

Fall 2019

STS 201-101: Understanding Technological Society

Pedro de la Torre III

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STS 201.101
Tuesdays, 6-8:50 PM
Cullimore Hall Lect. 3

Dr. Pedro de la Torre III
pedlt3@njit.edu
Office Hours: Tues., 4 - 5 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*. Most announcements about assignments, readings, etc. will happen within the first five minutes of class.

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.

Grading / Assignments

All of your grades will be expressed as percentages. In Moodle, you may 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.”

STS Topics Report & Presentation (20%) – Working in groups, you will write and present a report responding to a topic in STS. A detailed list of requirements, as well as a list of topics to choose from, 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: “Group Work”), 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. At the end of the course, you will be asked to complete a peer-assessment, and students who contributed little will not receive the full grade awarded to their group.

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 an individual research memo with at least three credible citations (or one peer-reviewed social science journal article) each time their group is debating. Individual research memos 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.

9/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Work: Topics Due • Introductory Video
9/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Promise” in The Sociological Imagination by C.W. Mills* • Anthropologies of the Sciences: Thinking Across Strata by Mike Fortun & Kim Fortun* • Annotation #1 Due
9/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preface & CH 1-2 in The Whale and the Reactor by Langdon Winner* • Annotation #2 Due

9/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The deadly truth about a world built for men – from stab vests to car crashes by Caroline Criado-Perez • Sex redefined by Claire Ainsworth • Group Work: Research Question Due • Debate #1: <i>Tech companies like Amazon should sever all contracts with immigration enforcement agencies</i>
10/1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CH 1, 10, & 12 in An Introduction to Science and Technology Studies by Sergio Sismondo* • Annotation #3 Due • Debate #2: <i>Social media promotes democracy, equality, and cross-cultural understanding</i>
10/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Race & Ethnicity” by Justin D. García (from “Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology”) • The unwelcome revival of ‘race science’ By Gavin Evans • Anthrobites: Scientific Racism w/ Rachel Watkins • <i>Midterm Exam Review</i> • Annotation #4 Due
10/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midterm Exam
10/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CH 1 & CH 5 in Dumping in Dixie by Robert D. Bullard* • Dirty Little Secrets: New Jersey’s Poorest Live Surrounded by Contamination by Sarah Gonzalez and The WNYC Data News Team • Massive, \$1.7 billion environmental cleanup of Passaic River proposed by EPA By Ted Sherman • Annotation #5 Due
10/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are nuclear weapons scientists? Hugh Gusterson TEDxFoggyBottom (video) • Gusterson, Hugh. 1996. Bodies and Machines In Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War.* • Debate #3: <i>The United States should heed calls by the Sunrise Movement and others to implement a “Green New Deal”</i> • Annotation #6 Due
11/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.* • Annotation #7 Due
11/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political Neurotheology: Emergence and Revival of a Psychedelic Alternative to Cosmetic Psychopharmacology by Nicolas Langlitz* • Annotation #8 Due
11/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Work: Outline & “Final” Bibliography Due • Debate #4: <i>Nuclear weapons should be prohibited for all states under international law</i> • Tapping Local Knowledge to Understand and Combat Asthma By Jason Corburn
11/26	No Class – Follow Your Thursday Schedule
12/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” by Donna Haraway* • Annotation #9 Due
12/10	<p style="text-align: center;">Last Day of Class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Work: Presentations & Reports Due
TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Exam