Network Neutrality

This assignment takes the place of class on March 7, 2013. As such, it requires approximately 2 hours of work. On this assignment, you may work with a partner if you wish.

This assignment is due by 11:59pm, Saturday, March 9th.

I. Background

Extreme simplification: Net Neutrality is the concept that the internet should be content and application neutral. The idea is that an internet service provider (ISP), such as Comcast, should not be able to discriminate against or block content. For example, the ISP should not be able to block the New York Times but allow the Wall Street Journal to reach its customers. An ISP should also be application neutral — i.e. if I want to use Vonage instead of Comcast’s own Voice over IP (VoIP) application, I should be free to do so. This is a large topic and these selections are meant to address the issue from a non-technical perspective. Read the following sources to understand the basics of net neutrality:

1. Introduction to Net Neutrality: Tim Wu Network Neutrality FAQ. Read the main text column on the site.  
   http://timwu.org/network_neutrality.html
2. Moyers on America: Net Neutrality: PBS  
   http://www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/net/neutrality.html
3. Your textbook, Chapter 12 (Part 3).

II. Network neutrality Act of 2006 Debate

In 2006, the Network Neutrality Act of 2006 was debated in congress but never became law. The bill, introduced by Rep. Markey, legislated content and application neutrality. The debate over the Markey Bill and others highlights the different positions on net neutrality.

1. Watch — Daily Show with Jon Stewart clip (2006), Net Neutrality Act:  
2. Read — Adam Penenberg, Internet Freeloaders, Slate Magazine, Jan. 17, 2006:  
   http://www.slate.com/id/2134397/
3. Read — Rep. Rick Boucher (D-VA), Beware of a Two-Lane Internet, Bloomberg Businessweek, Mar. 7, 2006:  
   http://benton.org/node/1627
   and the opposing viewpoint:
   Tom Tauke, Say No to "Net Neutrality" Rules, Bloomberg Businessweek, Mar. 16, 2006:  
   http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/mar2006/tc20060316_119464.htm

III. BitTorrent Incident

Read — Marguerite Reardon, Comcast Denies Monkeying with BitTorrent Traffic, CNET, Aug. 21, 2007:  
Read — Peter Svensson, Comcast Blocks Some Internet Traffic, MSNBC.com, Oct. 19, 2007:
IV. BitTorrent Fallout

After Comcast was caught throttling BitTorrent, Comcast agreed to stop throttling and to disclose its network management practices. Additionally, the FCC proposed net-neutrality rules.

Read — Nate Anderson, FCC Proposes Network Neutrality Rules (and big exemptions), Ars Technica, Oct. 22, 2009:

V. Outcome of Comcast Case

Comcast challenged the FCC’s power to regulate the internet. Eventually, the court sided with Comcast and ruled against the FCC. There have been more legal challenges around the issue of whether or not the FCC has the regulatory power to govern the internet, and this decision did not decide whether net neutrality is a “right” that is due to the American people. Legalities aside, the fundamental issue of net neutrality remains.

VI: Assignment:

1. In approximately 500 words, summarize your position on the topic of net neutrality. You should think critically about both arguments for and against net neutrality and avoid blanket statements of agreement or disagreement.

2. Using Google or another search engine of your choice, see if you can find a formal position statement on the issue of net neutrality by a large corporation. You might choose: (for example only, you may of course choose another company of interest to you)
   - an ISP such as Comcast, Verizon, or AT&T
   - content provider, such as Google, Yahoo, or Amazon
   - a large computer services provider such as IBM, Microsoft, or Apple.

   Summarize the company's position and include a link to the position statement. Why do you think the company holds its position? In other words, think about how the business uses the Internet and why the company takes the position on net neutrality that it does.

VII: Submission:

Submit your write-up to BB for the assignment “Net Neutrality.” Be sure to include both your names (assuming you worked with a partner) as well as the honor code statement.