max 40 presentations per group in total – makes sense to book the first presentation ASAP!
- Do It Yourself. A proven case of plagiarism will definitely flunk the course, but can go worse (the College has been pretty angry in recent cases)

...

- Using ghostwriting is not a bright idea – you will have to master the content to present it anyway (and after all, who do you study for...?)
- In some years, some people did not present in their appointed time and the seminars ran dry. So now, if someone misses their presentation time without a valid reason, there will be no other chance during this term. You can always negotiate (and valid cases will get a new opportunity) – but preferably BEFORE the deadline.

Exam

- Two versions (you pick one):
 - Oral – 10 computer-picked short questions to answer on site. No communication or study aids (the traditional way)
 - Written – an about 2-page essay on one of the three computer-picked topics (i.e. you get three random ones, pick one of them). Study aids (books, articles, Internet) are permitted, but the work is mostly an opinion piece, showing YOUR take on the issue
- The points (up to 40) will be added to the existing score
- Every year so far, some folks get the max grade already before the exam. With the score > 50 , you can opt for getting the grade on points only, omitting the exam (e.g. “got 72 points, grade 3 is fine”)
- THEREFORE: who plans to fail the course, must be either
 - a) extraordinarily thick, or
 - b) supremely lazy

One more thing

- The particular course has a lot of facts, but also a notable share of opinions that may differ
- Opinions given by the lecturer are to be taken with a grain of salt – and they are not supposed to be parroted at the exam
- However, it is crucial for an IT person to form his/her opinion on an issue and be able to defend it with arguments (especially needed for exam essays). You will need it in the future – if bosses see a sheep, they will try to fleece it
- *U53 ur h34d, d00d!*

Materials and contacts

- The course home page is <https://akadeemia.kakupesa.net/SPEAIT> - it will also have all the lecture texts and slides (dual-licensed as GNU FDL and CC BY-SA)
- E-mail: kakk@kakupesa.net or kaido@itcollege.ee (the TTU/Taltech or Google ones work too)
- Skype: kakuonu (used rarely)
- Mobile: +372 50 64 464
- Location at the College: Room 524
- Course points will be published weekly at Kakupesa after the start of seminars (a password-protected table). Stay tuned!

Thanks