

POLS 5960: Technology and Democracy

Fall 2020

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Note: This syllabus is meant to serve as an outline and guide for our course. Please note that I may modify it with reasonable notice to you. I may also modify the Course Schedule to accommodate the needs of our class. Any changes will be posted on Canvas under Announcements.

Course Description

Course Summary

While progress in the social and political world is understood to ebb and flow generationally or simply depending on where you stand in terms of your identity or ideology, the scientific and technological world is broadly seen as inherently progressive. Greater knowledge and technical know-how is understood as constantly expanding, and these expansions are seen almost unquestionably as positive. When technological tools create problems or challenges, we generally see these challenges as unintended consequences, and the solution as more technology: any new problems can simply be solved by further expanding our knowledge.

The core goal of this course is to challenge this naive and deterministic view of scientific and technological development by demonstrating the embedded nature of science, technology, and society, and identifying some of the ways technology both shapes and is shaped by democracy. Many of the core ethical and political challenges posed by a variety of extant and emerging technologies will be examined in order to illustrate the nature of these interactions.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will:

- Examine the complex interactions between society, political systems, and technological artefacts, including developing an understanding of how technological artefacts can shape and be shaped by political, legal, and social environments;
- Identify some of the core ethical and political challenges posed by a variety of extant and emerging technologies;
- Develop and demonstrate interactive skills for use in an online, collaborative work environment;
- Produce an informative podcast assignment which illustrates their knowledge of course materials.

Required Materials

As a former first-generation college student, I think the college experience is expensive enough without me adding to it without necessity. Therefore, the materials for this course are either available for free online, or will be provided freely by me in weekly PDF documents or other files. **I encourage you to take whatever money you expected to spend on books for this course and use it to do something nice for yourself.**

There are a few things I anticipate you will need:

- A podcast app on your cell phone, or access to a computer or tablet on which you can listen to podcasts;
- Audio editing software for the podcast assignment (Audacity is a good, free choice. Adobe Audition is also provided to students for free by the University for a limited time, and is also an excellent editor);
- Video conversation software for discussions with the class or with me (Zoom is the University preference, but I can accommodate Google Hangout and Skype if Zoom is problematic for you);
- Access to Google Docs for collaborative note-taking assignments.

If for any reason accessing any of the above items is problematic for you, please contact me through Canvas and we will work to make arrangements for you.

Teaching and Learning Methods

Online learning environments present unique challenges and opportunities for student learning. One of the deepest challenges is that of interactivity and the development of classroom culture. Without a physical learning space, it can be difficult to interact with other students or have a meaningful relationship with your instructor. This is part of the reasoning behind the discussion board posts and collaborative note-taking assignments – the aim of these is to help you build a few meaningful relationships with other students, collaborate with them, and create a space to develop a purposive learning relationship with the instructor. It should be noted that the development of this kind of space, whether in an online or physical environment, is not solely the responsibility of the instructor alone. I pledge to do my best to create this kind of environment, and I deeply encourage you to work with me and your classmates to make this environment possible. **I strongly believe that intentional and regular communication will make your experience in this course much more positive.**

In addition, I am a proponent of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies. In brief, SEL contends that any learning environment is incomplete and ultimately ineffective if it doesn't take deep consideration of the social and emotional factors impacting the course. These may include things like a student's relationship with classmates or the instructor, the mental health of the student, and other factors. As such, I will do my best to make this online learning environment a healthy one for you, and I will work to be open and receptive to your communication – especially communication regarding any external factors which may impact your course experience. **Mental health is an especially deep concern for me, and I encourage you to**

reach out to me if there's anything I can do to accommodate whatever challenges you may be facing. If I am unable to assist you, I will do my best to serve as an advocate on your behalf to help you acquire whatever assistance you may need.

Instructor Expectations

Your instructor is committed to the following expectations for this course:

- The instructor will do his best to create a learning environment which is collegial, welcoming, and conducive to student learning and communication;
- The instructor will work with students both individually and as a group in order to help develop an effective online collaboration environment;
- The instructor will communicate regularly with students via class discussions, office hours, emails, Canvas, feedback on assignments, and other methods;
- The instructor will provide feedback on assignments in a timely manner.

Student Expectations

The following is expected of all students in this class:

- Students will do their best to check in regularly to Canvas in order to receive course announcements or other module updates in a timely manner;
- Students will make an effort to develop working relationships with both the instructor and their classmates in order to develop an effective online collaboration environment;
- Students will do their best to create a learning environment which is collegial, welcoming, and conducive to student learning and communication.

