Technology and Society

SC04601
Gasson 309
September - December, 2013
Monday, Wednesday, Friday - 8:00am - 8:50am

Instructor: Mr. Alexander Hernandez
Office: McGuinn 410A
E-mail: alexander.hernandez@bc.edu
Office Hours: Mondays: 9:00am – 9:50am, Wednesdays: 9:00am – 9:50am or by appointment

Course Description

The goal of this course is to understand the importance of technology and technological change in our social world. Through the use of sociological concepts and the sociological imagination, students will be asked to consider how social factors (e.g. race, class and gender) impact the development and presentation of technology. With the help of lecture, discussion, and hands-on work with technological applications, we will engage with technology in a way that should make you better understand how technology influences our everyday lives.

Course Objectives

- Examine the social impact of technology both historically and in contemporary society
- Understand the various ways that stereotypes and biases affect our perception and use of technology
- Identify the inventors and innovators who have helped bring about technological change
- Consider the public policy implications of technological innovation
- Learn the usefulness of a variety of technological applications

Perennial Questions – In this course we will examine several vital questions, including:

- What makes society work?
- How does society evolve?
- What is truth within our society? Other societies?

Cultural Diversity – In addition this course will examine how race and ethnicity is dealt with in American society and other cultures.
Historical Perspective - In order to understand the field of sociology, a history of our paradigms must be examined as well. We will discuss how American ideals have been shaped by social, cultural and technological change since our nation’s founding. For example, we will discuss how slavery in this country has affected race relations in our modern world.

Methodology - The way in which sociology as a discipline and sociologists as social scientists are able to report on and study societies must be examined as well as the findings themselves. As part of becoming a critical thinker and an examiner of everyday life, this course will challenge all approaches to obtaining sociological “knowledge” in order for students to better understand our society and other societies. In order to do this we will be considering the various techniques employed by sociologists including interviews, surveys and ethnography. We will weigh the positives and negatives of each method in order to better understand the science of sociology.

Creating a Personal Philosophy – This course, in its attempt to help students think more critically about everyday life, our social structures, and social change, will help students uncover what their own, unique approach to life is. More specifically, each student will, in effect, create his or her own sociological perspective. In order to achieve this end, students will be presented with a wealth of information on some of our most important social issues (e.g. racism, sexism, etc.). This information will come in many forms that are familiar to students including books, magazine articles, movies, music and of course prepared lecture. From this they are expected to cultivate their own viewpoint on the issues and then present them in the form of class discussion, homework assignments, reaction papers and exams.

Course Requirements/Grading:

All students must bring a laptop or tablet to class every day.

Class Attendance is required. You should attend every class unless you are ill or faced with an emergency. Many in-class activities cannot be made up and papers must be turned in on time. It is extremely difficult to understand sociological topics without being able to relate them to your own life and experiences. You can get a lot of information from the readings, but without coming to class you risk missing important discussions, and we will miss your input.

BE WARNED: The class lectures are meant to complement the readings, but they will not repeat the readings. New, original information will be available in every class session. You can get a lot of information from the readings, but without coming to class you risk missing important discussions. If you miss a class activity or if you do not participate, you will lose points from your final point total.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS

Each week I will post a short written assignment on Blackboard. The purpose of these assignments are to make sure that you are engaging with the class material outside of the classroom. These assignments
can take many forms and shapes but for the most part they will simply require that you respond to a
general question. Each assignment is generally 300 words minimum and is due on Friday night by
8:00pm, but this can change based on the assignment so make sure to check each week.
  - Please submit your assignments in either .doc or .pdf format

It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that they submit their paper properly and on time. I do not accept late papers. The only exception is if there is a legitimate excuse such as a death in the family or medical emergency. However, even in this case it is the student’s responsibility to provide proof as to why they missed the assignment. As always, remember “Murphy’s Law” (see addendum for more information). These assignments will be worth 20% of your grade.

REACTION PAPER – **DUE October 18th by 8:00pm on Blackboard**

For this assignment, you are to read and review a news article. This paper will be graded on content, clarity, creativity, and relevance to the course. Your topic will be given to you at least two weeks before the paper is due. A prompt will be presented when the topics are given out. These are due on the specified due date and cannot be made up or turned in late. This paper will be worth 20% of your grade.

HANDS-ON PROJECT PAPER – **DUE December 6th by 8:00pm on Blackboard**

For this assignment, you are to gain some hands-on experience with some form of technology such as creating a YouTube video or learning basic computer programming. You will then write about your experience and discuss/describe the value of this skill in our modern world. I will provide a detailed prompt and an example of what this paper should look like when we discuss it in class. These are due on the specified due date and cannot be made up or turned in late. This assignment will be worth 20% of your grade.

