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Fall 2021

## STS 201-101: Understanding Technological Society

Matthew Polsky

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**UNDERSTANDING TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
AN INTRODUCTION TO SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, & SOCIETY (STS)  
New Jersey Institute of Technology  
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences  
STS 201 101  
Fall 2021**

Instructor: Matt Polsky  
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**Classes:**

Monday 6:00 PM—8:50PM  
Kupfrian 108

**Office Hours:**

Mondays, Approximately 2:15 PM-5:30 PM, either in the Student Center Lounge or Cullimore 407, or by appointment. Not after class.

**Course Mode: Face-to-Face**

**Course Description:**

This course introduces the social sciences: anthropology, communications, economics, history, political science, sustainability, psychology, and especially sociology. The course introduces ideas, theories, and issues from various subject areas in the social sciences. Furthermore, the course analyzes and evaluates the impact these issues are having in our rapidly evolving and changing social, cultural, and particularly technological society. Much of the course focuses on technology and its mixed roles in positively addressing, worsening, or even creating local, national, and global issues, as well as its effects and relationships on the global ecological system and sustainability. This course evaluates the role of the individual, and how these issues are influential on a local, regional, national, and global scale in the twenty-first century.

**Course Objectives:**

- a. To introduce the basic subject areas of the social sciences, develop an understanding for them, their impact on human behavior, groups, and global society
- b. To analyze technology socially, culturally, and psychologically and the role it plays in our constantly evolving culture and society
- c. To analyze, evaluate, and critique society and societal events with deeper significance and understanding
- d. To call attention to and raise awareness that our individual life is bound to and shaped by our social and cultural environment
- e. To analyze, critique, and evaluate some of such social phenomena as: technological advances, culture, social dynamics, socialization, deviance, social

stratification, gender, racial/ethnic relations, the impact of science, the role of religion and politics, the influence of education and positive and negative uses of power

- f. To focus on the environment and technology, paying special attention to human impacts on the environment
- g. To examine and analyze complex sociological, psychological, and cultural variables involved in the technological global society
- h. To practice using self-reflection and critical thought to expand the awareness of students to the world around them
- i. To articulate an appreciation of the complexities of science, technology, and society, and begin to consider how society might better be able to avoid the negative consequences of new otherwise potentially beneficial technologies
- j. To evaluate, analyze, and understand various theorists in the social sciences and their relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
- k. To be able to make the leap to policy, as well as envision technological/entrepreneurial opportunities that offer potential solutions to contemporary or lurking social, economic, environmental, and political problems
- l. To develop skills in and model civil but productive discourse around sometimes very difficult issues as the larger society is struggling with how to do this. At times, this will involve understanding both sides of issues, including creative ways that differences might be overcome; at other times, such a strategy might be questioned
- m. To begin to understand meta-issues which go beyond the content of the course itself; that is, larger issues such as deeper, underlying mindsets that can affect individual and group views, recognizing barriers to social change, and questioning conventional assumptions. Hopefully, students will be able to apply these insights beyond the ending of this course.

Beyond the social science and critical look at technology, the above-objectives which are most important are “H,” “L,” “M,” and the last part of “I.” “F” will probably not be a major priority (unless the class asks for it).

**Prerequisites:** None.

**Required Textbooks:**

***Contemporary Society: An Introduction to the Social Science*, 13th Edition, John and Erna Perry, Pearson, 2012, ISBN-13: 978-0-205-02089-8**

***Culture and Technology: A Primer*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Jennifer Daryl Slack and J. Macgregor Wise, Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2015, ISBN 978-1-4331-0775-7**

***Online articles (posted weekly on Canvas)***

At times, optional articles may be suggested.

Students must complete the assigned readings before class.

**Grading Policy**

<b>Quiz #1</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Quiz #2</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1 - 1 1/2-Page Answers to 2 Discussion Questions (at different times during the course) (1¼ spacing, or as close as possible)</b>	<b>5, 5</b>
<b>5-6 Page Paper, with formal citations, on a relevant topic of your choice</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>1 or 2 Person Group Presentation of a reading (either part of a book chapter or an article)</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>“Show me you did the readings” Mini-Quiz most weeks</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Attendance</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Class Participation, including in-class group efforts</b>	<b>15</b>
=====	
<b>Total Point Value</b>	<b>100 points</b>

**Grading Scale:**

100-91.....	A (Superior)
90-88.....	B+ (Excellent)
87-81.....	B (Very Good)
80-78.....	C+ (Good)
77-71.....	C (Acceptable)
70-65.....	D (Minimum)
<65.....	F (Inadequate)

Make-up Policy on Quizzes: Students should make every effort to avoid missing a quiz. If an emergency makes missing one necessary, the student should arrange with the professor to take it the next week. However, the options available within the make-up quiz will likely be more limited.

