

McGill University
Department of Sociology
Course Outline – SOCI 235: Technology and Society

Number of Credits: 3

Term: Fall 2016

Course Schedule: Mon, Wed, Fri, 13:35–14:25

Location: ENGMC 304

TA 1: Alissa Mazar (alissa.mazar@mail.mcgill.ca)

TA 2: Qiaoling He (qiaoling.he@mail.mcgill.ca)

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Office: 727 Leacock

Office Hours: Mon, 11:30–13:00

TA Office Hours: TBA

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Course Overview: This course is an introduction to Science and Technology Studies (STS), the interdisciplinary study of how science and technology shape society and the environment and, conversely, how society and the environment shape science and technology. There is no denying that science and technology is a driving force in today's world of high modernity – a world deeply textured with complex technologies – but at the same time it has driven the world toward a state of high risk. Our objective is to understand this reality. By the end of this course students should be able to put the commonsensical notions about the manifold blessings of science and technology under a critical scrutiny.

Course Materials: The material covered in this course will be drawn from Rudi Volti, *Society and Technological Change*, 7th edition (New York: Worth Publishers, 2014), supplemented by additional materials, as appropriate. Additional materials will be posted on *myCourses* in due course. The required textbook is available at McGill Bookstore for purchase. A copy of the textbook will be on reserve at McLennan Library. You can also buy a used copy of the 6th edition of the textbook. Evidently, you will have a much easier time with the course material if you keep up with the weekly readings.

Instructional Method: Although I will be lecturing most of the time, I actively encourage your participation in class discussions. To facilitate this, we will use a classroom audience response technology called *TurningPoint*. You are required to open a *Turning Account* and download the *TurningPoint Cloud* app at the following link: <https://account.turningtechnologies.com/account/>. The technology is free of charge. You just need a laptop or any tablet or smartphone with Wi-Fi connectivity to respond to in-class questions or discussion points. For any technical support, please contact McGill IT Services at <http://www.mcgill.ca/it/get-started-it/need-help> or call 514-398-3398.

Since an ideal level of participation can be hampered by the large size of the class, you will have another opportunity to become more actively engaged in the discussion of class topics through smaller-sized conferences led by Teaching Assistants. If there is something you could not raise in class due to time constraints or was not addressed in sufficient detail, conferences will be the ideal chance to bring this up. Additionally, through your interaction with me and your TAs beyond the classroom you will have plenty of chances to clarify any concepts which still remain ambiguous to you. I strongly encourage you to see us during our office hours.

Special Needs: If you have a disability and need special arrangements, please contact me and the Office for Students with Disabilities at 514-398-6009 (or email: disabilities.students@mcgill.ca).

Evaluation: Your grades will be based on the following components:

Midterm exam – 30% (multiple choice and short-answer questions, date: October 17, in class)

Final exam – 40% (multiple choice and short-answer questions, date: during the exam period)

One short essay – 15% (to be written in a group of three, due November 25, in conference)

Conference attendance and participation – 10% (for ten conferences in ten weeks)

Class attendance and participation – 5% (for 20 classes after the add/drop period).

Examinations: There will be two written examinations worth 70% of your final grade (30% for the midterm and 40% for the final exam). The exams will involve short-answer and multiple-choice questions and be based on lectures and required readings covered until the examination date. The final exam will not be cumulative; that is, it will be based on post-midterm lectures and readings only. You will write the midterm exam on October 17 in class during the regular class time. The date of the final exam will be given by the University. Failure to write the exams on the scheduled dates will result in a grade of zero for that exam, unless there is some legitimate circumstance with appropriate proof and arrangements are made in advance. A deferral exam will be offered after the final exam on a date given by the University.

Essay: In a group of three (3), you have to write one (1) original essay on a pre-approved topic and the essay is worth 15% of your final grade. The essay is due on November 25 in your conference. You must hand in a printed copy of your essay. After the due date, a late submission will be penalized at the rate of 10% for each day late. See below the guideline for writing your essay.

Conferences: You must sign up for one of the following four conference sections when the registration is open on Minerva after 02:30 PM, September 21:

10:35 - 11:25, Room: BIRKS 111, Cap. 40

11:35 - 12:25, Room: RPHYS 114, Cap. 40

01:35 - 02:25, Room: ENGMC 304, Cap. 40

02:35 - 03:25, Room: RPHYS 115, Cap. 40.

