

STS 315 – Sports, Technology, and Society

Fall 2023
MW 11:30 AM – 12:50 PM
Faculty Memorial 405

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Office: Cullimore 418

Office Hours: MW 10:20 AM – 11:20 AM

Prerequisites

HUM 102 with a grade of C or higher, and one History and Humanities GER 200 level course with a grade of C or higher.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- restate the arguments contained in assigned readings and class presentations
- identify the conclusion of arguments
- identify the premises of arguments
- evaluate arguments
- write while reading
- construct their own arguments
- demonstrate fluency in using basic STS concepts
- develop and defend positions about issues related to Sports, Technology, and Society

Course Description

This course will address philosophical and sociological issues surrounding sports, especially questions that arise with advances in technology. For instance:

- Realignment is radically changing the face of college sports. What's the role of technology in facilitating realignment? Is realignment good or bad for college sports?
- Major League Baseball introduced several rule changes for the 2023 season. These changes were largely motivated by technology, in particular broadcast technology. Were the changes good for the game?
- COVID-19 has changed sports, perhaps temporarily, perhaps permanently. Some sports are attempting to compensate with changes to rules or game practices. Others are attempting to develop procedures to help ensure that athletes, fans, and others remain safe while engaging in or with sporting activities. Others have attempted to develop changes to equipment to ensure player safety. What is the future of sports in the face of COVID-19?
- FiveThirtyEight, edited by renowned sabermetrician Nate Silver, announced that Steph Curry, point guard for the NBA's Golden State Warriors, had [broken](#) basketball during

the 2015-16 season. Before we can decide whether such a claim is true, we need to address a few other questions, including: What is basketball? How should it work? How could we tell if it is broken? Should the kinds of statistical analyses conducted by FiveThirtyEight have real ramifications for the NBA? Should Steph Curry cause rule changes? Should other players try to emulate Curry? If basketball is indeed broken, how could we fix it?

- Golf courses, especially those that emphasize playing the ball through the air (such as Augusta National) rather than on the ground (such as The Old Course at St. Andrews), are increasingly vulnerable to golfers using new technologies to develop longer, straighter irons, more reliable drivers, and balls that behave in ways designed to compensate for a player's swing faults. Should courses be redesigned? Should stricter limits be placed on equipment development? Should golf be easier than it is? More difficult?
- What's the difference between a game and a sport? Is fitness a sport? What is Crossfit and why is it on television? For that matter, why is any sport (or game) on television? What do we get out of spectating? What is a real fan? If I move to a new place, should I remain loyal to my old team(s), or should I adopt teams near me? Does the fact that I can pay to watch so-called 'out of market' games undermine local support for teams?
- Why are professional athletes paid so much money? Should the US Women's National Soccer Team players earn the same as the players on the Men's Team? Should they earn more? How should on-field performance come into play? What about television viewership?
- What position should we take on performance-enhancing drugs? Should that position be different for amateur and professional athletes? Should it vary from sport to sport?

Classes

Classes will revolve around discussion of homework assignments. I will talk; however, I expect questions and contributions from students. I also expect you to have done the assignments *before* class. I encourage you to go back and revisit assignments after class.

I chose assignments that are likely to provoke thought and discussion. For this reason, I expect regular attendance in class. I also expect everyone to show respect for the opinions of others. I encourage you, however, to find respectful ways to disagree. The point of the class is not to reach a consensus, but rather to provoke thinking.

I encourage you to participate actively in discussion. It is in your own interest if I know your name. There will also be opportunities for discussion (as well as writing) on the class Canvas site. The class will have its own discussion forum to which students will be expected to contribute.

Attendance Policy and Participation

I expect you to attend all classes and to have legitimate excuses for any classes missed. The official path to secure a legitimate excuse is via the office of the Dean of Students. I also expect you to catch up on whatever you miss if you are absent for any reason.

You will receive a **class participation grade**, described in greater detail below. Failure to attend class or participate actively in discussion will negatively affect your grade for the course.

Makeup Policy

In the event of an unexcused absence, you will *not* have the opportunity to make up any graded assignments. If you show up late, you will *not* be given more time to complete the required work.

Other Course Policies

I expect you to join class on time and keep disruptions during class to a minimum. Do *not* use phones, tablets, and other similar devices to chat/text/or talk with family and friends during class. Please bring some sort of electronic device that will allow you to access the internet on campus. Since I may ask you to do some writing in class, it will be better if you bring a laptop or tablet, rather than a smartphone, unless you are some sort of texting whiz. If you do not have such a device, then please bring paper and a writing instrument to allow you to complete the assignment in class (which you can then transcribe and upload to Canvas later).