EXAMS – MIDTERM EXAM: **October 23rd** & FINAL EXAM: **December 16th**

We will have two exams throughout the course. Each exam will be worth 20% of your grade. I reserve the right to use a variety of question types including but not limited to multiple choice, True/False, short answer and essay questions. Students will be eligible to take a make-up exam only at the instructor’s discretion with proper documentation.

POP EXTRA CREDIT/QUIZZES

I reserve the right to give pop extra credit/quizzes at any time throughout the semester.

There are four ways to earn extra credit: (1) Class participation that demonstrates deep insight and/or understanding of our social world, (2) through the submission of articles, clips, music or pictures that directly relate to the course (along with 3-5 sentences for each that demonstrates why the item is sociologically relevant), (3) through the completion of an extra credit assignment which can found
under the “Extra Credit” tab on Blackboard, and (4) the completion of a 4,000 word essay (**you must discuss this option with the instructor before starting no later than November 1**).

**GRADE BREAKDOWN**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage of Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Assignments</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reaction Paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hands-On Project Paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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**POINT CONVERSION SCALE**

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<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<td>97-100</td>
<td>A+</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-96</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-86</td>
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**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy:**

I take cheating and plagiarism **VERY** seriously. I have included an excerpt of the university’s academic integrity policy in the addendum. It is your responsibility to know what the policy is and to ask questions if anything is unclear. **When in doubt, ask!**

**Other Important Notes:**

✧ For other important dates and information, such as withdrawal, audit, incomplete, and repeat course policies, refer to your college handbook.

✧ **Instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus and class schedule if necessary. If this is the case, an announcement will be made in class.**

**Course Readings**

Readings will be required throughout the course and they will be available online through Blackboard. The readings will be posted at least one week before they are to be discussed in class. I will be posting announcements as well as sending out emails to inform students when a reading has been posted but it is the student’s responsibility to listen for any classroom announcements regarding the readings.
Course Schedule

Wednesday, September 4
- Introduction to Course
- Review of Syllabus

Friday, September 6
- Overview of Class and Topics

Sociological Foundation

Monday, September 9
- A Billion Wicked Thoughts by Ogas and Gaddam - 27

Wednesday, September 11
- Why the First Laptop Had Such a Hard Time Catching On by Alexis Madrigal - 3
- Feminist Technology by Linda Layne - 25

Friday, September 13
- Digital Divide Research, Achievements, and Shortcomings by Jan A.G.M. van Dijk - 15
- Diamandis and Kotler – Abundance - 17

History

Monday, September 16
- Video – Johannes Gutenberg and the Printing Press – 15 minutes

Wednesday, September 18
- Why Nikola Tesla Was the Greatest Geek Who Ever Lived by The Oatmeal – 1
- Video – The History of Electricity – 22 minutes
Friday, September 20

- What is a Photograph? By Graham Clarke - 16
- Stuff, Reality, and Dreams by Robert Friedel - 17

Monday, September 23

- Televisionary by Evan Schwartz - 7

Wednesday, September 25

- Creation Myth by Malcolm Gladwell – 7
- Tales of the Old Wild Web by Michael Socolow - 5

Theory

Friday, September 27

- The Net Generation Comes of Age by Don Tapscott - 29

Monday, September 30

- The Big Switch by Nicholas Carr - 33

Wednesday, October 2

- Taming the Big Data Tidal Wave by Bill Franks - 26
- Who am I? by Laura June – 5

Friday, October 4

- Everything is Miscellaneous by David Weinberger - 38
- The Overly Documented Life by A.J. Jacobs – 11

Monday, October 7

- Why Google Isn’t Making Us Stupid...Or Smart by Chad Wellmon - 15

Wednesday, October 9
- **Video** – The Filter Bubble – 24 minutes

**Friday, October 11**

- You'll Never Learn! By Annie Paul – 5

**Monday, October 14**

***No Class – Columbus Day***

**Wednesday, October 16**

- Too Big to Know by David Weinberger - 26
- The Information Diet by Clay Johnson - 31

**Friday, October 18**

- Smart Homes: Our Next Digital Privacy Nightmare by John Titlow - 5

***CONNECTION PAPER DUE BY 8:00PM TONIGHT!***

**Monday, October 21**

**Wednesday, October 23**

***Midterm Exam***

**Media**

**Friday, October 25**

- **Video** (or Transcript) – Susan Crawford on Why U.S. Internet Access is Slow, Costly, and Unfair by Bill Moyers – 25 minutes long (or 15 pages)
- **Video** – This Film is Not Yet Rated – 1 hour long
Monday, October 28
- A Brief History of Anonymity by Cole Stryker - 15
- Small Change by Malcolm Gladwell - 7

Wednesday, October 30
- Seduced by ‘Perfect’ Pitch: how Auto-Tune conquered pop music by Lessley Anderson - 5

Friday, November 1
- Reality is Broken by Jane McGonigal - 31

Monday, November 4
- Video – TPB-AFK – 82 minutes
- Lies, Damned Lies, and Piracy by Paul Tassi - 4

