Sociology 166 Society & Technology

UC Berkeley | Spring 2015

Instructor: Linus Huang
Office Hours: Mondays 3:30-5:30, 434 Barrows Hall
E-mail: lbhuang@berkeley.edu
Readers: Ogi Radic, Darrell Valor
Final Exam: Exam Group 6, Tuesday, May 12, 2015 11:30-2:30 PM

Course Overview

What is "technology"? Where does it come from? How does it change the way we live? To the extent that we explicitly pose these questions at all, we often operate under certain assumptions about how technology and society are related. We think of technology as reflecting the application of objective Science, which leads to an understanding of technological artifacts as not having any inherent political or cultural agenda of their own. Hence, slogans such as "guns don't kill people; people kill people" (to pick an admittedly controversial example).

Objections against technological development are frequently cast as Luddism, for technology is automatically associated with Progress. Agricultural technologies bring the possibility of ending starvation; medical technologies promise the end of disease and the prolongation of life; improved automobile and air bag design will reduce fatalities in car crashes; and lighter, sleeker, faster smartphones are both more powerful mobile computing devices and more attractive, personalized accessories.

The study of society and technology rejects such easy assumptions. It investigates the relationship between technology and society with the understanding that technology is not necessarily neutral, nor does it necessarily embody progress. Instead, it understands technology as inextricably bound up in the "messiness" of society, not conceptually outside it. This means, as the French sociologist Bruno Latour puts it, that "technology is society made durable".

Grading

Your course grade will be determined by two midterm exams, weighted at 35% each, and a final exam weighted at 30%. The two midterm exams will each be take-home in format. The initial plan for the final exam is that it will be in-class during the University's official timeslot for this course.

The grading scale is as follows. All scores are significant to the second digit after the decimal. '[' means including, and ')' means excluding, so '[83-87)' for example means everything from 83.00 up to but not including 87.00.

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)		

Note: Logistics subject to modification during the course of the semester.

Note: **There are no other discretionary considerations that factor in to the calculation of your course grade.** Whether for instance you demonstrated improvement (or, for that matter, decline) over the semester won't factor into your grade, and in any case does not mean much when there are only three total assignments. 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). Electronic copies of these letters are automatically sent to me; I do not require a paper hardcopy of them.

The course will require a modest degree of English writing proficiency during the three examinations. If you are an ESL student for whom this may prove difficult, accommodations 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, both **required** and **recommended**, are available in PDF format on the bCourses site, under the READINGS folder of the `Files` section. **Required** readings are to be completed **prior** to the class meeting by which they are listed.

Recommended readings are provided for those who may have deeper interest about particular subjects. In most cases, I will present material from recommended readings in class; you can read these either in tune with class, or at your own leisure. Everyone is responsible for the material that I do present in class. However, doing the recommended reading itself should not be necessary to perform well on the exams.

Introduction

Jan	21	Wed	Introduction: what is "technology"? *Required reading:* none *Recommended, but not required, reading:* L. Marx, "Technology: The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept"
	23	Fri	(cont'd)
	26	Mon	The problem of technological determinism (Part I) *Required reading:* J. Lepore, "Our Own Devices"
	28	Wed	(cont'd)
	30	Fri	The problem of technological determinism (Part II) *Required reading:* L. Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" *Recommended readings:* • N. Invernizzi & G. Foladori, "Nanotechnology and the Developing World: Will Nanotechnology Overcome Poverty or Widen Disparities?" • K. Shrader-Frechette, "Introduction" to *Environmental Justice* • D. Sarewitz, "Pas de Trois: Science, Technology, and the Marketplace"
Feb	2	Mon	(cont'd)
	4	Wed	(cont'd)

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Technology shapes/re-constitutes society