Course Engagement and Participation

Class participation is an essential part of the learning process. Students are responsible for their learning and are required to actively participate in all components of the course. Effective learning in an online environment presents additional unique challenges, so students must develop habits for regular course check-ins in order to learn effectively. Since this course also features collaborative elements, students must also make an effort to communicate effectively in an online environment. Last, open and critical discussion and communication associated with the course material is welcomed and encouraged at all times.

Evaluation & Grading

In total, there will be **500 points** awarded through your assignments and quizzes this semester (see the course schedule for assignment due dates). The breakdown for these points is as follows:

Podcast Assignments	(200 total points - 40% of Grade)	
Google Hangout + Instructor Consultation	50 Points	10%
Research and Podcast Draft	50 Points	10%
Podcast Episode	100 Points	20%
Collaborative Note-Taking Assignments	(100 total points - 20% of Grade)	
Week 3: Collaborative Notes on “Automating Inequality” Chapters	25 Points	5%
Week 5: Collaborative Notes on “The Age of Surveillance Capitalism” Chapters	25 Points	5%
Week 11: Collaborative Notes on “Twitter and Teargas” Chapters	25 Points	5%
Week 14: Collaborative Notes on “A Post-Human Politics?” Assignments	25 Points	5%
Module Content Quizzes	(100 total points - 20% of Grade)	
4 Surprise Quizzes - random weeks!	25 Points (Per Quiz - 100 points total)	20%
Weekly Discussion Board Conversations	(100 total points - 20% of Grade)	
Every week! NOTE: Posts are due Wednesday of the week they are given, respond to someone by Friday .	10 Points per week.	20%

See Canvas for additional assignment details.

Grading Scheme

A 100%-94%	A- 93.9%-90%	
B+ 89.9%-87%	B 86.9%-84%	B- 83.9%-80%
C+ 79.9% - 77%	C 76.9%-74%	C- 73.9%-70%
D+ 69.9%-67%	D 66.9%-64%	D- 63.9%-60%
E 59.9%-0%		

Course Schedule

The below course schedule details some of the major course readings, podcast episodes, and assignment due dates you should be aware of. Please note that there will also be video lectures and other content shared during each weekly module. To see the full content for each week, please view the selected weekly module on Canvas – **the homepage will be updated each week showing the full materials for each week.**

Also note: In many of the weeks below, I post a number of “Recommended Readings.” You are **NOT** required to read these any given week. These are provided to help you explore a topic further if it is an area of interest to you. These readings may also be valuable for your podcast episode on your chosen topic.

Week 1: Course Introduction (August 24-28)

- Readings:
 - Ch. 1 - “The Ethics of Invention” by Sheila Jasanoff
 - “A Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace” – John Perry Barlow
- Podcast Episodes:
 - None
- Assignments:
 - Week 1 Discussion Post: Introduction Video **Due Friday, August 28**
 - NOTE: In the future, your discussion posts will be due by the end of the day Wednesday, with a response to another student due by Friday. Week 1 is the exception!

Recommended Readings:

- *The Ethics of Invention*, by Sheila Jasanoff
- *Dreamscapes of Modernity*, by Sheila Jasanoff

Week 2: Tech and the Law: the 26 Words that Created the Internet (August 31-September 4)

- Readings:
 - “CDA 230: the Most Important Law Protecting Internet Speech”, Electronic Frontier Foundation <https://www.eff.org/issues/cda230>
 - Ch. 13: Exceptional Exceptions, from *The 26 Words that Created the Internet*, by Jeff Kosseff
- Podcast Episodes:
 - “With Great Power Comes... No Responsibility?”, from *Your Undivided Attention*
- Assignments:
 - Week 2 Discussion Post: Due **Wednesday, September 2nd**. Respond to a classmate by **Friday, September 4th**.