Guidance will be provided on how the Paper will be evaluated, but if students request more formal detailed rubrics, the Professor will try to provide them.

Extra Credit Opportunities: There are none.

Students are responsible to keep track of their own grades, what work they owe, and what they are missing. Late work will be penalized; not a lot the first day or two, but increasingly more steeply the longer it is overdue.

Three special notes about Class Participation:

Regarding inappropriate Use of Smart Phones and Laptops in class, while these devices are acceptable for legitimate in-class research, note-taking, test-taking, or for real emergencies (if possible, notify the professor if such a problem is anticipated during class), this area continues to be a problem in class. It is rude to the professor and sets a poor example for other students. Therefore, continued inappropriate use of these by a student will lead to deductions from the “Class Participation” part of their grade. The Professor may ask individual students to explain their use of them if not cleared before class.

On the other hand, student initiatives to improve the quality of the course, over and above normal expectations, in creative or other ways, are appreciated and can contribute to that portion of the grade. It is recognized that these devices could facilitate such a contribution.

Short of a formal Disability (see immediately below), if students have a significant personal constraint or challenge to participating in class, it should be discussed with the Professor very early in the course.

### **Requesting Accommodations for a Disability**

If you need an accommodation due to a disability, please contact Scott Janz, Associate Director of the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services, Kupfrian Hall 201 to discuss your specific needs. A Letter of Accommodation Eligibility from the Office authorizing student accommodations is required.

### **Expectations of Class Etiquette**

From NJIT’s Code of Student Conduct, “Students should...respect their instructor, classmates, as well as the ideas or opinions that differ from their own. While scholarly debates are encouraged, they should not become personal attacks.”

The above is not just boilerplate language. Given how the inability to have civil discussions is an increasing problem in our society and our politics, we have the opportunity in our class to be a model for how conversations can be held, even on difficult topics.

We have the opportunity to practice such skills that we can take with us in our lives outside the classroom, and going forward, that could help show society how it can be done.

**Instructor Responsiveness:** I will respond to all emails within 24 hours of seeing them. All students' products should be graded/commented on within 2 weeks.

**Academic Integrity:**

This section includes both a statement I am required to include, as well as thoughts passed down from other professors for this course, as well as my own.

*“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>.”*

*“Members of the NJIT community are expected to be honest and forthright in their academic endeavors.*

*There is a zero-tolerance policy on any and all forms of cheating.”*

*The professor will use Turnitin.com during the course of the semester.*

*“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](mailto:dos@njit.edu)”*

*You may find that plagiarism covers more things than you are aware.*

**Advising Success Center (ASC)**

The Advising Success Center was established to advise students who are undecided in their major, transitioning into another major at NJIT, and those students who need additional support to graduate successfully and in a timely manner. ASC is a place where students can get personalized advice that will enable them to grow developmentally and help them find the motivation to complete their degrees.

Details about the ASC are at <http://www.njit.edu/advising/index.php>.

**The Writing Center**

The Writing Center, located in the Central King Building, is a free resource which offers on-site tutoring. They provide one-on-one tutoring sessions to students from all disciplines. During Center hours, tutors are available to work with students on any aspect of their writing, from generating ideas and developing arguments, to working through drafts, making revisions, to completion.

Details are at <http://www.njit.edu/writingcenter/>

**Canvas:**

Familiarize yourself with Canvas, as much work and communications will be administered through it. You can access it at: [canvas.njit.edu](https://canvas.njit.edu).

**Email:** Email will also be used to communicate with the class. It is your responsibility to frequently CHECK YOUR NJIT EMAIL for the latest on any class information or news. When communicating with the Professor you should prioritize use of his NJIT address. However, he will likely see the Hotmail address sooner.

