

TECHNOLOGY & SOCIETY

SC 046.01 or CS 266.01

Fall Semester, 2008

Tuesday & Thursday, 4:30 – 5:45

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Course Description & Objectives

History offers and explains for us the course of social transformations. Today, the speed of global technological change is transforming contemporary society. In an accelerated global culture driven forward by dramatic developments in technology, no aspect of culture and society is left undisturbed. In national elections we talk of electronic voting. Digital technologies enable individuals to locate one another at any given time, raising new questions of ethics, privacy and social responsibility. Employment in the global economy is changing rapidly, having a major impact on how individuals prepare for employment, structure their daily lives, and think about the future.

This course is designed to enable students to focus on the experiential aspects of where technology intersects with their own lives. We will explore ways in which technology and technological change can be understood in an historical context. Through readings and class discussion, we will explore social, cultural, and political issues as they pertain to technological transformations. In the second half of the course, our explorations will be applied through analysis of a specific sociological study and individual/group projects.

Objectives for this course include:

1. To develop an appreciation for biography as the informative starting point of sociological reflection and analysis.
2. To develop a sociological perspective on technological change through readings, lectures, reflection, discussion, and course assignments.
3. To examine a technology and the respective social impact.

As a core course, this class will include discussions of sociology as a science and some of the original questions that faced founding sociologists. From the readings, in-class videos and class discussions we will address issues of multiculturalism as they relate to the use and construction of our understanding of various technologies and how issues of multiculturalism relate to technological develop and change. The books, articles, and essays represent a variety of sociological perspectives and research methodologies, the procedures followed by sociologists conducting research projects. We will examine the ways in which theoretical perspectives (e.g. Marxism, Symbolic Interaction) and methodologies (e.g. interviews, surveys, participant observation) shape the content and conclusion of the readings and research projects in general. In the second half of the course, our discussion of America Calling will provide an opportunity to consider both theory and methods in the context of a specific research study.

Throughout the course you will craft a number of papers in which you are encouraged to use your 'sociological imagination' to trace the connections between your own environment and the sociological issues which we address. In your paper, you will also be encouraged to develop skills of

critical sociological analysis in order to understand your own position as an active individual within the broader confines of the social order. You will also be challenged to critically examine your own position within our hierarchical society, to assess your past experiences in relation to your present attitudes and behavior, and to contemplate the kind of person you want to be in the future.

Required Texts

Society & Technological Change, 5th ed. Rudi Volti, Worth Publishers: New York (2006)

A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age, Daniel H. Pink, Riverhead Books: New York (2005)

Better Off: Flipping the Switch on Technology, Eric Brende, Harper Collins Publishers: New York (2004)

And additional assigned readings are listed in the syllabus and posted online.

The Rise of the Network Society, pp. 1-76

The Sociology of Georg Simmel, pp. 40-84

Sociability,

Modified Sociability, pp. 1-27

A Word on Course Readings

You are strongly encouraged to keep up with course readings. The quality of class discussion and your experience in the course will depend highly on your having made a serious attempt to get through the core readings. Class discussion will draw upon reading material in an integrated fashion along with other material, as opposed to simply being reviewed and discussed. Note, however, that whether or not reading material is discussed in class, you are responsible for all content.

Course Requirements & Grading

1. Class discussion, and its preparation, is an essential part of class work. Since we learn from our peers, and important insights emerge in our collective thinking/discussion, it is important that this shared work be valued. As such, class participation includes **attendance**, participating in **class discussions**, participating in **class exercises**, and also any **quizzes** or other **assignments**. Participation reflects 25% of the course grade.
2. Three short essays (4-5 pages each). The first essay is a technology autobiography. You are expected to think about your relationship with technology by focusing on one specific technology. The task is to think creatively about some form of technology and then sociologically analyze your relationship with it. The first paper is due on **September 25**. The second and third essays are directly related to issues raised in class and the readings. The due dates are **October 23** and **November 20** respectively. All paper submissions should be made through the course site. Each essay reflects 10% of the course grade (30% in total).
3. Each member of the class will develop (in small groups) a project that uses the sociological themes in the course to analyze a specific technology, evaluating the social context of a technology. Project topics and a brief work plan are due on **October 7**. Please note that topics should not be a direct duplication of any paper topic. While all projects should have

some type of written submission (a brief one or two page summary), do not feel constrained by the written word. Writing and presentation in the context of other media such as digital imaging, electronic art, video production, web technologies, etc., are encouraged. Project submissions (summaries and copies of presentations) are due when they are presented to the class. Class projects reflect 25% of the course grade.

4. A final take-home examination consisting of several essay-type questions related to the themes of the course will be handed out on the last day of class (May 3) and is due by 5:00 pm on **Dec. 11**. The final examination reflects 20% of the course grade.

Additional Course Policies

5. I draw your attention to Boston College's policy on **academic integrity** - <http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy.html#integrity>. Plagiarism is a serious offense and is not tolerated in this course or elsewhere on campus. In this course you are encouraged to use a variety of source types and use material creatively, and are also free to use Internet sources. However, you are also expected to adhere to University standards of academic integrity and to give proper credit to your sources.
 6. **Policy on late papers** ... there are no late papers in this class. Please plan your time accordingly.
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Class Schedule

Sept. 2, 4, 9, 11 – Technology & Society

Defining technology in a sociological perspective and an historical perspective

Readings: Society & Technological Change, Ch. 1-5; The Rise of the Network Society, pp. 1-76 (available in the course site)

Sept. 16/18/23 – TechnoStress & Cultural Transformation: Life in a Digital World

Readings: Society & Technological Change, Ch. 6-7; 13-14

Sept. 25/30, Oct. 2/7 – The Transformation of Work

Readings: Society & Technological Change, Ch. 8-10

Assignments Due:

1st Essay – Technological Autobiography (9/25)

Project topic, team, and brief work plan (10/7)

Oct. 9/14/16 – Digitally Shaping the Political Landscape

Readings: Society & Technological Change, Ch. 11-12; 15-17; A Whole New Mind, Daniel Pink, 2005

Oct. 21/23/28/30 – A Study in Communication Technology: The Telephone

~ Sociability in relation to communication technologies ~

Readings: The Sociology of Georg Simmel, “Sociability: An Example of Pure, or Formal, Sociology,” pp. 40-84 (3/25)

Assignment Due

2nd Essay – Technology & Work/A Whole New Mind (Oct. 23)

Oct. 30, Nov. 4/6 – A Study in Communication Technology: The Internet; Discussion of project format and expectations.

Readings: Sociability; Modified Sociability, pp 1-27.

Better Off: Flipping the Switch on Technology, Eric Brende. 2004

No class on Nov. 11 & 13

Nov. 18/20/25/Dec. 2 – Project presentations, Hand-out and discussion of final exam

Assignments Due

3rd Essay (Nov. 20)

Project Presentations

(*****Note**, class times on Nov. 18 & 20 will run longer than 5:45, and class may be held in a different location.)

Dec. 11 – Final Exam Due