

Technology and Politics

PSCI 280 T/TH 12:00PM-1:50AM / One Drexel Plaza Room 139

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Office hours: T/TH 2-4PM

Course Description:

How do technologies shape politics, and how do human interests produce particular kinds of technologies? This course will examine the life of many different kinds of technologies through the lens of human use, institutional practice, economic interests, policy, and social movements. Case studies will include the data rescue movement, smartphones and surveillance culture, Hurricane Harvey and infrastructure, inclusive/barrier-free design, and the ethics of human enhancement, among other topics. A core part of the course will be learning and developing skill in social science research through fun micro-assignments.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will:

1. Develop an understanding of the political and social factors central to the production, governance, and use of technologies.
2. Build critical reading and writing skills, including an ability to analyze media sources.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the politics of technologies through a variety of course assignments.
4. Refine research skills through micro-assignments, including project proposals, presentations, group activities, and data analysis.

Course Texts:

All required and recommended readings can be found on the Blackboard course website. Required readings must be completed prior to the assigned class session. Be prepared to draw on reading assignments in various class activities.

Point breakdowns for grades: 98-100 (A+); 93-97 (A); 90-92 (A-); 88-89 (B+); 83-87 (B); 80-82 (B-); 78-79 (C+); 73-77 (C); 70-72 (C-); 68-69 (D+); 63-67 (D); 60-62 (D-) Below 60 (F)

Grading:

Reading Responses	20%
Class Participation	20%
Media Share	10%
Midterm	15%
Final Project	35%

Attendance is required. You are allowed one unexcused absence. Subsequent absences will result in a five-point grade reduction per absence. If you show up "on time" and ready to learn for every class this term, three points will be added to your overall course grade.

Course Assignments and Evaluation

Reading Responses (20 responses x 1 point per response = 20 points, 20%)

Reading responses are due before every in-class meeting. Before each class (by 10:00AM on the day of class) post a brief response to the reading (.5 point) and a question that you have about the reading that you would like to discuss in class (worth .5 point); we will discuss your responses and your questions in class. The response should be at least 100 words, but can be very informal thoughts. Reading responses should be probing and generative; do not summarize the reading. Reflect and ask questions in your responses. Point to how the reading can be useful for something we are trying to learn as a class, as well as how it connects to other topics we're learning about. Think of the reading responses as a quick mechanism to help you get your thoughts down on paper and jumpstart class discussion. Each response is worth two points towards your "Reading Response" grade.

Active Class Participation (20 points, 20%)

Attendance is required, being on time is imperative and active participation is expected. Participation is graded for each class session. Please see the grading rubric for participation. Disruptive class conduct will result in points off your overall course grade. Smartphone use is not allowed during class; points will be deducted from your course grade for non-course related use of digital technology between 12:00-1:50PM. Please arrive and be in your seat ready to start at 12:00PM. We will start promptly at 12:00PM.

Active class participation means listening, being attentive to speakers and engaging peers, guest speakers, and myself; this also means helping to create a space where everyone in the room can participate. Do not dominate class discussion. Laptops should be brought to class and we will use them regularly, but laptops should only be used for course activities. It is very obvious and distracting when students are using their laptops for non-course related activities. If it feels like you or others are being distracted by your laptop, you will lose a point for the day.

Video Share (5 points per share x2, 10 points, 10%)

Find a video that profiles a technology, technology policy, or debate over technology. The videos should be between 3-10 minutes long, although longer videos will be considered if you contact me in advance. You will share two technology videos with the class this term. Videos need to be posted in the Blackboard Discussion Forum by 2PM the day before the class during which you'll share the story. In your Blackboard post you will respond to three questions: (1) What kind of values are supported and advanced by the technology? (2) Who benefits from the technology and who is put at risk (or left out) by the technology? (3) What resources, expertise, or policies does the technology depend on? You will receive a point for answering each of these questions, and two points for leading class discussion after screening the video the next day.

Midterm Exam (15 points, 15%)

The midterm exam will be given in class on Thursday November 2nd. The exam will include short essay questions and one long essay question. The exam will be closed book and will include ALL readings, lectures, and media material covered between September 26th and October 31st.

Final Project (35 points, 35%)

Over the course of the term you will work on a final project based on your interests – in technology, research methods, and skill building. Each week we will undertake short assignments in class to help move you forward on your project, very much like a workshop. In addition to these in-class workshops, there will also be four mini-assignments that are incorporated into the final project grade.