Recommended Readings:

- “You Break it, You Buy it: The Naivete of Social Engineering in Tech, and how to Fix it”, by Rebekah Tromble and Shannon McGregor
- *Throwing Rocks at the Google Bus*, by Douglass Rushkoff
- *The 26 Words that Created the Internet*, by Jeff Koseff (full book)

Week 3: Automating Inequality (September 8-September 11 - shortened week due to Labor Day holiday)

- Readings: **Read ONE** and provide notes in the collaborative note-taking space.
 - Ch. 2: “Automating Welfare in the Heartland”, from *Automating Inequality* by Virginia Eubanks
 - Ch. 3: “High-Tech Homelessness in the City of Angels”, from *Automating Inequality* by Virginia Eubanks
 - Ch. 4: “The Allegheny Algorithm”, from *Automating Inequality* by Virginia Eubanks
- Podcast Episodes:
 - “Eubanks on Automating Inequality”, from *Philosophical Disquisitions*.
- Assignments:
 - Week 3 Discussion Post: Due **Thursday, September 10th (due to shortened week)**. Respond to a classmate by **Friday, September 11th**.
 - Submit your notes from your selected Chapter in the appropriate collaborative note-taking space. This is **due Friday, September 11th**.

Week 4: Tech and the Economy, Part I: The Future of Work (September 14-18)

- Readings:
 - “The Rise of the Useless Class,” Yuval Noah Harari, from ideas.ted.com
- Podcast Episodes:
 - “Why do some in the tech community support universal basic income? They’re ‘terrified’ about the future.” From *Recode Decode*
- Assignments:
 - Week 4 Discussion Post: Due **Wednesday, September 14th**. Respond to a classmate by **Friday, September 18th**.
 - Schedule a Zoom brainstorming session for your podcast assignment with me by **Friday, September 18th** (meetings can place after the 18th, but must be scheduled by then).

Recommended Readings:

- *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a time of Brilliant Technologies*, by
- Erik Brynjolfsson, Andrew McAfee

Week 5: Tech and the Economy, Part II: Surveillance Capitalism (September 21-25)

- Readings: **Read ONE** and provide notes in the collaborative note-taking space.

- Ch. 5: “The Elaboration of Surveillance Capitalism: Kidnap, Corner, Compete”, from *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* by Shoshana Zuboff
- Ch. 10: “Make them Dance”, from *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* by Shoshana Zuboff
- Ch. 13: “Big Other and the Rise of Instrumentarian Power”, from *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* by Shoshana Zuboff
- Podcast Episodes:
 - None
- Assignments:
 - Week 5 Discussion Post: Due **Wednesday, September 23rd**. Respond to a classmate by **Friday, September 25th**.
 - Submit your notes from your selected Chapter in the appropriate collaborative note-taking space. This is **due Friday, September 25th**.

Recommended Readings:

- *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, by Shoshanna Zuboff (full book)
- *Cloud Ethics: Algorithms and the Attributes of Ourselves and Others*, Louise Amoore

Week 6: Protecting Your Data and Identify Online (September 28-October 2)

- Guest Content from Dr. Sean Lawson, Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Utah (see Canvas for details)
- Assignments:
 - Week 6 Discussion Post: Due **Wednesday, September 28th**. Respond to a classmate by **Friday, October 2nd**.

Week 7: Digital Wellness, Part I: Connection (October 5-9)

- Readings:
 - Selections from “How to Do Nothing” - Jenny Odell
- Podcast Episodes:
 - “The Opposite of Addiction”, from *Your Undivided Attention*
- Assignments:
 - Week 7 Discussion Post: Due **Wednesday, October 5th**. Respond to a classmate by **Friday, October 9th**.

Recommended Readings:

- *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*, by Jenny Odell (full book)

Week 8: Digital Wellness, Part II: Moderation and the Politics of Sight (October 12-16)

- Readings:
 - “The Internet Is Enabling a New Kind of Poorly Paid Hell,” *The Atlantic*
 - “In/Visibility,” Sarah T. Roberts.

- Podcast Episodes:
 - Video: Inside the Traumatic life of a Facebook moderator (The Verge)
 - Podcast: “The People Who Hold the Internet Together”, from *Slate*
- Assignments:
 - Week 8 Discussion Post: Due **Wednesday, October 12th**. Respond to a classmate by **Friday, October 16th**.

Recommended Readings:

- *Behind the Screen: Content Moderation in the Shadows of Social Media*, by Sarah T. Roberts
- *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions that Shape Social Media*, by Tarleton Gillespie

Week 9: Elections, Part I: Social Media and Your Data (October 19-23)

- Readings:
 - Kreiss, Daniel and McGregor, Shannon. “Technology Firms Shape Political Communication: The Work of Microsoft, Facebook, Twitter, and Google with Campaigns During the 2016 U.S. Presidential Cycle.” *Political Communication*, 2017.
- Podcast Episodes:
 - “Rock the Voter”, from *Your Undivided Attention*
- Assignments:
 - Week 9 Discussion Post: Due **Wednesday, October 21st**. Respond to a classmate by **Friday, October 23rd**.

