

Sociology 166 Society & Technology

UC Berkeley | Fall 2015

Instructor: Dr. Linus Huang**Office Hours:** Mondays 3:30-5:30 PM, 434 Barrows Hall**E-mail:** lbhuang@berkeley.edu**Readers:** Sean Khalifehzadeh + TBD**Final Exam:** Exam Group 15; Thursday, December 17, 2015, 3:00-6:00 PM**Course Overview**

What is the relationship between *technology* and *society*? The prevailing understanding can be summarized by **technological determinism**. In a nutshell, technological determinism is the belief that technology shapes society. For instance, the emergence of industrial technologies like the steam engine of necessity destroyed feudal social relations and ushered in modern industrial capitalism. The automobile made possible the decentralization of the urban core and the rise of suburbia. The Internet and in particular social media shrink the world into a village. Robots and other automation technologies will vastly increase the amount of time available for labor—but also raises the specter of mass unemployment.

Technological determinism, in practice, can be slippery. It can take many forms. The deterministic link between technology and society may be “harder” in some cases and “softer” in others. The view of the society that technology creates may be utopian (e.g., technology will end disease, famine) or dystopian (e.g., technology enables weapons of mass destruction, eliminates human skill/discretion). In all cases, however, the task of studying technology and society is reduced to the task of studying the (deterministic) ways in which a given technology will transform social structure and practice.

A sociological approach to technology disputes the assumptions technological determination makes about the relationship between technology and society. It draws attention to the role that society plays in shaping the way that technologies impact society and even in the shaping of the technology itself, to begin with. In doing so, it asserts that the problem of studying technology and society entails the studying of social relations, and not just the studying of technologies in isolation.

Grading

Your course grade will be determined by two take-home midterm examinations, weighted at 40% each, and a final, in-class, multiple-choice exam weighted at 20%. The final exam will be administered during the University’s officially scheduled exam week timeslot for this course (see above).

The grading scale is as follows. '[' means including, and ')' means excluding, so '[83-87)' for example means everything from 83 up to but not including 87.

A+	[99+)	A	[95-99)	A-	[90-95)
B+	[87-90)	B	[83-87)	B-	[80-83)
C+	[77-80)	C	[73-77)	C-	[70-73)
D+	[67-70)	D	[63-67)	D-	[60-63)
		F	[0-60)		

During the course of the semester, all scores will be recorded to two significant digits after the decimal. When it comes time to compute overall course grades, I will round the final course score (*NOT* each individual exam score) to the nearest whole number to determine the letter grade.

Note: There are no other discretionary considerations that factor in to the calculation of your course grade. I absolutely do not offer extra credit beyond that which I offer to the entire class.

As the course progresses, you can calculate your performance for yourself, given the weightings indicated above, and determine exactly what you need to do on subsequent graded assignments to get X grade.

International Students + Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations must have their statuses verified by the DSP office by the end of the third week of the course (including partial weeks). Digital copies of approval letters are automatically sent to me; I do not require a paper hardcopy of them.

The course will require a modest degree of English reading and writing proficiency during the three examinations. If you are an ESL student for whom this may prove difficult, accommodations (limited in nature, I'm afraid, but accommodations nonetheless) can be made provided you get in touch with me at the beginning of the semester.

Academic Honesty, classroom conduct

Violations of academic honesty have unfortunately been on the rise at UC Berkeley over the past few years, prompting among other things the posting of plaques in general classrooms around campus re-emphasizing the code of academic conduct. The general rule of thumb behind the code is: act in such a way that no one could possibly question your conduct.

Plagiarism—copying someone else's work and presenting it as your own—has been the central problem. Copying off either another student or off the readings (whether the readings are on or outside of the syllabus) both constitute plagiarism. All instances of plagiarism will be punished by an immediate **-0-** on the entire assignment in question, *plus* a report to the Office of Academic Affairs at my discretion.

Forming studying groups on your own is highly encouraged, especially since there are no discussion sections to accompany this course. If these groups are used to struggle through ideas or debate topics (both are also good uses of class time, by the way!), then the effort expended can be very rewarding. However, if groups are used simply to memorize a classmate's notes by rote, to subsequently recite on exams, **this is effectively another form of plagiarism** as far as I am concerned. I use this specific example because it recently popped up in one of my courses.

Use of laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc. in class. I use my laptop for virtually everything and do not expect students not to utilize the various digital technologies we have at our disposal today. However, if you are texting, Twittering, watching Netflix, or some other such thing in class, you are likely distracting others and I will ask you to leave.

Reading/Exam Schedule

All readings are available in PDF format on the bCourses site, under the READINGS folder of the Files section. Some readings are also available online (but they're in the READINGS folder anyway as well); in these cases I include URLs. Readings are to be completed **prior** to the class meeting by which they are listed.

Introduction

Aug 26 Wed **Introduction: Does technology shape society?**

No readings.

