

**Department of Communication and Culture**  
**Communications Studies (COMS) 623 - Seminar 01**  
**Social Contexts of Technology**  
**Fall 2013**  
**We 13:00-15:45 SS 315**

**Instructor:** Richard Hawkins  
**Office/Phone Number:** SS 306; 220-6548  
**Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 10:00-12:00 or by appointment  
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**Website:** N/A

**Additional Information**

N/A

**Course Description**

This course will investigate key theories, issues and debates from a variety of disciplinary perspectives as concerns the origins, roles, uses and governance of technology in contemporary societies. Through a series of instructor-mediated discussions, student presentations and individual research projects, students will explore key arguments and approaches relating generally to technology as a “problem” in the analysis of social, political and cultural issues. Students will discuss these ideas critically and contextualize them in current issues and debates.

**Course Objectives**

- To familiarize students with seminal theoretical and empirical perspectives on technology and society from a variety of influential intellectual perspectives.
- To enable students to formulate original critical perspectives and arguments about technology in contemporary society that are informed by knowledge and evidence.
- To build a solid multidisciplinary foundation drawn from different intellectual perspectives including communications studies, science, technology and society studies, innovation studies, and philosophy, among others, that will equip students to pursue advanced research related to technology and society.

**Course organization:**

The course will revolve around individual research projects, leading to a *research paper* to be handed in at the end of Term. Students will participate in two blocks of seminars:

- ***Instructor-mediated discussions:*** Students will engage in critical discussions based upon reading of a common group of texts relating to specific themes. Over the course of these discussions, students will prepare written responses to selected readings as discussed in class.

- ***Student-led research seminars:*** Students will present a work-in-progress seminar based upon their final papers.

### **Internet and electronic communication device information**

Students are reminded to turn mobile telephones and other electronic devices off during the sessions and to use laptops for course-related purposes only. Students expecting emergency communications during a session are exempted from these provisions upon prior notification of the instructor.

Electronic recording of seminar proceedings will be permitted only for students who have a formally diagnosed physical or learning disability that requires this action. Written proof of disclosure of such disabilities to the relevant university administrative bodies will be required before such permission is granted (refer to the Students with Disabilities section below).

Otherwise, students are encouraged to make creative use of media in the seminar whenever they wish. Students who may have special media requirements for seminar presentations other than an Ethernet connection and classroom projector should notify the instructor at least 4 weeks beforehand so that arrangements can be made with Media Services.

### **Textbooks/Readings**

List of core readings for Thematic Seminars will be provided at the beginning of Term.

### **Assignments and Evaluation**

#### **1. *Thematic discussions:***

The course will begin with a series of seven instructor mediated thematic discussions, each oriented to a key theme in exploring the relationship between technology and society. Each session will discuss a group of core texts, each participant being responsible for reading and being able to comment critically upon 2-3 specific texts each week. The instructor will call upon students to give brief expositions of key ideas contained in these papers and then open the floor for discussion. Oral responses to instructor and student questions and comments in these discussions will form part of the overall course assessment.

#### **2. *Reading responses:***

Students will submit **three written responses** (~1500 words each) to selected readings discussed in the instructor-mediated discussions. These responses will explore these readings in more depth. They may relate to single or multiple texts and/or themes at the discretion of the student. They may also reference other texts as chosen by the student – e.g. they may compare and contrast the ideas in the required reading with alternative ideas in readings selected by the student. Responses should cover (1) the intellectual background of the authors and the readings, (2) the content and main ideas (3) the implications and insights for investigating technology and society in the contemporary milieu, with reference to topical issues, examples or perspectives that are of interest to the student. To further enhance class discussion and collaboration, students will post their responses to Blackboard so that their colleagues can refer to them. All written responses must be received by 30 October.

### 3. *Research seminars:*

In the final weeks of Term, each student will lead a one-hour seminar (20 minute presentation, plus 40 minute discussion) based upon his/her research for the Term Paper. This seminar should explain the topic as well as the theoretical background and approach with reference to ideas discussed in the first part of the course. It should also discuss the progress of the research: e.g. conceptual or methodological problems and how they were addressed.