Week 10: Elections, Part II: Election Security and Disinformation (October 26-30)

- Readings:
 - See Canvas Module.
- Podcast Episodes:
 - “A Hacker’s Look at Election Infrastructure,” from *Dot Citizen*.
 - “The Information War,” from *Waking up with Sam Harris*.
- Assignments:
 - Week 10 Discussion Post: Due **Wednesday, October 26th**. Respond to a classmate by **Friday, October 30th**.
 - **REMEMBER TO VOTE! THE ELECTION IS NOVEMBER 3RD**

Week 11: Technology and Activism (November 2-6)

- Readings:
 - Selections from Zeynep Tufekci’s *Twitter and Teargas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*.
 - This will be a collaborative note-taking week as well: check in on Canvas for the readings

- Podcast Episodes:
 - Episode from *Dot Citizen* podcast – see Canvas for details.
- Assignments:
 - Week 11 Discussion Post: Due **Wednesday, November 2nd**. Respond to a classmate by **Friday, November 6th**.
 - Submit your notes from your selected Chapter in the appropriate collaborative note-taking space. This is **due Friday, November 6th**.
 - **REMEMBER TO VOTE! THE ELECTION IS NOVEMBER 3RD**

Recommended Readings:

- *Twitter and Teargas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, by Zeynep Tufekci (full book)
- *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*, Pankaj Mishra

Week 12: Sex, Gender, Race, and the Internet (November 9-13)

- Readings:
 - Selections from “Algorithms of Oppression” by Safiya Noble
- Podcast Episodes:
 - “Algorithms of Oppression,” from *Weekly Economics Podcast*.
- Assignments:
 - Week 12 Discussion Post: Due **Wednesday, November 9th**. Respond to a classmate by **Friday, November 13th**.

Recommended Readings:

- *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, by Safiya Noble (full book)
- *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*, by Ruha Benjamin
- *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, by Simone Browne
- *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, by Kate Manne

Week 13: A Post-Human Politics? (November 16-20)

- Readings: **Read ONE** and provide notes in the collaborative note-taking space.
 - Selections from Yuval Noah Harari’s *Homo Deus* - “The Data Religion.”
 - Selections from Ray Kurzweil’s *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* - “The Six Epochs.”
 - Selections from Nick Bostrom’s *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*.
 - Farman, Abou. “Re-Enchantment Cosmologies: Mastery and Obsolescence in an Intelligent Universe.” *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (Fall 2012), pp. 1069-1088).
- Podcast Episodes:
 - See Week 14 module on Canvas.
- Assignments:

- Week 13 Discussion Post: Due **Wednesday, November 16th**. Respond to a classmate by **Friday, November 20th**.
- Submit your notes from your selected Chapter in the appropriate collaborative note-taking space. This is **due Friday, November 20th**.

Recommended Readings:

- *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, by Yuval Noah Harari (full book)
- *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, by Ray Kurzweil (full book)
- *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*, by Nick Bostrom (full book)
- *On Not Dying: Secular Immortality in the Age of Technoscience*, by Abou Farman

Week 14: Data Feminism (November 23-25 - Short Week Due to Thanksgiving Holiday)

- Readings:
 - Selections from from “Data Feminism” by Catherine d’Ignazio and Lauren Klein
- Assignments:
 - Submit your podcast Questions Draft/Script/Research by **Wednesday, November 25th**.

Week 15: Wrap-Up (November 30-December 3rd)

- Podcast Discussion Period
- Assignments:
 - Week 15 Discussion Post: Due **Wednesday, December 1st**. Respond to a classmate by **Friday, December 3rd**.

