The Culture of Connectivity

Information age: inform·ation age n.
The period beginning in the last quarter of the 20th century, noted for the abundant creation, storage, consumption, and manipulation of information, especially via computers and the internet; characterized by the ability of individuals to transfer information freely and to have instant access to knowledge that would previously have been difficult or impossible to find. (American Heritage online dictionary)

Over the past 25 years, the explosion of information has brought rapid and unprecedented change to the global community. Access to information of every kind is available from far corners of the earth. Much of the change clearly benefits humankind: advanced communication links allow aid to flow immediately into areas ravaged by natural disasters, as individuals donate funds for disaster relief from their smart phones; school children and graduate students alike have unlimited educational resources at their fingertips; and online medical networks provide access to organ donations within minutes of a donor's death, to name just a few. But the information age also has its dark side as bloggers may spout bigotry and lies without consequence, sexual predators prey on children in unguarded chat rooms, thieves steal identities, and terrorists on different continents plot together in real time via the internet.

New questions have been raised in the Information Age that remain unanswered: How can intellectual property be protected in the virtual world? How can privacy be protected? What are the ethics of social networking? What are the consequences of less connected communities? Is texting replacing talking? How well do we know our next door neighbors? In what ways are we actively engaged with others? The impact of the Information Age permeates every academic discipline, political arena, business venture, artistic endeavor and scientific research field.

Throughout the year, some of the topics the University community will examine may include:

- The social divide between information “haves” and “have nots”
- The impact of social networking sites on human relationships and communication
- The potential for internet connection to enhance efforts in globalization
- The ethical dilemmas that arise from the internet and new technologies
- The rewards and risks of an even greater integration of new technologies into our everyday lives
- The new art forms that have developed directly in response to and because of new technologies
- The ways new technologies redefine etiquette and social responsibilities
- The role of the citizen/scholar the digital world

A year-long dialogue about the issues of the Information Age would be a robust expression of Missouri State University's public affairs mission.