

Spring 2019

# STS 201-004: Understanding Technological Society

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## Recommended Citation

de la Torre III, Pedro, "STS 201-004: Understanding Technological Society" (2019). *Humanities Syllabi*. 96.  
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STS 201 Section 004  
M/W – 1-2:20 PM  
Cullimore, Lecture Hall #1

Dr. Pedro de la Torre III  
pedlt3@njit.edu  
Office Hours: Wed., 2:45-3:45 PM

# Understanding Technological Society

## Course Description

In this class, we will be examining the intersections of science, technology, culture, and politics in a nuanced and critical way. We will be drawing on work from the interdisciplinary social science field of science and technology studies (STS), which means we will be asking questions, like: Who gains and who is hurt by particular technologies, and who should have a say in how or whether they are implemented? Are science and technology distinct from, or examples of, culture and politics? How does expertise limit, support, or transform movements and other forms of public participation? Does your smartphone and social media help connect you to your communities, does it make you into a lonely zombie, or is it complicated? How has science and technology both created and challenged inequality and oppression? How is identity mediated and transformed by science and technology? What science doesn't get done, and why?

Despite the title of the course, we will end up with more questions than answers. Our first core task will be learning about some of the thoughtful approaches to these issues provided by STS scholars. The second will be to engage in discussions, activities, and assignments that will help us develop our own informed perspectives on these important questions. We will be working towards the following learning outcomes:

- Understanding some of the key concepts, theories, and methodologies of STS
- Evaluating the social, cultural, and environmental implications of particular technologies, policies, and forms of knowledge production
- Analyzing cultural and political assumption about technoscientific progress, governance, and ethics
- Identifying the ways diversity, difference, and inequality shape and are shaped by science and technology

## Course Materials

All course materials will either be posted on Moodle, or a link will be provided on the syllabus (which can also be found on Moodle). You are expected to have all of the week's readings accessible to you in class on paper, on a tablet, or a laptop (*not on cell phones*). I *highly* recommend printing out your readings. You should check the syllabus and Moodle often, in case there are changes to the scheduled readings.

## Course Policies

### ***Office Hours***

Office hours will be held in Cullimore Hall in room #435. The door locks automatically, so please knock loudly. If scheduled office hours do not work for you, you can also schedule another time to meet via email.

***Late/Incomplete Work***

Each additional 24 hours that an assignment is late will result in the penalty of a letter grade. Make-up exams will only be allowed when there are significant extenuating circumstances, as determined by the Dean of Students.

***Technology***

On the first day of class, we will discuss and vote on a binding technology policy for the classroom.

***Expectations***

I expect students to be present (in mind and body) in each course, and on-time. Each unexcused absence after the first will result in a five point reduction in your participation grade. If you are absent or late, it is your responsibility to find out what we covered in class, including details about assignments. I recommend you exchange contact information with a “buddy” for the course that can help fill you in, although you may contact me as a *last resort*.

You are also expected to be respectful of fellow students, and to do your part to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment. We will be covering some difficult and politically charged issues in this course. Students are expected to give classmates space to grapple clumsily with new and difficult ideas and be open to respectful criticism and disagreement. However, I will not tolerate attacks on or an atmosphere hostile to anyone based on race, gender expression, sexuality, nationality, religion, body type, immigration status, status as a survivor of sexual assault, or disability. If you have related concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

***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](mailto:dos@njit.edu).

**Grading / Assignments**

All of your grades will be expressed as percentages. In Moodle, you will see letter grades like A+ and A- that do not technically exist at NJIT, but your final grade will be assigned based on the following scale (rounding up or down if your score lands between letter grades):

A	90-100%
B+	87-89%
B	80-86%
C+	77-79%

C	70-76%
D	60-69%
F	0-59%

**Weekly Annotations & Film Reviews (10%)** - Each week, you are responsible for writing an “annotation” of any ONE of the assigned readings that are *marked with an asterisk* on the schedule. I will provide a template for annotations on Moodle, which is where you will turn them in. Annotations should be at least 200 words (not including the quotations you will be asked to provide). Good faith completion of the annotations will earn you a 100%, but if it looks like you didn’t actually read I may deduct points or refuse to accept the annotation. Please note that annotations are scanned by plagiarism software. Additionally, we will watch films in class on occasion. You will need to fill out a “film review” a short worksheet that will either be handed out in class or posted on Moodle. The lowest three grades (including “0”) on annotations and film reviews will be dropped automatically—in other words, you will have three “free passes.”

**Technology Assessment Report & Presentation (20%)** – Working in groups, you will write an assessment of a particular technology or related policy. A detailed list of requirements for the report will be provided early in the semester. Some class time will be available for you to work with your groups (marked in the schedule as: “TA Lab”), although some work will have to happen outside of class. You will be expected to cite course readings, peer-reviewed work in the social sciences, and other credible sources.