Spots of registration for each conference section (maximum 40) will be filled up on the first-come-first-served basis. All conferences will be facilitated by your TA. Ten percent of your course grade will be assigned to your attendance and participation in 10 conferences. If you miss any conference, you will not be receiving any grade for that conference. Under an extenuating circumstance with appropriate proof, you will be given only one chance to make up one missed conference by writing an extra assignment.

Class Attendance and Participation: *TurningPoint* will record your class attendance and participation grades out of 5%.

Course Calendar and Readings: Please note that if necessary changes may be made to the following breakdown and readings. All changes will be announced beforehand in the class and will be posted on *myCourses* as well. If a topic is not covered in one class, it will be carried forward to the next. In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Sept. 2 – An introduction to the course. *No readings.*

Sept. 7 & 9 – The nature of technology and technological change. *Readings:* Ch. 1, 2 of the textbook.

Sept. 12, 14 & 16 – The sources of technological change. *Readings:* Ch. 3, 4.

Sept. 19 & 21 – The diffusion of technology. *Readings:* Ch. 5.

Sept. 23 – Conference 1. *No regular class and readings.*

Sept. 26 & 28 – Effects of technology on environment. *Readings:* Ch. 6.

Sept. 30 – Conference 2. *No regular class and readings.*

Oct. 3 & 5 – Effects of technology on health. Ch. 7, 8.

Oct. 7 – Conference 3. *No regular class and readings.*

Oct. 10 & 12 – Effects of technology on work. Ch. 9, 10.

Oct. 14 – Conference 4. *No regular class and readings.*

Oct. 17 – Midterm exam in class.

Oct. 19 – Industrial production system. *Readings:* Ch. 11.

Oct. 21 – Conference 5. *No regular class and readings.*

Oct. 24 & 26 – Information and communications technologies. *Readings:* Ch. 12, 13.

Oct. 28 – Conference 6. *No regular class and readings.*

Oct. 31 – The Internet Age and the Digital Divide. *Readings:* Ch. 14.

Nov. 2 – The evolution and consequences of military technologies. *Readings:* Ch. 15.

Nov. 4 – Conference 7. *No regular class and readings.*

Nov. 7 & 9 – War, terrorism and the limit of new weapons. *Readings:* Ch. 16, 17.

Nov. 11 – Conference 8. *No regular class and readings.*

Nov. 14 & 16 – Control of technology. *Readings:* Ch. 18, 19.

Nov. 18 – Conference 9. *No regular class and readings.*

Nov. 21 & 23 – Governing technology. *Readings:* Ch. 20.

Nov. 25 – Conference 10. *No regular class and readings. Your essay is due in conference.*

Nov. 28 & 30 – The future of technology and society. *Readings:* 1. A documentary film screening and discussion on the film on Nov. 28 (the film will be selected later). 2. Global Agenda Council on the Future of Software & Society, “Deep Shifts – Technology Tipping Points and Societal Impact” (World Economic Forum, 2015).

Dec. 2 – Review class. *No readings.*

Dec. 5 – Giving your essay back to you and wrapping up. *No readings. End of semester.*

GUIDELINE FOR YOUR ESSAY

Topic: By the fifth conference (October 21), select your group members and a topic and get a brief outline of your essay approved by your TA. Meet your TA and me during our office hours and get our help on selecting your topic and writing the essay. You have to write a short essay on the approved topic, addressing a research question on the relationship between technology and society. A research question may look like this: “Is technology an enabler of, or constraint on, our freedom?” To answer your research question, you have to support your arguments with empirical evidence. The essay should contain an introduction, a theoretical framework or a literature review section, an empirical section with a brief discussion of results, and a conclusion.

Typing: Your essay should be approximately 10 pages long, double-spaced, typed in 12 point Times New Roman font with one-inch margin on all sides. You should have a cover page containing the title of the essay and the names and IDs of each of the group members. You can add pages as necessary (beyond the limit of 10 pages) for any endnotes, references, and appendices.

Reference and Citation: Your essay is an academic writing. You must include a complete list of references (at least five academic sources such as journal articles and/or books) used in your paper. You should follow a consistent reference and citation style throughout the paper. The American Sociological Association (ASA) style of citation is preferred. A short guideline on the ASA style is posted on *myCourses*.

Language: “In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.”

« Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue). »

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is punishable. If you are not sure about what constitutes plagiarism, talk to me. McGill’s policy on plagiarism is as follows:

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity> for more information).”

Course Evaluations: I will strongly encourage you to participate in both midterm and end-of-course evaluations. [End-of-course evaluations](#) are one of the ways that McGill works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student’s learning experience. You will be notified when the evaluations are available. Please note that a minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students.

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