COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OVERVIEW

This course will introduce undergraduates to a range of theories and approaches to the study of technology so as to provide various perspectives on the co-construction of society and technology. It recognizes that technology is not merely a set of material artifacts with a straightforward impact on our world but represents a complex set of practices, norms, and values that both reflect and shape our convictions about personhood, time, class, gender, space, labor, and politics. Further, because technology often depends on the broader socio-economic, legal, and political context from which it is invented, adopted and stabilized, ample attention will be placed on these contextual conditions and the hidden assumptions that drive its popular understandings.

The course primarily concentrates on communication technologies of the last 150 years (telegraph, telephone, computers, Internet) and is roughly chronological, starting with the telegraph and ending with our digital present. However, we will consider a number of other technologies (railway, reproductive technologies, farming technologies) that will help sharpen our theoretical frameworks and will provide a comparative touchstone to discuss the intersection of communication technologies with other technological systems as well as what may be unique about communication technologies.

COURSE GOALS

The goal is not to arrive at the “right” theory of technology, but have students come away with a firm understanding of multiple methods and approaches by which to assess technology in various social and political terms. As such, we will be studying the ways in which scholars from different disciplines—history, sociology, philosophy, media studies, anthropology, for example—have approached questions about technology, society, and politics. This means that we will also learn about the different ways in which different disciplines weigh the value of different types of data. By the end of the course, students should be able to understand various ways by which to assess the mutual relationship between society and technology; to identify different theoretical approaches to the study technology; and finally, begin to decide which questions and approaches they find most useful for analyzing contemporary issues and debates as they concern technology and society.

COURSE FORMAT, GENERAL REQUIREMENTS, ATTENDANCE, & ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I will begin each class with a short introductory lecture that examines the themes and readings for the week. The rest of the class should function to promote class discussion and student-led conversation about the various readings. Because active
participation in discussion is the cornerstone of the class, you should come prepared for discussion and with copies of the reading.

To aid our discussion and to improve their writing skills, you be required to turn in one weekly writing assignment where you will (1) provide a summary of the thesis and argument of each reading (2) pose at least one conceptual question about the readings and/or topics under discussion. A short in-class mid-term and a take-home final exam will also be given. More information on these assignments and grading criteria are provided on a separate sheet.

Because this is a seminar course, regular class attendance is required. Three or more missed classes without prior notices or excuse will result in your grade being dropped by one half letter.

Plagiarism or cheating on any assignment will not be tolerated under any circumstances and will result in a failure of the assignment and possibly failure of this class.

For further information, please consult the Steinhardt policy on academic integrity:
http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/dcc/undergraduate/Statement_On_Academic_Integrity.php

SAMPLE SYLLABUS – This syllabus is provided as a sample. Some course content may vary.

GRADING (please see separate assignment sheet for further details)

- Attendance and Class Participation: 15%
- Weekly Writing Assignments: 25%
- In-Class Mid-Term Exam: 25%
- Final Exam: 35%
- Extra-credit assignments: If completed to satisfaction, the extra-credit assignment can raise your grade by one unit of alphanumeric grading (that is, from a B to a B+ or A- to an A).

READINGS AND OTHER MATERIALS:

Most readings are available on Blackboard. The following two texts are required and are available for purchase at the NYU Bookstore:

- Standage, Tom

- Dibbel, Julian
  2006 Play Money, Or, How I Quit My Day Job and Made Millions Trading Virtual Loot. New York: Basic Books

COURSE SCHEDULE

<table>
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<th>Week I.</th>
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1. September 4: Introduction

Short Film Clip: “The Gorilla Detector”

During the first meeting we will discuss the syllabus, goals and requirements of the course.

2. September 6: Thinking Historically and Conceptually

Williams, Rosalind

Marx, Leo

Suggested Reading
Cowan, Ruth Schwartz

**Week II.**

1. **September 11: A First Case Study: Space-Time Compression: The Telegraph**

   Standage, Tom  
   1999 The Victorian Internet. New York: Berkley Trade Book, pp. TBD  

   Kielbowicz, Richard  

2. **September 13: Space-Time Compression: The Telegraph and the Railway, Continued.**

   Standage, Tom  
   1999 The Victorian Internet. New York: Berkley Trade Book, pp. TBD  

   Shivelbush, Wolfgang  

**Suggested Reading**

Cowan, Ruth Schwartz  

**Week III.**

1. **September 18: How Can Technology Communicate and Reshape our World? Molding the Body**

   Tenner, Edward  

2. **September 20: How Can Technology Communicate and Reshape our World? Political Logics.**

   Winner, Langdon  

**Suggested Reading**

Feenberg, Andrew  

**Week IV.**

1. **September 25: Sounds that Travel: The Telephone and Gender**

   Fischer, Claude.  
SAMPLE SYLLABUS – This syllabus is provided as a sample. Some course content may vary.

