

Sociology 241
Fall 2015
TTh 3:55-5:15 PM
Office hours: T 2:00-3:30 PM, and by appointment

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TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

In big and small ways, we live through technology. Technology has been hailed as the way to address every social problem imaginable, from world hunger to bad breath. To be sure, technological innovation has not been an unqualified success – far from it, in fact. Yet, there is little doubt that we, as individuals and as a group, will continue to invest in technological solutions to tackle current ills and to create a better future. This course will explore the relationship between technology and society as humans endeavor to ensure a better tomorrow. Throughout, we will be concerned with the following key interrelated questions. First, how does technology shape our world, and, how do we in turn shape our technology? Second, what kind of future do we want? Or, differently put, how do we envision the relationship between technology and society? And third, what does our vision for the future imply for the sociotechnical choices and decisions we must make as we move forward into the twenty-first century?

Learning Goals

By the end of this course, students will be able to: (1) communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, about central concepts and theories in the sociology of technology; (2) gather, assess, analyze, and critically interpret scholarly and popular literature on the social and ethical dimensions of technological innovation across local and global contexts; and (3) develop their understanding and appreciation of key sociotechnical challenges of the twenty-first century.

Assessment Plan

This course will employ the established SAS rubrics to evaluate achievement of its learning goals.

COURSE LOGISTICS

Readings

We will be using the following textbook, available at the University Bookstore:

- Johnson, Deborah, G., and Jameson M. Wetmore. 2009. *Technology and Society: Building our Sociotechnical Future*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

All other reading material will be posted on the course's website on Sakai.

Requirements and Evaluation

You are expected to come in prepared to discuss, question, debate, and generally contribute to the production of knowledge and the overall class experience. To help you prepare, I will be posting lecture outlines on Sakai before class meets. Lecture time will be organized around an analysis of the assigned reading as well as a broader examination of themes and issues as they pertain to each session's topic for discussion

➤ Your grade for this course will be based on the following requirements:

(a) Midterm Exam (35%)

A closed-books, closed-notes exam, to be held in class on Monday, October 20th. It will include multiple choice questions, true/false statements, short answers, and a bluebook essay. A make-up exam will only be granted under extraordinary circumstances, and it will be harder than the original exam.

(b) Current Events Assignment (30%)

During the second week of classes, you will be assigned to a session/topic of discussion in the syllabus. Based on your assigned topic, you are to choose a news story that was reported in a reputable news source within the last six months and then write a 3-5 page paper analyzing the story with the help of the concepts and problematic we will have been using in the course. You will be expected to give a short presentation of your topic at the end of class on the day of your assigned session. The paper itself is due exactly a week following your session.

(c) Final Exam (35%)

This will again be a closed-books, closed-notes exam, to be held in class on Thursday, December 17th, 8:00-11:00 AM. It will include multiple choice questions, true/false statements, short answers, and a bluebook essay. The final exam will be non-cumulative, but you will still be expected to draw upon the main themes and theoretical perspectives running through the course.

➤ Final grades are absolutely non-negotiable and will be assigned according to the following scale:

A = 90-100; B+ = 85-89; B = 80-84; C+ = 75-79; C = 70-74; D = 60-69; F ≤ 59

➤ Cheating, plagiarism, or any other kind of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. It will result in a failing grade and a referral to the Dean of Students. The University Policy on Academic Integrity is at http://wp.rutgers.edu/courses/201/plagiarism_policy/

➤ Just as your grade depends on your adhering to certain basic rules of academic integrity, so, too, will it depend on your adhering to certain fundamentals of appropriate classroom behavior, as follows:

The Department of Sociology encourages the free exchange of ideas in a safe, supportive, and productive classroom environment. To facilitate such an environment, students and faculty must act with mutual respect and common courtesy. Thus, behavior that distracts students and faculty is not acceptable. Such behavior includes cell phone use, surfing the internet, checking email, text messaging, listening to music, reading newspapers, leaving and returning, leaving early without permission, discourteous remarks, and other behaviors specified by individual instructors. Courteous and lawful expression of disagreement with the ideas of the instructor or fellow students is, of course, permitted, and encouraged.

If a student engages in disruptive behavior, the instructor, following the University Code of Student Conduct, may direct the student to leave class for the remainder of the class period. Serious verbal assaults, harassment, or defamation of the instructor or other students can lead to university disciplinary proceedings. The University Code of Student Conduct is at <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~polcomp/judaff/ucsc.shtml>.

CLASS SCHEDULE*

*This schedule is subject to change. Changes, if necessary, will be announced well in advance during class and on the course website on Sakai.

September 1 Introductions

The Relationship between Technology and Society

September 3 Technological Determinism of Society

Reading: Heilbroner, "Do Machines Make History?," *Technology and Society* (henceforth, *T&S*): 97-106

September 8 LABOR DAY

September 10 Social Determinism of Technology

Reading: Cowan, "How The Refrigerator Got Its Hum," on Sakai

September 15 The Mutual Shaping of Technology and Society

Reading: Pinch and Bijker, "The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts," *T&S*: 107-140

- October 29** **Managing Uncertainty**
Reading: Pollock, “When Is a Work Around? Conflict and Negotiation in Computer Systems Development,” *T&S*: 423-440
Film: Meltdown at Three Mile Island (Part 1)
- November 3** **Technological Disasters**
Reading: Collins and Pinch, “The Naked Launch: Assigning Blame for the Challenger Explosion,” *T&S*: 407-422
Film: Meltdown at Three Mile Island (Part 2)
- Twenty-First Century Challenges**
- November 5** **Life on the Screen**
Reading: Turkle, “Identity in the Age of the Internet,” on Sakai
- November 10** **Staying Networked, Getting Involved**
Reading: Gladwell, “Small Change: Why the Revolution will not be Tweeted,” on Sakai
- November 12** **CLASS CANCELED**
- November 17** **Civilizing the Global Economy**
Reading: Chapman, “Shaping Technology for the 'Good Life': The Technological Imperative versus the Social Imperative,” *T&S*: 445-458
- November 19** **The Transformation of the Workplace**
Reading: Wajcman, “The Feminization of Work in the Information Age,” *T&S*: 459-474
- November 24** **Global Inequality**
Reading: Invernizzi and Foladori, “Nanotechnology and the Developing World: Will Nanotechnology Overcome Poverty or Widen Disparities?,” *T&S*: 485-497
- November 26** **- THANKSGIVING BREAK -**
- December 1** **Sustainable Consumption**
Reading: Elliott, “Energy, Society, and Environment: Technology for a Sustainable Future,” *T&S*: 475-484
- December 3** **Big Brother is Watching?!**
Reading: Monahan, “Questioning Surveillance and Security,” *T&S*: 537-564

December 8 **Reproductive Rights and Population Control**
Reading: Welin, “Reproductive Ectogenesis: The Third Era of Human
Reproduction and Some Moral Consequences,” *T&S*: 51-62

December 10 **A Brave New World**
Reading: Bess, “Icarus 2.0: A Historian's Perspective on Human
Biological Enhancement,” *T&S*: 599-61

Wrap-up and review session

December 17
8:00-11:00AM

– FINAL EXAM –