

**Communications Studies (COMS) 623 - Seminar 01**  
**Social Contexts of Technology**  
**Fall 2011**  
**W 13:00-15:50 SS 315**

**Instructor:** Patrick Feng  
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**Office Hours:** T 14:00-15:00 or by appointment

### **Course Description**

This course will investigate key issues and debates surrounding the roles and uses of technology (particularly new media and information and communication technologies) within contemporary societies. More generally, we examine linkages between science, technology, and society (STS), with an eye to understanding how these domains shape one another. We will approach these topics through a variety of theoretical perspectives, including science and technology studies, communication studies, and related fields.

Authors from different schools of thought will be studied with the aim of mapping out central debates in the field. These theoretical perspectives will then be used to inform discussions of contemporary STS issues such as copyright, access to information, privacy and surveillance, culture and identity, commodification, globalization, etc.

By the end of the course students should:

1. Be conversant with a variety of theoretical perspectives on science and technology (particularly new media and ICTs) and their place in society;
2. Be able to think critically about the roles and uses of technologies in modern societies, including their design, marketing, consumption, and use;
3. Have a solid understanding of central questions, concepts, and debates within science and technology studies, communication studies, and related fields that pertain to the scholarly study of science and technology.

### **Objectives of the Course**

The goal of the course is to provide students with a solid understanding of a range of theoretical approaches to the study of new media, ICTs, and technology in general, thereby enabling them to develop their own perspectives and research projects in the field.

## Textbooks and Readings:

A list of readings will be provided on the first day of class. Most readings will be available on reserve at the library or made available in class or through Blackboard. *Students are expected to come prepared for class having done the assigned readings in advance.*

## Assignments and Evaluation

Students will be graded based on the following components:

- Reading responses 30%  
*5 responses total @ 6% each*
- Participation 30%  
*Lead two seminars (20%)*  
*General participation (10%)*
- Research paper 40%

Description of assignments:

- **Reading responses:** On most weeks, students will have the opportunity to prepare a brief written response (~1000 words) to one or more of the assigned readings. Your response should summarize the key points of the reading(s) and present your views or reactions to them. To further class discussion and collaboration, students will post their responses to Blackboard so that classmates can read and comment on them. A total of five responses are due over the course of the term.
- **Participation:** Seminar classes work best when everyone comes prepared and contributes to class discussion. Effective participation requires you to critically engage with ideas presented in the readings as well as ideas presented by your classmates. Participation will be evaluated on two aspects:
  - First, you will be asked to lead two seminar discussions. This entails preparing a brief presentation (15-20 minutes) summarizing the week's readings and leading a class discussion based on those readings.
  - Second, you will be evaluated on your overall class participation, including participation in online forums on Blackboard.
- **Research paper:** This constitutes the main assignment of the course. Each student is to write a 20 page research paper (~5000 words) on a topic that builds upon concepts and ideas introduced in the course. Students are encouraged to choose a topic that relates to their personal research interests. Topics must be approved in advance by the instructor. Papers are due on the last day of classes. In addition, students will give a class presentation on their research.

Note that it is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment.

**Registrar-scheduled Final Examination:** No

### **Policy for Late Assignments**

A penalty of one sub-grade (e.g., A- to B+) will be assessed for each day an assignment is late. After 5 days, late assignments will **NOT** be accepted. Under exceptional circumstances (e.g., medical illness), students may petition for an extension.

### **Writing Skills Statement**

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, although to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Research papers must be properly documented.

If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: [www.efwr.ucalgary.ca](http://www.efwr.ucalgary.ca)

### **Grading System**

In this class, you will receive grades in the 4-point scale (2.7, 3.0, 3.3) *rather than* percentages. Sometimes you may receive grade points between letter grades. 3.5 is the mathematical mid-point between a B+ (3.3) and an A- (3.7) and 3.15 is the mid-point between a B (3.0) and a B+ (3.3), etc.

### **Plagiarism**

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. Readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. This includes assignments submitted in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media, and material taken from such sources.

Please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (SS 106, [efwr.ucalgary.ca](http://efwr.ucalgary.ca)) if you have any questions regarding how to document sources.

### **Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre (220-8237) and discuss

your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of the course.

### **Students' Union**

For details about the current Students' Union contacts for the Department of Communication and Culture see [www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/su](http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/su)

### **"SAFEWALK" Program -- 220-5333**

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night -- call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot booths.

### **Ethics**

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see

The Department of Communication and Culture Research Ethics site:

<http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/ethics>

or the University of Calgary Research Ethics site:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/compliance/ethics/info/undergrad/>

### **Schedule of Lectures and Readings**

A complete schedule of lectures and readings will be distributed on the first day of class.