Phone/tablet/laptop use is permitted in class only for class purposes (taking notes, Googling something I said, carrying out a writing assignment, etc.). If you choose to use your device for purposes other than those related to the class, it is your loss. If you distract other students in doing so, it is their loss, as well. I expect you to respect your fellow classmates and your instructor enough not to distract yourselves and others. With this policy, I am attempting to treat you as an adult. As with all other policies, I reserve the right to change my mind or make exceptions for specific individuals.

The best way to contact me is to visit me during office hours or via email. I check email less frequently on the weekends. You are, of course, encouraged to ask questions before, during, or after class or schedule a time to meet.

NJIT Statement on Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: <http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. **Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university.** If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu.

In the context of this course, unless group work is specifically authorized by me, all work should be completed on your own without any unauthorized aids. *All* writing, including on your Canvas entries, is expected to represent your own work, completed on your own specifically for this course. This means that you cannot copy text from other papers, websites, encyclopedias, or any other source without quoting any copied material and fully and accurately citing your sources. In addition, if you refer to, use, or build upon ideas from other work, even if you don't quote that work exactly, you should fully acknowledge your sources. When citing an online article, a link to the relevant webpage will suffice as a full citation on Canvas.

I take plagiarism and citations very seriously and do not enjoy having to question whether a document constitutes plagiarism. For all our sakes, please take care to cite all referenced material. For any questions involving these or any other Academic Integrity issues, please consult me.

Students with Disabilities

NJIT offers accommodations to students with disabilities. If you need some sort of academic accommodation, please provide me with the appropriate paperwork before/after class, during my office hours, or email me to schedule a meeting.

Basic Needs Security

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so.

Requirements and Grading

This course is graded according to the requirements specified and weighted below.

Class participation	50%
Presentation #1	25%
Presentation #2	25%

Class participation (50%): participation includes discussion in class, possible occasional quizzes, in-class assignments, attendance, and Canvas Discussion Forum/blog postings.

You may have noticed that class participation is 50% of your final grade. That's a lot. There's a reason for it. Unlike some other types of thinking, philosophy is essentially exploratory and intellectually risky. You will need to develop the habit of taking risks in class in order to succeed in developing and defending your own positions about sports, technology, and society. This means you will need to practice. You should practice at home by completing the assignments and writing about them before coming to class. At home, you can take large intellectual risks, since you won't have the added pressure of being in front of the classroom when you do so. The Canvas Discussions are meant to be a safe place for you to practice taking the intellectual risks necessary for good philosophical thinking.

When you attend class, you will already have done some thinking about the issues we will discuss that day. Some of your fellow students may have responded to your blog entry with questions or comments. They might disagree with you. That's good, because discussion is really boring if everyone agrees about everything. Come to class prepared to defend or revise your thinking.

Class may be a scarier place for some students to take risks; but it is also a safe place for you to explore your own thinking. As long as what you are saying relates to what we are discussing in class, and as long as you are respectful of your classmates and instructor, feel free to say what you want. No single relevant statement you make in class will negatively affect your grade. So, it doesn't matter if, during class discussion, you cannot remember that dude Plato's name or get some niggling detail wrong. Readings, blog posts, and class discussion are the places for you to make mistakes so you can get things right during your presentations.

Canvas Discussions

Students will post blog entries on the assignments for each class, unless otherwise noted. As long as you engage the assignment, and as long as your blog entry is posted before class, you will receive credit for that blog post.

Blog entries should generally consist in your own reflections on the assigned readings: What is this person saying? What is at stake in their argument? What is the conclusion of the argument? What claims are used to support that conclusion? Whom/what are they arguing against? How does their position relate to what others have said? Do I agree or disagree with their point? Why?

N.B. – This means there should be two parts to every blog post:

1. Restating the author's position (what's their conclusion, what are their premises, etc.?)
2. Stating your own position about the author's position (are their premises true, etc.?)

Since I assign readings relevant to the course learning outcomes, each blog entry provides you the opportunity to practice the skills necessary to achieve one or more of the course learning outcomes.

Occasionally, I will provide a more specific prompt for an assignment. When I do, please follow the more specific directions, as well.