28 Fri Introduction (cont'd)

31 Mon **The reification of technology and the ideology of progress**

Readings:

- K. Toyama, "Technology won't fix America's neediest schools. It makes bad education worse." *The Washington Post* PostEverything 4 Jun 2015
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/06/04/technology-wont-fix-americas-neediest-schools-it-makes-bad-education-worse/>
- M. Gladwell, "The Social Life of Paper" *The New Yorker* 25 Mar 2002
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/03/25/the-social-life-of-paper>

Sep 2 Wed (cont'd; no new readings)

4 Fri (cont'd; no new readings)

7 Mon **##### LABOR DAY: NO CLASS #####**

Sep	9	Wed	The neutrality assumption of technological determinism <i>Readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • L. Winner, “Do Artifacts Have Politics?” • D. Sarewitz, “Pas de Trois: Science, Technology, and the Marketplace”
	11	Fri	(cont’d; no new readings)
	14	Mon	(cont’d; no new readings)
	16	Wed	Does the Internet cause social isolation? <i>Readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S. Turkle, <i>alone together</i> introduction • K. Hampton, L. Sesions & E. Her, “Core Networks, Social Isolation, and New Media”
	18	Fri	(cont’d; no new readings)
	21	Mon	(cont’d; no new readings) MIDTERM #1 TAKE-HOME DISTRIBUTED MON 21 SEP 2015
	23	Wed	How the Internet brings people together <i>Reading:</i> M. Rosenfeld & R. Thomas, “Searching for a Mate”
	25	Fri	(cont’d; no new readings)
	28	Mon	Does the Internet make society more democratic? <i>Reading:</i> Y. Benkler, <i>The Wealth of Networks</i> ch 6, 7 MIDTERM #1 TAKE-HOME DUE MON 28 SEP 2015
	30	Wed	(cont’d; no new readings)
Oct	2	Fri	(cont’d; no new readings)
	5	Mon	Social media and civic engagement <i>Reading:</i> K. Hampton et al, “Social Media and the ‘Spiral of Silence’”
	7	Wed	(cont’d; no new readings)
	9	Fri	The Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) perspective <i>Reading:</i> T. Pinch & W. Bijker, “The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts”

Oct	12	Mon	(cont'd; no new readings)
	14	Wed	How did automobiles win the American city? <i>Reading:</i> P. Norton, <i>Fighting Traffic</i> ch 1, 3
	16	Fri	(cont'd) <i>Reading:</i> P. Norton, <i>Fighting Traffic</i> ch 7, 8
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	19	Mon	(cont'd; no new readings)
	21	Wed	Why are we skeptical of GMOs? <i>Readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> N. Johnson, "Panic-Free GMOs" selections http://grist.org/series/panic-free-gmos/ F. Hiatt, "Opinion: Science that is hard to swallow" <i>The Washington Post</i> 8 Feb 2015 https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/fred-hiatt-genetically-modified-foods-prove-hard-for-americans-to-stomach/2015/02/08/3ae7902c-ad60-11e4-9c91-e9d2f9fde644_story.html
	23	Fri	(cont'd; no new readings)
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	26	Mon	(cont'd; no new readings)
	28	Wed	Technology and Risk <i>Reading:</i> D. Vaughan, "The Trickle-Down Effect"
	30	Fri	(cont'd; no new readings)
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Nov	2	Mon	Automation in the workplace: what is the role of human skill? <i>Reading:</i> W. Langewiesche, "The Human Factor" <i>Vanity Fair</i> Oct 2014 http://www.vanityfair.com/news/business/2014/10/air-france-flight-447-crash
	4	Wed	(cont'd; no new readings) MIDTERM #2 TAKE-HOME DISTRIBUTED WED 4 NOV 2015
	6	Fri	Socially constructing automation in the workplace <i>Reading:</i> M. Levinson, <i>The Box</i> ch 1, 2, 6
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	9	Mon	(cont'd; no new readings) MIDTERM #2 TAKE-HOME DUE MON 9 NOV 2015
	11	Wed	##### VETERAN'S DAY: NO CLASS #####

Nov	13	Fri	Technology and inequality <i>Readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> E. Brynjolfsson & A. McAfee, “Why Workers Are Losing the War Against Machines” <i>The Atlantic</i> 26 Oct 2011 http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2011/10/why-workers-are-losing-the-war-against-machines/247278/ C. Hanley, “Putting the Bias in SBTC”
	16	Mon	(cont’d; no new readings)
	18	Wed	(cont’d; no new readings)
	20	Fri	How is science “social”? <i>Reading:</i> T. Kuhn, <i>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</i> pp. 1-51
	23	Mon	(cont’d; no new readings)
	25	Wed	##### THANKSGIVING: NO CLASS #####
	27	Fri	##### THANKSGIVING: NO CLASS #####
	30	Mon	The social context of technological innovation <i>Reading:</i> F. Block & M. Keller, “Where Do Innovations Come From?”
Dec	2	Wed	The commercialization of academic science? <i>Reading:</i> S. Vallas & D. Kleinman, “Contradiction, Convergence, and the knowledge economy”
	4	Fri	Course wrap-up + evaluations
	7	Mon	##### READING,
	9	Wed	##### RECITATION, and
	11	Fri	##### REVIEW week
Dec	17	Thu	FINAL EXAM <u>IN-CLASS</u> 3:00-6:00 PM