

L A K E H E A D U N I V E R S I T Y
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Sociology 2455 WA

Computers and Society

Winter Term 2012

Mondays 7:00 - 10:00 p.m., RC-0005

Sociology web-page address: <http://sociology.lakeheadu.ca>

Instructor: Walid Chahal

Phone: 343-8426

Office: UC 0037

e-mail: wchahal@lakeheadu.ca

Course Focus:

In this course, we will critically examine the social construction of computer culture, computer user identity, and consumer demand. We will discuss their links to software production and development, as well as to advertising and marketing strategies. We will also analyze the impact of new computer technologies on employment, education (especially children's early education), class, gender and ethnic relations in the context of the organization of work and the global economy. We will include in our examination recent technological advances, such as artificial intelligence, robotics, nanotechnology and surveillance. We will draw on case studies from around the world and use a variety of sociological perspectives.

Required Reading Materials:

There are two required textbooks and one course reading package for this course.

- 1) Winston, Morton & Ralph Edelbach. 2011. *Society, Ethics, and Computer Technology*, Revised 4th Edition (Custom Publication). Belmont, CA, USA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- 2) Scott-Dixon, K. 2004. *Doing It: Women Working in Information Technology*. Toronto: Sumach Press.
- 3) Reading Package for *Sociology 2455--Computers and Society*.

Course Topics:

Required Readings

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|---|---|
| 1. Introduction | Winston, "Children of Invention Revisited" (pp: 1-25) |
| 2. The Use of Computer Technology in our Children's Early Education & Computer Use Learning, the Natural World & Computer Use | Armstrong & Casement, chapter 10
Armstrong & Casement, chapter 11 |
| 3. The Future of Canadian Education & Computer Technologies | See 'The future of education: reboot required Q & A: Don Tapscott' (CBC News, August 12, 2010):
http://www.cbc.ca/news/story/2010/08/11/f-school-tapscott.html |
| 4. Employment & the Development of the New Computer Technology | Rifkin, Chapter 5 |

- Visions of Technological Utopian
Women's Work in the IT
Employment & the Global Economy
- Rifkin, Chapter 3
Scott-Dixon, Introduction & chapter 1
Menzies, Heather, pp:3-19
5. Theorizing about Women's Work Choices
in IT & Structural Relations of Gender,
Class & Race
Great Promises versus Material Realities
New Work versus Same Old & the Inequity
of the Labor Market
Looking Ahead
- Scott-Dixon, chapter 2
Scott-Dixon, chapter 3
Scott-Dixon, chapter 4
Scott-Dixon, chapter 5
6. Perspectives on the Information Society
Globalizing the Social Economy
Globalization & Economic Development:
- Castells, pp:XVII-XLIV
Rifkin, chapter 18
Winston—J. Stiglitz, "Making Globalization Work" (pp: 174-181)
7. International Forum on Globalization, "What Should be off-Limits to Globalization"
Winston--(pp: 182-195)
- The Impact of Globalization
on Developing Countries—Pendakur & Harris (P & H)--R. Harindranath, pp:56-64
8. The Mythology of Computer Use
- Rose, chapter 1 (15-42)
9. The History of Computing
The Origin of the User as a Social Concept
Sociology, Science & Computer Technology
- Rose, chapter 2 [**Reserve**]
Bauchspies et al, Preface & Chapter 1: **Recommended:**
Pendakur & Harris (P & H--pp:19-32) [**Reserve**]
10. The Culture of Software Production
The Roots of Digital Culture
Current Theorizing about Digital Technology
& Race, Class, & Gender
- Rose, chapter 3[**Reserve**]
Millar, chapter 1
Millar, Chapter 2
11. Computer Consumer & the User
The Impact of Advertising
Children & Advertising on the Net
- Rose, chapter 4 [**Reserve**]
Film: "The Ad & the Ego" (part 1-4)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WZGB1kx6CE>
Recommended: Armstrong & Casement, chapter 8
12. Computer Users & Technical Knowledge
Scholarly Analyses of Computer Anxiety,
Technostress, & Computer Phobia
- Rose, chapter 5 [**Reserve**]
Rose, chapter 6 [**Reserve**]
13. The Youthful User & the Mythology of
Computer Use
- Rose, chapter 7 [**Reserve**]
14. The Future User &
Responsible Action
- Rose, Conclusion [**Reserve**]
15. Citizenship & Democracy
Computers, Information & Surveillance Technology: Winston—J. Stanley & B. Steinhardt, "Bigger

Monster, Weaker Chains” (pp: 222-235)

