

STS 201 Understanding Technological Society

Spring 2025

Class Meeting: Tuesday and Thursday 4-5:20 p.m. in Faculty Memorial Hall 404

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 2:30-3:30 p.m.

Office location: Cullimore 332

Class Instructor: Tyler Leli

Requirements

- (1) Come to the seminar with questions, examples, objections, and so on.
- (2) Attend class and actively participate in discussions.
- (3) There will be no books that you will need to buy for this course. Links to all readings will be posted on Canvas.

Grading Structure

1. Attendance – 10%
2. Participation – 10%
3. Short Essay Assignments (250 words, 5 assignments – four highest grades taken into average) – 20%
4. Peer Review – 5% (split 2.5/2.5 for mid-term and final assessment)
5. Mid-Term Essay (1000 words) – 20%
6. Debate – 10%
7. Final Essay – 25%

Grading Scale

Grading Scale:

A = 100-90	B+ = 89-87	B = 86-80	C+ = 79-77	C = 76-70	F = 69-0
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Late Work

Late work will not be accepted (except in the case of an excused absence). Students should contact their instructor in advance of due dates when having difficulty completing an assignment.

Technology

Canvas is NJIT's learning management system.

Students use their NJIT email as the primary method of communication and maintain an appropriate tone. Include an appropriate subject line and name in all emails for more efficient correspondence.

Students should not use cell phones during class unless needed for a specific activity. Resist the distraction and focus on one thing at a time - classroom lessons, activities and discussion. Active engagement in class leads to better outcomes in grading. Everyone should set phones to silent as a courtesy.

NJIT University Code 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 be reported. Per university policy, an initial violation of the code results in a zero for the flagged assignment and a second violation leads to a failing grade for the class. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu.

All assignments submitted shall be considered "graded work" and all aspects of your coursework are covered by the Code on Academic Integrity. All projects and homework assignments are to be completed individually unless otherwise specified.

Chat GPT and other Large Language Models (LLMs)

STS 201 follows the guidelines from the NJIT University Code on Academic Integrity:

“Artificial intelligence usage is not permitted in this course. The expectation of this course is for students to work through the course without assistance from any type of artificial intelligence to better develop their own skills in this content area. As such, artificial intelligence usage is not permitted throughout this course.”

Any and all use of LLMs will be treated the same as any other violation of NJIT’s University Code on Academic Integrity.

Accessibility Needs

Every attempt will be made to accommodate qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a documented disability, please see me as early in the semester as possible to

discuss the necessary accommodations, and/or contact the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services at 973-596-5417.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center (Central King Building G17) is available for in-person and virtual sessions. This resource is free and intended to help you improve your writing and communication skills with tutors who help with planning assignments, improving your writing, refining an essay or multimedia project, for classes, personal statements, etc. For more information or to make an appointment, please visit <https://www.njit.edu/writingcenter/>.



NEED HELP? KNOW WHO TO CALL

Please note following important numbers that will come in handy in case of emergency:

EXTERNAL RESOURCES	AVAILABILITY	CONTACT NUMBER
Suicide Prevention	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(973) 623-2323 (University Hospital-Newark)
Drug/ Alcohol Addiction	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(877) 630-8262
Crime Victim Compensation Office	Monday – Friday 8 AM – 8 PM	(877) 658-2221
Rape Care Center	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(877) 733-2273 (Essex County)
Sexual Assault Hotline	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(800) 656-HOPE (National)
Psychiatric Emergency	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(973) 924-7416 (Newark Beth Israel Hospital)
NJIT RESOURCES	AVAILABILITY	CONTACT NUMBER
NJIT Public Safety	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(973) 596-3111 (Emergency) (973) 596-3120 (Non-Emergency)
Dean of Students (TITLE IX – Sexual Misconduct Report/Response)	Monday – Friday 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM	(973) 596-3466
Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)	Monday – Friday 8:30 AM - 5 PM	(973) 596-3414
Student Health Services (SHS)	Monday – Friday 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM	(973) 596-3621

Reading list

These will be pre-assigned readings for each class. This schedule is subject to be modified based on progress in class. Readings will average about ten pages before each class.

Week 1: Orientation and Intro to Technology and Society

Tuesday, January 21

- Syllabus Review

Thursday, January 23: *Primary causes of technological growth*

- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/news-guns-germs-steel-jared-diamond-interview>
- <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/technology-and-the-innovation-economy/>

Week 2: Capitalism and society

Tuesday, January 28: *Examining the US economy*

- <https://www.adamsmithworks.org/documents/chapter-1-of-the-division-of-labour>
Adam Smith , *The Wealth of Nations* ch. 1
- <https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/031815/united-states-considered-market-economy-or-mixed-economy.asp>
- <https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/pikettys-inequality-story-in-six-charts>

Thursday, January 30: *How do humans make choices?*

- <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/12/why-do-econ-classes-barely-mention-behavioral-economics/578092/>
- <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-two-friends-who-changed-how-we-think-about-how-we-think>
- <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2016/11/decision-science-daniel-kahneman-amos-tversky>

Week 3: Surveillance

Tuesday, February 4: *Government Surveillance Powers Overview*

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/21/opinion/fisa-section-702-fbi-privacy.html>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/20/us/politics/senate-passes-surveillance-law-extension.html?searchResultPosition=5>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDai5Ntb-bg>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=saGAUe-dVXc>

Thursday, February 6: *How far should policing surveillance go?*

- <https://www.propublica.org/article/police-body-cameras-video-ai-law-enforcement>