- Project proposal, due Tuesday 10/17 = 5 points
- Data submission, due Thursday 11/9 = 5 points
- Mini-presentations, in class 11/14 and 11/16 = 5 points
- Argument architecture, due Tuesday 11/21 = 5 points
- Final projects, due Friday 12/8 = 15 points

Academic Policies

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty of the highest order is expected. It is not acceptable to submit work done for another class in this class, though it is acceptable to build on previous work. Talk to us if you have questions about this. Nor, of course, is it acceptable to submit work done by someone else as your own. Citations must be included for both indirect and direct quotation, providing clear documentation of sources. Special care must be taken to properly cite digital resources. Please see the Student Handbook for complete guidelines on academic honesty. Here is a useful review of plagiarism:

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/plagiarism.html>. *If we are able to confirm plagiarism or another form of academic dishonesty on any assignment in this course, you are likely to fail the entire course.* As Drexel students, you are responsible for reading and adhering to Drexel's Code of Conduct: http://www.drexel.edu/studentlife/community_standards/studentHandbook/general_information/code_of_conduct/

Attendance

Attendance is required. Unexcused absences will result in a five-point grade reduction for each unexcused absence. Documentation for excused absences should be obtained from the Student Experience Office, 4th floor Academy Hall, x8022, se@rpi.edu.

Grade Appeals

You may appeal a grade through a written statement describing the grounds on which a change of grade should be considered appropriate. Grade appeals must be submitted within one-week of receiving the

grade. Before initiating a formal appeal, feel free to talk to us. Please wait a minimum of 24-hours after receiving the grade before contacting us about a grade appeal. If you decide to pursue an appeal, the written statement must reference one of the three criteria identified in the *Student Handbook* as grounds for appeal. According to the *Handbook*, the "allegation must be based upon a violation of the course syllabus, a violation of Institute policy, or a violation of the student's rights under the Student Bill of Rights."

Course Drop Policy

See http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/course_drop.asp

Course Change Policy

As the instructors, we have the right to modify this syllabus at any time. We will solicit feedback from the class before any changes are made, and students will be notified in a timely manner both in class and via Drexel email.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office of Disability Resources should inform us of their needs as soon as possible so that we can accommodate any necessary modifications. The Office of Disability Resources is located at 3201 Arch Street, Suite 210. For more information, see <http://www.drexel.edu/oed/disabilityResources/>

Quarter Schedule

[W1] 9/26 - What is technology?

T: Intro to course and learning community

TH: "Technologies as Forms of Life" from *The Whale and the Reactor* by Langdon Winner

[W2] 10/3 - What is technology, and how do we govern it?

T: "Do Artifacts have Politics" from *The Whale and the Reactor* by Langdon Winner

TH: Introduction and Chapter One to *Pressed for Time* by Judy Wajcman

[W3] 10/10 - Governing technology?

T: Chapters 2-3 from *Pressed for Time* by Judy Wajcman

TH: Chapters 4-5 from *Pressed for Time* by Judy Wajcman

[W4] 10/17 and 10/19 – Social Ordering & Information Systems

T: “Introduction” to *Sorting Things Out* by Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star
Project Proposal Due

TH: Self-selected chapter from *Sorting Things Out* by Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star

[W5] 10/24 and 10/26 – Infrastructures & Slow Disasters

T: “Learning from Disaster?” by Scott Knowles and “A Tale of Two Sandys” by the Superstorm Research Lab.

TH: Expertise in the Grid, <http://limn.it/expertise-in-the-grid/>

[W6] 10/31 and 11/2 – Algorithm Design

T: Introduction and Chapter 1 in *Weapons of Math Destruction* by Cathy O’Neil

Th: Chapter 2-3 in *Weapons of Math Destruction* by Cathy O’Neil

[W7] 11/7 and 11/9 – Algorithm Justice

T: Chapters 4-6 in *Weapons of Math Destruction* by Cathy O’Neil

Th: Chapters 7-10 in *Weapons of Math Destruction* by Cathy O’Neil

[W8] 11/14 and 11/16 - Cyborgs, Enhancement, & Ethics

T: Pages 1-50 from *Modest Witness@Second Millenium* by Donna Haraway

Th: Chapter 2-3 from *Modest Witness@Second Millenium* by Donna Haraway

[W9] 11/21 – Design Dilemmas

T: “Nanotechnology in the City: Sustainability Challenges and Anticipatory Governance” by Arnim Wiek, David Guston, Sander van der Leeuw, Cynthia Selin and Philip Shapira

[W10] 11/28 and 11/30 – The Lolz

T: Introduction and Chapter 1 from *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy* by Gabriella Coleman

Th: Chapters 2-3 from *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy* by Gabriella Coleman

[W11] 12/5 and 12/7 – Atomic Futures

T: Chapters One from *The Nuclear Borderlands* by Joseph Masco

Th: Chapters Eight and Epilogue from *The Nuclear Borderlands* by Joseph Masco