Feb	6	Fri	Is cyberspace an entirely different social realm? *Required reading:* L. Nakamura, "Race In/For Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet" *Recommended readings:* • N. Boero & C. Pascoe, "Pro-anorexia Communities and Online Interaction" • C. Seale, "Gender Accommodation in Online Cancer Support Groups" • N. Yee, J. Bailenson & N. Ducheneaut, "The Proteus Effect"
	9	Mon	(cont'd)
	11	Wed	Does technology make us lonely? Yes, it does. *Required readings:* • S. Marche, "Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?" • M. Gladwell, "Small Change" *Recommended readings:* • S. Turkle, *Alone Together* intro + ch 8 • M. McPherson, L. Smith-Lovin & M. Brashears, "Social Isolation in America"
	13	Fri	(cont'd)
	16	Mon	***** PRESIDENT'S DAY: NO CLASS *****
	18	Wed	(cont'd)
	20	Fri	Does technology make us lonely? No, it doesn't. *Required reading:* E. Klinenberg, "Facebook Isn't Making Us Lonely" *Recommended reading:* K. Hampton, L. Sessions & E. Her, "Core Networks, Social Isolation, and New Media"
	23	Mon	(cont'd)
	25	Wed	The Internet as progressive social broker *Required reading:* M. Rosenfeld & R. Thomas, "Searching for a Mate"
	27	Fri	(cont'd)

MIDTERM EXAM #1 DISTRIBUTED ON BCOURSES FRI 27 FEB 2015

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Mar	2	Mon	Does the Internet make society more democratic? *Required reading:* Y. Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks* ch 6
	4	Wed	(cont'd) *Required reading:* Y. Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks,* ch 7

MIDTERM EXAM #1 DUE ON BCOURSES WED 4 MAR 2015

	6	Fri	(cont'd)
	9	Mon	Digital inequality *Required reading:* T. Wu, *The Master Switch* ch 20 "Father and Son" *Recommended reading:* J. Schradie, "The Digital Production Gap"
	11	Wed	(cont'd)
	13	Fri	Automation in the workplace *Required readings:* • W. Langewiesche, "The Human Factor" • J. Kantor, "Working Anything but 9 to 5"
	16	Mon	(cont'd)
	18	Wed	Technology and income inequality *Required reading:* E. Brynjolfsson & A. McAfee, "Why Workers Are Losing the War Against the Machines"
	20	Fri	(cont'd)
	23	Mon	**##### SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS #####**
	25	Wed	**##### SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS #####**
	27	Fri	**##### SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS #####**

Society shapes technology

	30	Mon	The SCOT perspective *Required reading:* T. Pinch & W. Bijker, "The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts" *Recommended reading:* J. Abbate, *Inventing the Internet* ch 3 "The Most Neglected Element"
Apr	1	Wed	(cont'd)

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Apr 3 Fri The social context of innovation

Required reading: F. Block & M. Keller, "Where Do Innovations Come From?"

MIDTERM EXAM #2 DISTRIBUTED ON BCOURSES 3 APR 2015

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6 Mon (cont'd)

8 Wed The commercialization of science?

Required reading: S. Vallas & D. Kleinman, "Contradiction, Convergence, and the Knowledge Economy"

MIDTERM EXAM #2 DUE ON BCOURSES WED 8 APR 2015

10 Fri (cont'd)

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13 Mon Why are we skeptical of genetically modified food?

Required readings: selections from N. Johnson's *Grist* series "Panic-Free GMOs":

- "Genetic engineering vs. natural breeding: What's the difference?"
- "Block party: Are activists thwarting GMO innovation?"
- "20 GMO questions"

There are 30 pieces (and counting) in this series; we will look at 3 of them. The index page for all of them is: http://grist.org/series/panic-free-gmos/

Recommended reading: R. Schurman & W. Munro, "Ideas, Thinkers, and Social Networks: The process of grievance construction in the anti-genetic engineering movement"

15 Wed (cont'd)

17 Fri How the automobile won the American city

Required reading: P. Norton, *Fighting Traffic* ch 1, 3

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20 Mon (cont'd)

Required reading: P. Norton, *Fighting Traffic* ch 7, 8

22 Wed (cont'd)

24 Fri Technology & risk

Required reading: D. Vaughan, "The Trickle-Down Effect"

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27 Mon (cont'd)

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Apr	29	Wed	Why is computer programming dominated by men? *Required reading:* N. Ensmenger, "Making Programming Masculine"
May	1	Fri	Course wrap-up and evaluations
	4	Mon	**##### READING,**
	6	Wed	**##### RECITATION, and**
	8	Fri	**##### REVIEW**
	12	Tu	**FINAL EXAM TUESDAY, MAY 12, 2015 11:30-2:30 PM**

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