Students are free to present and organize these seminars in any way they prefer. Use of audio-visual aids is at the discretion of the student BUT will not contribute to the evaluation. Students are encouraged to use media selectively and creatively where it can contribute to making and/or illustrating discussion points more effectively. Students are discouraged from using bullet points. You will be assessed solely on the basis of the *quality* of your observations and arguments, NOT on how you present them. Students must submit a written summary of their presentations to the instructor following the presentation.

#### *Research paper:*

Each student will write an 18-20 page fully 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 in connection with eventual thesis topics. *Topics must be approved in advance by the instructor.* Papers are due on December 7 at the beginning of class. The final session will be devoted to informal presentation and discussion of observations and findings.

All written assignments should be *double-spaced* in a suitable font such as Times New Roman 12 point. References and bibliographic information should be formatted consistently in an accepted academic style; consult a style manual if necessary.

All research papers (term papers) must be in a format suitable for submission to a peer reviewed venue. Diagrams, charts, tables and appendices must be clearly identified and numbered with appropriate reference to them appearing in the text. Headings and sub-headings should be arrayed in a clear logical hierarchy.

It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment.

Note: Please hand in your papers directly to your instructor if possible. If this is not possible, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

#### **Evaluation:**

<i>Assignment One</i> – Oral contributions to thematic discussions	<b>10%</b>
<i>Assignment Two</i> – Written reading responses	<b>30%</b>
<i>Assignment Three</i> – Student research seminar	<b>10%</b>
<i>Assignment Three</i> – Research Paper	<b>50%</b>

**Registrar's- scheduled exam:** No

**Policy for late assignments:** Late assignments are discouraged. A penalty of one half 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. All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

### **Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act**

This course is conducted in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP). As one consequence, students should identify themselves on all written work by placing their name on the front page and their ID number. You will be required to provide a piece of picture identification in order to pick up any assignments or look at a final exam from SS320 after classes have ended. For more information see also <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>.

### **Writing Skills Statement**

Department policy directs that all written assignments 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**

The following grading system is used in the Department of Communication and Culture for all Graduate courses:

Letter Grade	Grading Scale	Grade Point Value (see <a href="#">U of C Calendar: Academic Standing</a> )
A+	96-100	4
A	90-95.99	4
A -	85-89.99	3.7
B+	80-84.99	3.3
B	75-79.99	3
B-	70-74.99	2.7
C+	65-69.99	2.3
C	60-64.99	2
C-	55-59.99	1.7
D+	53-54.99	1.3
D	50-52.99	1
F	0-49	0

## **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 Writing Support Services (3rd Floor Taylor Family Digital Library, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>) if you have any questions regarding how to document sources.

## **Academic Misconduct**

For information on academic misconduct and the consequences thereof please see the current University of Calgary Graduate Calendar at the following link:  
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

## **Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with Student Accessibility Services (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 Faculty of Arts, see [www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/su](http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/su)

## **Graduate Students' Association**

For details on the Graduate Students' Association, please see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/GSA/>

## **Student Ombudsman**

For details on the Student Ombudsman, please see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/GSA/services/ombudsperson.html>

## **Emergency Evacuation and Assembly Points**

For information on the emergency evacuation procedures and assembly points, please see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>

## "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 (ie. surveys, interviews, observation) as a 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:

Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB)

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/ethics/cfreb>

### Reading List

A full reading list will be supplied at the beginning of term.

### Schedule of Lectures

Session	Date	
1	Sept 11	Introduction and organization
		<b>Thematic Seminars</b>
2	Sept 18	1. Technology and history
3	Sept 25	2. Technology and science
4	Oct 2	3. Technology and philosophy
5	Oct 9	4. Technology and culture
6	Oct 16	5. Technology and innovation
7	Oct 23	6. Technology and governance
8	Oct 30	7. Technology and society <i>Written reading responses due.</i>
9	Nov 6	Seminar preparation break (no class meeting)
		<b>Student Research Seminars</b>
10	Nov 13	(As scheduled at the beginning of term)
11	Nov 20	
12	Nov 27	
13	Dec 4	<i>Research papers due</i> – informal sharing of findings