Week 16 – FINALS WEEK (December 7-11)

- Assignments:
 - Podcast Episode **due December 11th**

Course Policies

COVID-19 Protection and Face Coverings (for any in-person meetings)

Based on CDC guidelines, the University requires everyone to wear face coverings in shared public spaces on campus, including our classroom. As a reminder, when I wear a face covering, I am protecting you. When you wear a face covering, you are protecting me and all of your classmates. If you forget your face covering, I will ask you to leave class to retrieve it. If you repeatedly fail to wear a face covering in class, I will refer you to the Dean of Students for a possible violation of the Student Code. Note that some students may qualify for accommodations through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you think you meet these criteria and desire an exception to the face covering policy, contact the [Center for Disability and Access](#) (CDA). Accommodations should be obtained prior to the first day of class so that I am notified by CDA of any students who are not required to wear a face covering.

Canvas

Since this is a hybrid learning course, we will be using Canvas to submit assignments, make class announcements, and so on. If you are having any trouble with Canvas as it relates to this class, contact me first and we will see if we can resolve the issue. If the problem persists, contact Canvas Support 24/7 by clicking the Help button located on the left-side global navigation.

If you are new to using Canvas or need a reminder of how to use it, I highly recommend the [Canvas Getting Started Guide for Students](#).

Communication

If you need to speak to me about grades, course questions, or other concerns, contacting me via Canvas is the best way to reach me. In general, I try to respond within 24 hours, but this may be extended if you contact me during weekends or work-related travel. In such instances I will respond as soon as possible.

Late Assignments

Assignment due dates are posted on Canvas and, in general, late assignments will not be accepted. That said, I know life happens, and in extenuating circumstances arrangements may be made provided students contact the instructor **before** the assignment due date. Students should make every effort to turn assignments in on time.

Institutional Policies & Procedures

1. ***The Americans with Disabilities Act***. The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, (801) 581-5020. CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.
 - a. ***Accommodation Policy (see Section Q)***:
<http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-100.php>
2. ***Addressing Sexual Misconduct***. Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB,

801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS).

3. **Drop/Withdrawal.** Students may drop a course within the first two weeks of a given semester without any penalties. Students may officially withdraw (W) from a class or all classes after the drop deadline through the midpoint of a course. A “W” grade is recorded on the transcript and appropriate tuition/fees are assessed. The grade “W” is not used in calculating the student’s GPA. See the [Academic Calendar](#) for the last day to withdraw from term, first and second session classes.
 - a. **Deadlines for courses with irregular start and end dates policy.**
<https://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/miscellaneous.php>
4. **Plagiarism/Cheating.** It is assumed that all work submitted to your instructor is your own work. When you have used ideas of others, you must properly indicate that you have done so. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and may be punished by failure on an individual assignment, and/or failure in the course. Academic misconduct, according to the University of Utah Student Code, “*includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one’s work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information...It also includes facilitating academic misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic misconduct.*” For detailed definitions and possible sanctions please see the **Student Code** below. <http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.php>
5. **Wellness Statement.** Your personal health and wellness are essential to your success as a student. Personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, cross-cultural differences, etc., can interfere with a student’s ability to succeed and thrive in this course and at the University of Utah. Please speak with the instructor before issues become problems. And, for helpful resources, contact the Center for Student wellness at www.wellness.utah.edu or 801-581-7776.
6. **Veterans Support Center.** The Veterans Support Center is a “one stop shop” for student veterans to find services, support, advocacy, and camaraderie. They are located in the Park Building Room 201. You can visit their website for more information about their services and support at <http://veteranscenter.utah.edu>.
7. **LGBT Resource Center.** The University of Utah has an LGBT Resource Center on campus. They are located in Room 409 of the Olpin Union Building. Hours: M-F 8-5pm. You can visit their website to find more information about the support they can offer, a list of events through the center and links to additional resources: <http://lgbt.utah.edu>.
8. **Learners of English as an Additional/Second Language.** If you are an English language learner, please be aware of several resources on campus that will support you with your language and writing development. These resources include: the Writing Center (<http://writingcenter.utah.edu>); the Writing Program (<http://writing-program.utah.edu>); the English Language Institute (<http://continue.utah.edu/eli>).
9. **Sandy Campus Safety Statement.** The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. To report suspicious activity, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677). You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit safeu.utah.edu. SANDY POLICE 801-799-3000

10. Please let me know if there is any additional support you would like to discuss for this class.

As the only institution in the state classified in the highest research category (R1), at the University of Utah you will have access to state-of-the-art research facilities and be able to be part of the knowledge creation process. You will have the opportunity to do research of your own with faculty who are leading experts in their field, engaging in programs that match your research interests. Further, you will interact with and often take classes with graduate students that provide an advanced understanding of the knowledge in your field.