Resistance to World Trade Talks P & H—M. Lemire, pp:310-321
Cyber-Activism Across National Borders P & H—K. O’Neill, pp:322-335
How Facebook Changed the World: The Arab Spring (parts 1-4)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOEeLMuYPEQ&feature=related>

- 16. Artificial Intelligence, Robotics & Nanotechnology:
Winston—Rodney Brooks, "Us and Them" (pp: 249-262); Winston—Ray Kurzweil:
“Nanoscience, Nanotechnology, and Ethics: Promise and Peril” 301-309
- 17. Biotechnology & Nanotechnology & Weapons of Mass Destruction:
Winston—B. Joy, "Why the Future Doesn’t Need Us" (pp: 285-300)
Biotechnology & Genetic Engineering: Winston—C. Cummings, "Trespass" (pp: 340-351)

Course Requirements:

There are **three (3) requirements** for this course.

- 1. ***One presentation***.....**20%**

Students need to work together in groups and divide the work evenly among the members of their group for this assignment. Every group will consist of two students, and every group is required to do the following:

(A) In-Class Article-Presentation

Every group will be provided with (or will be asked to choose) an article dealing with one of the areas of computers & society from specific social science journals or books. The group is expected to present at least one article. The presenters should not only sum up the main argument(s)/viewpoint or idea(s) of the article, but also provide analyses of the article by making use of the concepts, theories and other material covered in class. It is important that the presenters understand their article well and effectively communicate its content to the rest of the students. The presenters should be prepared to lead the discussion and answer questions regarding their topic. They may use overheads or any other prop that will improve their presentation.

(B) Short Film--In addition to the article, students may choose to include a short film, or parts of a film (up to 5 minutes) in order to facilitate understanding of a particular part of their topic.

- 2. **Two in-class Tests**: February 6th & March 26th (**2 @ 35% each**).**70%**

The tests consist of short-answer and essay questions and may include multiple-choice questions. The tests cover all class work, lecture, student presentations, and reading material to date. It is not the instructor’s aim to reproduce the same material that is covered in the assigned reading. The lecture material and discussions will complement, expand, and shed more light on those issues that are covered in the textbooks and reading package.

- 3. ***Class participation & critical reflection***.....**10%**

Class attendance is expected: In order to do well in this course, you must attend class on a regular basis. There will be substantial in-class discussions and much of the material covered in lectures will not be found in the reading. In order to participate in class discussions, it is important that you do the readings before coming to class. You

must come to class ready to contribute to discussion in a thoughtful way, to ask questions, as well as critically reflect on the assigned readings. Students are strongly encouraged not to engage in private conversations during class lectures.

PLEASE NOTE:

THERE WILL BE A PENALTY FOR ASSIGNMENTS HANDED IN LATE.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will be dealt with according to the University regulations. For more information, see University Regulations section “**IX Academic Dishonesty**,” Lakehead University Calendar 11/12: <http://calendar.lakeheadu.ca/current/contents/regulations/univregsIXacdishon.html>

Further, the student will be given additional information concerning course topics, course requirements, evaluation procedures and other relevant material on the first day of class.

Reading Package for Sociology 2455--Computers and Society

Armstrong, Allison & Charles Casement. 1998. Chapters: 10 and 11, pp: 167-199 in *The Child and the Machine: Why Computers May Put Our Children's Education at Risk*. Toronto: Key Porter Books.

Bauchspies, Wenda, Jennifer Croissant & Sal Restivo. 2006. Preface & Chapter 1, pp: VII-XI;1-18 in *Science, Technology and Society: a Sociological Perspective*. Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing.

Castells, Manuel. 2010. pp:XVII-XLIV in *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture, Vol. I- The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd ed.). Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing.

Menzies, Heather. 1996. Pp: 3-19 in *Whose Brave New World? The Information Highway & the New Economy*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

Millar, Melanie Stewart. 1998. Chapters: 1 & 2, pp: 28- 43; 53-68 in *Cracking the Gender Code: Who Rules the Wired World?* Toronto: Second Story Press.

Pendakur, Manjunath and Roma Harris. 2002. Pp: 56-64; 300- 335 in *Citizenship and Participation in the Information Age*. Aurora, Ontario: Garamond Press.

Rifkin, Jeremy. 1995. Chapters: 3, 5, & 18, pp: 42-56; 69-80; 275-293 in *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*. New York: Tarcher & Putnam.

Rose, Ellen. 2003. Chapters: 1, pp: 15-42 in *User Error: Resisting Computer Culture*. Toronto: Between the Lines.