**Attendance:**

Attendance counts for 15 points of your final grade. Please make sure I have you checked in if you arrive after attendance is taken, which does not mean you should make being late or leaving early a habit or reductions may be made to this portion of your grade. If you have more than 1 UNEXCUSED ABSENCE there will be increasing levels of grade reduction in this portion of your grade.

**Quizzes:**

There will be TWO regular quizzes this semester (not the more frequent mini-quizzes used to test you've done the readings). The dates are posted. It is important that you are in class that day.

You may use a laptop, tablet, or device to take the quizzes if you wish. Most likely they will be open book. The mini-quizzes will not be.

If students request it, the Professor will consider making the former take-home quizzes.

**Schedule:**

This schedule is subject to change without warning or prior notification. It certainly will change with longer-than-expected class time discussions of earlier topics—which will happen, better understanding of students' interests and requests, surprising but very relevant societal developments, important and relevant new articles. This is the very nature of the course topic, and what makes it so vital.

Each chapter or section, along with all articles posted on Canvas, should be read prior to the class it is assigned. Readings are not usually lengthy. Therefore, understanding their content, including identifying what isn't clear to you, is very important. Class time will help you understand things further, but it is best to have that earlier foundation. You will understand the discussions better, as well as be in a better position to contribute to them.

**WEEK 1:**

September 8

**Introduction, including educational philosophy**

Article(s) on Canvas:

Broome, Brian. Professors indoctrinating students? In reality, it's the other way around. [The Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/08/26/professors-indoctrinating-students-reality-its-other-way-around/). August 26, 2021.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/08/26/professors-indoctrinating-students-reality-its-other-way-around/>. Comment by Matt Polsky

Yahr, Emily. Pop Culture: Is Mayim Bialik's dubious science going to be 'Jeopardy!'s' next big headache? The Washington Post. August 27, 2021.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2021/08/27/mayim-bialik-jeopardy-vaccines-brain-supplements/>. Comment by Matt Polsky

WEEK 2:

September 13

**Chapter 1 Perry & Perry: Through the Lens of Science**

Article(s) on Canvas TBA

WEEK 3:

September 20

**Chapter 1 Slack & Wise: The Power & Problem of Culture, The Power & Problem of Technology**

Article(s) on Canvas TBA

1-2 student Presentations of a reading or part of a chapter

First answer to a Discussion Question due

WEEK 4:

September 27

**Chapter 2 Perry & Perry: In the Beginning**

Article(s) on Canvas TBA

1-2 student Presentations of a reading or part of a chapter

WEEK 5:

October 4

**Chapter 6 Slack & Wise: Luddism**

Article(s) on Canvas TBA

1-2 student Presentations of a reading or part of a chapter

**QUIZ #1**

WEEK 6:

October 11

**Chapter 10 Perry & Perry: From the Plow to the Computer: Change, Collective Behavior, & Social Movements**

Article(s) on Canvas TBA

1-2 student Presentations of a reading or part of a chapter

WEEK 7:

October 18

**Chapter 7 Slack & Wise: Appropriate Technology**

Article(s) on Canvas TBA

Second answer to a Discussion Question due

1-2 student Presentations of a reading or part of a chapter



WEEK 8:

October 25

**Chapter TBA in Perry & Perry**

Article(s) on Canvas TBA

1-2 student Presentations of a reading or part of a chapter

WEEK 9:

November 1

**Chapter TBA in Slack & Wise:**

Article(s) on Canvas TBA

1-2 student Presentations of a reading or part of a chapter

WEEK 10:

November 8

**Chapter TBA in Perry & Perry**

**QUIZ #2**

1-2 student Presentations of a reading or part of a chapter

WEEK 11:

November 15

**Chapter TBA Slack & Wise:**

Article(s) on Canvas TBA

1-2 student Presentations of a reading or part of a chapter if not already completed

WEEK 12:

November 22

**Chapter TBA in Perry & Perry**

Article(s) on Canvas TBA

1-2 student or Team Presentations of a reading or part of a chapter if not already completed

November 25 Thanksgiving Holiday

WEEK 13:

November 29

**Chapter TBA Slack & Wise:**

Article(s) on Canvas TBA

1-2 student Presentations of a reading or part of a chapter if not already completed

WEEK 14:

December 6

**Chapter TBA in Perry & Perry**

or Article(s) on Moodle TBA

Five-Six-page Paper due

December 13, Reading Day, No class

December 20, Final Exam Period

As there will not be a final exam, we will not meet