Technology and Public Policy
Course Proposal, UCDC
Shelly Steward

Course Description

Robots. Algorithmic Management. Data Surveillance. Rapidly advancing technology presents major challenges to society today, yet also provides tools for innovative solutions that would have been unimaginable a decade ago. This course considers the relationship between technology and public policy, examining aspects of tech that demand policy interventions and asking how tech can better equip governments to effectively lead.

The course begins by examining the relationship between technology and society, illuminating for students how culture, law, and policy have shaped technology's development over the past century. Next, students will explore a range of contemporary issues at the intersection of technology and public policy, including automation, surveillance, algorithmic discrimination, and regulatory challenges. Finally, we will consider the broad relationship between technology and democracy in the 21st century. At the conclusion of the course, each student will draft an original tech policy proposal, which they will share with classmates at a policy pitch event on the last day of class.

Drawing on a combination of academic research, journalistic accounts, and contemporary legislation, the readings of the course provide a range of perspectives from which students can build their own views. Each week, students will be introduced to policy proposals at the state and federal level, as well as international examples. The course is geared toward both students interested in technology who want to think more about its relation to public policy, and policy-oriented students who seek to apply their interest to the growing world of tech. By taking this course, students will develop an understanding of the role of social forces in shaping technology, build skills to analyze and develop technology policy, and learn to write and speak effectively in policy situations.

Sample Syllabus

Part I: The Relationship between Technology and Society

Week 1: What is technology?

Readings: Asimov, Isaac. 1950. "Runaround" in *I, Robot.* New York: Random
               House.

               Anderson, Mark Robert. 2017. "After 75 years, Isaax Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics
               Need Updating." *The Conversation.* March 17.

Week 2: A brief history of technology

Readings: MacGregor, Neil. 2013. Excerpts from *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. New York: Penguin.

Illing, Sean. 2018. "Technology isn't just changing society — it's changing what it means to be human." *Vox*. February 23.

Week 3: A brief history of technology (redux)

Readings: Harari, Yuval Noah. 2015. "Chapter 15: The Marriage of Science and Empire" in *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. New York: Harper.

Brynjolfsson, Erik and Andrew McAffee. 2016. "Chapter 15: Technology and the Future, Which is Very Different from Technology Is the Future" in *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Assignment: Technology policy in the news

Part II: Today's Issues in Technology Policy

Week 4: Automation and job displacement

Readings: Duncan, David Ewing. 2019. "The %$@! Robot that Swiped My Job" in *Talking to Robots: Tales from our Human-Robot Futures*. New York: Dutton.

Ford, Martin. 2016. "Chapter 2: Is This Time Different" in *Rise of the Robots: Technology and the Threat of a Jobless Future*. New York: Basic Books.

Krugman, Paul. 2019. "Don't Blame Robots for Low Wages." *New York Times*. March 14.

Week 5: Surveillance and data privacy

Readings: Zuboff, Shoshana. 2019. "Introduction: Home or Exile in the Digital Future" in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs.

Ajunwa, Ifeoma. 2017. "Corporate Surveillance is Turning Human Workers into Fungible Cogs." *The Atlantic*. May 19.

Wickendon, Dorothy. 2018. "Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook, and the End of Silicon Valley's Wild West." Politics and More Podcast. September 13.

Week 6: Algorithmic discrimination

Readings: Eubanks, Virginia. 2018. "Chapter 1: From Poorhouse to Database" in
Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Noble, Safiya Umoja. 2018. "Chapter 2: Searching for Black Girls" in *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism.* New York: New York University Press.

Week 7: Regulating global technology

Readings: Con Diaz, Gerardo. 2019. "Introduction" in *Software Rights: How Patent Law Transformed Software Development in America.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Isaac, Mike. 2019. "Introduction" in *Super Pumped: The Battle for Uber.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Assignment: Policy case study

Week 8: New frontiers in technology policy

Readings: *Washington Post.* 2019. "How we can combat climate change." January 2.

Halpern, Sue. 2019. "How Cyber Weapons Are Changing the Landscape of Modern Warfare." *New Yorker.* July 18.

Part III: Solutions for Tomorrow

Week 9: Technology and democracy

Readings: Larson, Christina. 2018. "Who needs democracy when you have data?"
MIT Technology Review. August 20.

Ma, Michelle. 2018. "The Impact of Technology on Democracy." *Wall Street Journal.* November 11.

Week 10: Solving tomorrow's problems

Assignment: Final Policy Proposal