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/09/nyregion/newark-surveillance-cameras-police.html>
- <https://www.newarkpublicsafety.org/npd/citizen-virtual-patrol/>

Week 4: The Future of Work

Tuesday, February 11: *Technology and Work*

- <https://hbr.org/2022/11/research-roundup-how-technology-is-transforming-work>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ukvd4adVcHw>
- <https://rooseveltinstitute.org/publications/good-labor-policy-is-good-technology-policy/>

Thursday, February 13: *Universal Basic Income* + Conditional vs. Unconditional Assistance

- Bidadanure, Juliana Uhuru. "The political theory of universal basic income." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22.1 (2019): 481-501.
<https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050317-070954>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzPoDCmYmwI>
- <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2021-03-06/stockton-study-universal-basic-income>

Week 5: Environmental Justice

Tuesday, February 25: What is environmental justice and where does the public stand on climate issues?

- <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/environmental-justice-movement#:~:text=Environmental%20justice%20essentially%20means%20that,policies%20that%20shape%20their%20communities.>
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/08/09/what-the-data-says-about-americans-views-of-climate-change/>

Thursday, February 27: Contemporary US Climate Policy + Congestion Pricing

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/09/climate/biden-environmental-rules-epa.html>
- <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2022/7/28/23281757/whats-in-climate-bill-inflation-reduction-act>
- <https://e360.yale.edu/features/trump-second-term-climate>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/14/nyregion/congestion-pricing-nyc.html>

Week 5: Social Determinants of Health + Obligations to Future Generations

Tuesday, March 4: Social Determinants of Health

- <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1325672/1/1325672.pdf>
- <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health>
- [The Glasgow Effect](#)

Thursday, March 6: *What duties do we have to future generations?*

- <https://aeon.co/essays/having-children-is-not-life-affirming-its-immoral>
- <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/22552963/how-to-be-a-good-ancestor-longtermism-climate-change>

Optional Additional Video

William MacAskill (University of Oxford) discussing what we owe future generations:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shGhMUbdDc4>

<https://aeon.co/essays/elon-musk-puts-his-case-for-a-multi-planet-civilisation>

Week 6: Writing Essays and Peer Review

Tuesday, March 11:

- “A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper” Jim Pryor

chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://philosophy.fas.harvard.edu/files/s/phildept/files/brief_guide_to_writing_philosophy_paper.pdf

- Purdue MLA Writing Style
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_overview_and_workshop.html

Thursday, March 13:

- No readings. Submit your midterm essay by the end of class.

Week 7: Algorithmic Bias

Tuesday, March 25: *Can algorithms be biased?*

- Fazelpour, Sina & Danks, David (2021). Algorithmic bias: Senses, sources, solutions. *Philosophy Compass* 16 (8):e12760.
<https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/share/ATJKT4P3G9WQCSPJ6WGV?target=10.1111/phc3.12760>

Thursday, March 27: Contemporary Issues in Technology (TBD based on current events)

Week 8: Animal Ethics

Tuesday, April 1: *Animal Testing*

- Singer, Peter (1989). All Animals Are Equal. In Tom Regan & Peter Singer (eds.), *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*. Oxford University Press. pp. 215--226.
chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://spot.colorado.edu/~heathwoo/phil1200,Spr07/singer.pdf>

Additional Optional Reading

- Nagel, Thomas. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 83, no. 4, 1974, pp. 435–50. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2183914>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2023.

Thursday, April 3: No class due to a university-wide wellness day.

Week 9: Finance and Society

Tuesday, April 8: *Breaking down the blockchain*

- https://www.ibm.com/topics/blockchain#:~:text=IBM-.What%20is%20blockchain%3F,patents%2C%20copyrights%2C%20branding)).
- <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-blockchain>

Thursday, April 10: *Bitcoin and competitors*

- <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/23071245/bitcoin-price-crypto-ethereum-nfts-defi-stablecoin>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/05/technology/cryptocurrencies-bitcoin-explainer.html?searchResultPosition=4>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/18/technology/bitcoin-halving-countdown.html?searchResultPosition=2>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/05/business/bitcoin-stock-market.html?searchResultPosition=1>

Week 10: Conspiratorial Thinking

Tuesday, April 15: *Conspiracy Theories*

- Why people fall for conspiracy theories, Kaleigh Rogers and Jasmine Mithani, *FiveThirtyEight*,
<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-people-fall-for-conspiracy-theories/>

- Nguyen, C. Th (2018). Escape the echo chamber. Aeon.

<https://aeon.co/essays/why-its-as-hard-to-escape-an-echo-chamber-as-it-is-to-flee-a-culture>

Optional Reading

What Do Conspiracy Theorists Do When Proven Wrong?, *NY Times*, 2024, Stuart A. Thompson

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/07/technology/biden-conspiracy-theories-misinformation.html?searchResultPosition=1>

Thursday, April 17: Open day

- Watch *Feels Good Man* –

<https://www.peacocktv.com/watch-online/movies/feels-good-man/46afd55f-2818-3ab8-8c32-69c2df85dff>

Week 11: Prep Day and In-Class Debate

Tuesday, April 22: Debate groups formed, topics released, research done and roles organized.

Thursday, April 24: In-class debate

Week 12: Final Essay Prep!!

Tuesday, April 29: Finalize topic for second essay and in-class writing session (leave with outline, roughly 500 words to turn into draft before class on Friday)

Thursday, May 1: Peer Review #2 (1000 words, paper outline)

Week 13: Final Essays Due

Tuesday, May 6: Final essays due