Your Own Wireless Telephone (Washington Post, 1910):

2. September 27: The Cellular Telephone and . . .

Vicente L. Rafael.

OR

Horst, Heather and Daniel Miller

Week V.

1. October 2: Large-Scale Industrial Farming, Large Technological Systems, and Cultural Critique

Hughes, Thomas P.

Pollan, Michael
2006 The Omnivore's Dilemma. (one chapter, TBD)

2. October 4: Large-Scale Industrial Farming, Large Technological Systems, and Cultural Critique, Continued.

Pollan, Michael
2006 The Omnivore's Dilemma (one to two chapters, TBD).

Johnson, Nathanael

Week VI.

1. October 9: Computers: Omissions and Unforeseen Applications

Light, Jennifer

Ceruzzi, Paul

Suggested Reading

Edwards, Paul

2. October 11: Networks and/of Labor: Then and Now

Downey, Greg

Review for Mid-Term

Week VII.
1. October 16: In class midterm

2. October 18: Society Seeps into Networking, Networking Seeps into Society

Turner, Fred

Pfaffenberger, Bryan

Week VIII.

1. October 23: Technology, Imperialism, and Colonialism

Philip. Kavita

Salvatore, Ricardo Donato

2. October 25: The Technical Politics of Autonomy

Kunreuther, Laura

Week VIII.

1. October 30: Technologies of the Self: Body Modification

Elliot, Carl

Suggested Reading

Hacking, Ian


In Class Movie: The Sterilization of Leilani Muir, Canadian National Film Board, 1997

Ash, Adrianne

Steinbock, Bonnie

Suggested Reading

Sandel, Michael J.
**Week X.**

1. **November: Technological Tinkering: Hackers**

   **In Class Film:** Necrocam

   **Readings TBD**

2. **November 8: Technological Tinkering, Objects and Identities**

   **Guest:** Joshua Greenberg, Director of Digital Strategy and Scholarship at the New York Public Library and author of Videophiles and Betamania.

   Greenberg, Joshua  

   Borgman, Albert  
   1984  Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Small section on devices)

**Week XI.**

1. **November 13: Intellectual Property and Technology**

   Mann, Charles  

   Gillespie, Tarleton  

   Helprin, Mark  
   http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/opinion/20helprin.html?ex=1337313600&en=4187cd8cddc05eaf&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss

   **Suggested Reading**

   Boyle, James  
   2003  Second Enclosure Movement and the Construction of the Public Domain  

   Hess, Carla  

2. **November 15: Tinkering the Law: The Case of Free and Open Source Software**

   **Meet the Geeks: Q & A with F/OSS Developers in Flesh and Blood.**

   **Readings:**


   Debian Free Software Guidelines:
   Floss is not just Good for your Teeth: http://www.sarai.net/publications/occasional/floss-is-not-just-good-for-teeth

**Week XII.**
1. November 20: Wiki Politics

Schiff, Stacey

Lemann, Nicholas

Bossewitch, Jonah

2. November 22
No Class, Thanksgiving Holiday

Week XIII.

1. November 27: Blogs, Genre and Medium

Cohn, Kris

boyd, danah

2. November 29: The Politics of Web 2.0

Jenkins, Henry

Susstein, Cass

Week XIII.

1. December 4: Games

Guest: James Grimmelmann, Associate Professor of Law, New York Law School. He studies how the law governing the creation and use of computer software affects the distribution of wealth, power, and freedom in society.

Levy, Steven
2006  Living a Virtual Life: Is World of Warcraft a game, or is it a harbinger of virtual realities that we all might inhabit. Only a Night Elf knows for sure. September. http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14757769/site/newsweek/page/0/

Taylor, T.L.

Grimmelmann, James

2. December 6: Games, Continued

Dibbel, Julian

Review for Final