**Debates (20%)** - We will have a series of in-class debates on issues of technoscientific controversy. Students are expected to work with their group to research the topic, and present a strong case for their “side” in the debate. Each student must turn in three “talking points” with at least four credible citations each time their group is debating. Talking points must be turned in on Moodle BEFORE class begins (a template for talking points is available on Moodle). Half of the grade will be determined by the quality of this individual research, and half by the group’s in-class performance. If you are absent for a debate, you must write a one page single-spaced argumentative essay for the side of the debate assigned to your group within one week.

### **Participation (10%)**

You will be graded on attendance, as well as the quantity and quality of your participation in class discussions and activities. You should always come with at least one written question or comment about the readings to share with the class. Finally, if participation is lacking, or it seems students are not reading, I will assign pop quizzes that will count towards your participation grade.

### **Exams (40%)**

You will take both a midterm and final exam, each counting towards 20% of your final grade. Exams will include a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

## **Schedule**

*Readings and assignments are to be completed by the beginning of class on the date they are listed.*

<b>1/23</b>	<b>Introductions</b>
<b>1/28</b>	<b>Introducing STS / Sociological Imagination</b> “The Promise” in The Sociological Imagination by C.W. Mills*
<b>1/30</b>	<u>TA Lab: Topics Due</u>
<b>2/4</b>	Preface & CH 1 in The Whale and the Reactor by Langdon Winner*
<b>2/6</b>	CH 2 in The Whale and the Reactor by Langdon Winner*
<b>2/11</b>	CH 1 & CH 10 in An Introduction to Science and Technology Studies by Sergio Sismondo*
<b>2/13</b>	CH 12 in An Introduction to Science and Technology Studies by Sergio Sismondo*
<b>2/18</b>	Anthropologies of the Sciences: Thinking Across Strata by Mike Fortun & Kim Fortun*

2/20	TA Lab <a href="#">“The New Science of Sex and Gender” in Scientific American</a>
2/25	<b>Scientific Racism</b> “Race & Ethnicity” by Justin D. García (from “Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology”)
2/27	<b>Environmental Justice</b> Documentary: TBA 1. <a href="#">Dirty Little Secrets: New Jersey’s Poorest Live Surrounded by Contamination</a> by Sarah Gonzalez and The WNYC Data News Team 2. <a href="#">Massive, \$1.7 billion environmental cleanup of Passaic River proposed by EPA</a> By Ted Sherman
3/4	CH 1 & CH 5 in Dumping in Dixie by Robert D. Bullard*
3/6	<b>Debate #1:</b> <i>The United States should heed calls by the Sunrise Movement and others to implement a “Green New Deal”</i>
3/11	TA Lab <u>Midterm Exam Review</u>
3/13	<b>Midterm Exam</b>
3/18	<u>Spring Break!</u>
3/20	<u>Spring Break!</u>
3/25	<b>Science, Technology, and Discourse</b> 1. <a href="#">Who are nuclear weapons scientists?</a>   Hugh Gusterson   TEDxFoggyBottom (video) 2. Gusterson, Hugh. 1996. Bodies and Machines In Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War.*
3/27	<b>Expertise &amp; Social Movements</b> Documentary: TBA
4/1	Epstein, Steven. “The Construction of Lay Expertise: AIDS Activism and the Forging of Credibility in the Reform of Clinical Trials.” Science, Technology, & Human Values 20, no. 4 (1995): 408-437.*
4/3	<b>Debate #2:</b> <i>Nuclear weapons should be prohibited for all states under international law</i> TA Lab
4/8	<b>Psychedelic Science and Culture</b> Political Neurotheology: Emergence and Revival of a Psychedelic Alternative to Cosmetic Psychopharmacology by Nicolas Langlitz*
4/10	<b>Debate #3:</b> <i>Contemporary practices of mass surveillance by the U.S. federal government represent a significant threat to democracy and individual rights</i>
4/15	<b>Gendered Technoscience</b> Rapp, Rayna. 1999. “Waiting and Watching” In Testing Women, Testing the Fetus: The Social Impact of Amniocentesis in America.*
4/17	<b>Debate #4:</b> <i>AirBnB must be strictly regulated in urban areas because it drives up the cost of housing for residents</i>
4/22	Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” by Donna Haraway*
4/24	TA Lab Gwin, Peter. <a href="#">“How ancient remedies are changing modern medicine.”</a> National Geographic.
4/29	<u>TA Lab / Final Exam Review</u>
5/1	<b>Technology Assessment Presentations</b>
5/6	<b>LAST DAY OF CLASS</b>  <b>Technology Assessment Presentations</b>  <b>Technology Assessment Reports Due</b>
TBA	<b>Final Exam</b>