To be abundantly clear, entries must be completed *before the beginning* of each class. In general, entries will be “graded” on the basis of whether students have successfully engaged the assigned reading, and whether they have been turned in on time. So, missing a deadline will mean no credit for the assigned entry. Not engaging the reading will mean no credit for the assigned reading. Addressing the assigned reading and posting your entry before the beginning of each class will earn credit for the assigned reading. At the end of the semester, the discussion forum/blog portion of your participation grade will be calculated as a percentage of assignments turned in. If you complete and turn in all blog assignments on time, you will receive 100% for 50% of your class participation grade, or 25 points toward your final course grade. If you skip the discussion forum altogether, the highest grade you can receive for the class is a C.

N.B. – Plagiarism will be severely punished. Copying someone else's work is cheating. Allowing someone to copy your work is cheating. Googling “Socrates” and copying from a website is cheating. Copying from anywhere is cheating. **You must read each assignment and write your own Canvas entry on that assignment before each class for which there is an assignment.**

The remainder of your participation grade will be based on attendance and discussion in class. I should definitely know your name well before the end of the semester.

Two Class Presentations (25% each): Students will give two 20-minute presentations during class on topics to be determined in consultation with me. The grade for each presentation will be a combination of instructor and peer evaluations. Rubrics are posted on Canvas. The point of peer evaluations is to ensure that your grades reflect your level of contribution to the group.

Letter and numerical grades are translatable on the following scale:

A = 90%+
B+ = 87-89.99%
B = 80-86.99%
C+ = 77-79.99%
C = 70-76.99%
D = 60-69.99%
F = 0-59.99%

Required Texts

I will post reading assignments on the course Canvas site. Whenever possible, I will try to find readings related to current events. For that reason, assignments are not all listed here, but will appear on Canvas ~ 7 days in advance of the due date. I encourage you to bring good article/topics to my attention.

Class Schedule**Wk 1:** (Sept 6)

W: Class intro and expectations

Wk 2: (Sept 11/13)

M: Read and post an entry on Canvas about the following article. Andy Miah. "Sports." *Ethics, Science, Technology, and Engineering: A Global Resource*. Ed. J. Britt Holbrook. 2nd ed. Vol. 4. Farmington Hills, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2015. 247-250.

W: Find and post an article related to a potential topic for your presentation.

Wk 3: (Sept 18/20)

M: Repeat Wednesday's assignment with a new article.

W: Formulate a potential topic for your presentation.

Wk 4: (Sept 25/27)

M: Read and comment on at least 5 of your classmates' posts from weeks 2 and 3.

W: Find and discuss an article related to one of your classmate's potential topics.

Wk 5: (Oct 2/4)

M: Repeat Wednesday's assignment with a different classmate's potential topic.

W: Presentation prep

Wk 6: (Oct 9/11)

M: Presentation prep

W: Presentation prep

Wk 7: (Oct 16/18)

M: Presentations

W: Presentations

Wk 8: (Oct 23/25)

T: Presentations

R: Publishing Presentations

Wk 9: (Oct 30/Nov 1)

T: TBD

R: TBD

Wk 10: (Nov 6/8)

T: TBD

R: TBD

Wk 11: (Nov 13/15)

M: LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW

W: Presentation prep

Wk 12: (Nov 20/22)

M: Presentation prep

Wk 13: (Nov 27/29)

M: Presentation prep

W: Presentation prep

Wk 14: (Dec 4/6)

T: Presentations

R: Presentations

Wk 15: (Dec 11/13)

M: Presentations

W: Publishing presentations

N.B. – Everything on the syllabus is subject to change. When changes are made, a new version or corresponding changes will be posted on the course Moodle site.

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HONORS COURSE ADDENDUM

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Students taking this class for Honors credit will be expected to take an especially active role, which will be evaluated as part of your Class Participation grade.

There are two main ways in which you can take this active role.

1. Each of you will take on the role of leading groups for presentations. Leading the groups means organizing things generally, including times for meetings outside of class, attempting to make sure everyone in your group participates, being the one to initiate any slides for presentations, etc. Because there are two presentations over the course of the semester, you will lead two groups, which may or may not contain the same members. Your effectiveness as group leader will also be evaluated by your peers as part of their peer evaluations. I will not have a separate category for them to rank you as a group leader. However, being a good group leader will be reflected in their evaluations of you.
2. This course deals with timely topics. As such, it depends on a regular supply of timely materials for us to discuss in class. If you see a story or article or topic relevant to this class, post a blog entry on it, along with a link. I have created a special blog section called 'Happenings' for you to put those. By the end of the semester, you should have made *at least 5* posts in this section. Posting more, and carrying on a conversation there about them, would be even better.