Wednesday, November 6
- Three Myths about Copyright - 9
- Everything Wrong with Digital Copyright (And How to Fix It) by Kyle Wagner - 3

Crime and Deviance

Friday, November 8
- Why Privacy Matters Even if You Have ‘Nothing to Hide’ by Daniel Solove - 10
- Anonymous 101: Introduction to the Lulz by Quinn Norton - 9

Monday, November 11
- How I Became A Password Cracker by Nate Anderson - 3
- Anatomy of a Hack by Dan Goodin - 3
- Does Cybercrime Really Cost $1 Trillion? By Maass and Rajagopalan - 10
**Wednesday, November 13**

- They’re Watching: Why city-wide surveillance failed to stop the Boston Bombing – 5
- Drones Over US soil: The calm before the swarm – 5

**Education**

**Friday, November 15**

- The Net Generation As Learners by Don Tapscott – 28

**Monday, November 18**

- Why Online Education Won’t Replace College…Yet by David Youngberg - 2
- Hogwarts for Hackers by Klint Finley – 3
- Programming is the New Literacy by Marc Prensky – 5

**Work, Consumption and Relationships**

**Wednesday, November 20**

- Race Against the Machines by Erik Brynjolfsson – 26
- Better Than Human: Why Robots Will – And Must – Take Our Jobs by Kevin Kelly - 6

**Friday, November 22**

- The Net Generation as Consumers by Don Tapscott - 33
- What is Bitcoin and How Does it Work? – 3
- Let’s Cut Through the Bitcoin Hype: A Hacker-Entrepreneur’s Take by Dan Kaminsky - 6

**Monday, November 25**

- Searching for a Mate by Resenfield and Thomas - 26
Wednesday, 27 – Friday, 29

***Thanksgiving Break! - No Class***

Monday, December 2
- A Million First Dates by Dan Slater – 11
- Love and Sex With Robots by David Levy - 37

Tech Miscellaneous

Wednesday, December 4
- The Need to Bleed? by Aengst and Layne - 24

Friday, December 6
- The Most Human Human by Brian Christian – 38
- Video – Robot Revolution – 40 minutes
- Is Human Enhancement Cheating? By Brad Allenby - 2

HANDS-ON PROJECT PAPER DUE BY 8:00PM TONIGHT***

Monday, December 9
- Moral Machines by Gary Marcus - 2

Wednesday, December 11
- The Taste of Tomorrow by Josh Schonwald – 15
- Welcome to the Programmable World by Bill Wasik - 5

***Final Exam – December 16th @ 9:00am***
Addendum to Syllabus

Email: Please DO NOT email me for the following reasons:

- You are not going to attend class, but you just wanted to let me know.
- You missed a class and wanted to find out if “we did anything important.”

These types of emails will not be answered so just don’t send them!

Please DO email for the following reasons:

- You want to talk to me but you can’t attend the normal office hours and you want to make an appointment.
- You have a simple question that can be answered in 1-2 sentences. I will not answer long, complex questions through email. You should come see me during my office hours if you want to chat about any of those kinds of questions.
- You have an EMERGENCY situation and need immediate attention (from an instructor... for other types of emergencies, please dial 911).

Also, please be sure to be very specific in your email. “I want to stop by to talk about my paper grade” doesn’t help me as much as “I want to stop by on Tuesday to talk about the grade I got on Paper #2.”

SOME ADVICE: Come to office hours if you have a problem. It is much easier to solve a problem when I can work with you face to face.

Murphy’s Law: Anything that can go wrong will go wrong.

You need to protect yourself against the craziness of life. Back up your work (I recommend www.dropbox.com). Begin your papers early just in case your computer explodes (I have seen it happen!) or a terrible tragedy occurs. Make friends with your peers so if you have to miss class you will still have the notes. You never know what will come up so don’t leave your grade up to chance!

Class Notes: All of my class materials including PowerPoint’s and lectures are my personal property and are not to be distributed without my permission. In addition, my lectures are NOT to be recorded.

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating and Plagiarism

“Plagiarism, or literary theft, is defined as appropriating the literary composition of another person, including parts, passages, or language of the writing, and passing off the appropriate material as one’s own. Plagiarism is the failure to give proper credit or citation to one’s sources of information. It includes the failure to use conventional methods of documentation for material quoted or paraphrased. Additionally, plagiarism includes allowing someone else to compose or rewrite an assignment for a student.” Please see the college handbook for more information. You can also use that as a reference.
during the course. If cheating or plagiarism is discovered the student will receive a grade of zero (0) for the assignment. Further disciplinary action will be taken upon a second incidence including a grade of “FF” for the course.

Students with Disabilities:

If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, dugganka@bc.edu, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD, or Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, paulette.durrett@bc.edu, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities, including temporary disabilities. Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.