

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY
Technology, Society, and Indigenous Peoples of Canada
SOCI-2755-FDF 2026
Mr. Brian McMillan
brian.mcmillan@lakeheadu.ca

Course Outline

A sociological study of technology examines the causes and consequences of technological change. Sociology adopts the view that the nature of our technologies, and their impacts, are inextricably linked to the social, economic, and political arrangements of our society. Our technologies are *social constructions*. They share a reciprocal relationship with our society wherein first we shape our technologies, and then our technologies shape us. We refer to this view as the *socio-technical perspective*, a perspective which informs the following course of study from beginning to end.

The course of study includes an examination of traditional and contemporary definitions of technology, the identification and description of several competing theoretical perspectives regarding the causes and consequences of technological change, and numerous topics such as the dynamics of technological design and development, the adoption and diffusion of technology, technology's relationship to various forms of inequality, the nature of work, the gendering of technology, the impact of technology on community and communications, technology's role in modern surveillance, and others. The course concludes with an examination of the moral and ethical considerations regarding technology.

The course also pays special attention to technology and Canada's Indigenous peoples. Content may include topics such as the impact of major technological systems on the social and economic development of isolated Northern communities, the incorporation of new information and communications technologies into human services on First Nations reserves, traditional Native worldviews vs. the modern scientific approach, technology's role in efforts to resist cultural assimilation, the impact of legal decisions regarding technology on Indigenous treaty rights, the role of technology in the perpetuation of Native stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, and more.

Learning Objectives

At the completion of this course students will have a strong understanding of the *socio-technical perspective* common to many sociological analyses of the causes and consequences of technological change. In particular, students will learn how this perspective is helpful in understanding various issues faced by Indigenous communities in Canada's northern regions. Specific learning objectives include the development of a solid understanding of key course components such as: the comprehensive definition of technology favoured in contemporary sociology; a broad overview of the historical evolution of technology; the nature of *Indigenous knowledge* and its relationship to *appropriate technology*; a critical examination of theories on technological change (special focus on video games and digital media); the processes by which technologies are developed (special focus on *technopoles*, the *creative class*, and *algorithms*); the colonial impact of modern ICT's and digital practices on traditional Indigenous communities; the classic model of the adoption and diffusion of innovations; how differences in technology ownership and know-how lead to social, economic, and cultural inequality (special focus on the *digital divide* in remote Indigenous communities); the role of technology in the changing division of labour (special focus on the *sharing economy* and *gig work*); the impact of industrialized resource extraction on northern Indigenous communities; the historical and contemporary

theoretical perspectives on the study of gendered technologies (special focus on household technologies and the IT industry); the impact of the gendering of internet-based medical technologies on women in remote Indigenous communities; how social media technologies have altered interpersonal relationships and connections; electronic surveillance in the context of personal privacy and civil liberties; the role of technology in food security/insecurity issues in Indigenous communities; and the ethical and moral dimensions of our technological society.

How to Proceed Through the Course of Study

This course of study has no classroom. Rather, it features an excellent book and a variety of online articles and videos. Rudi Volti's book *Society and Technological Change* (2024) identifies and discusses most of the important theories and basic concepts needed to develop a thorough understanding of how society shapes technology and, in turn, how technology shapes society. The various online articles provide insight into the nature of the relationship between technology and Indigenous people.

The course comprises 6 study modules. Study modules include learning objectives, chapter synopses, and review questions for the required readings, as well as titles and links to supplementary online articles and videos.

I recommend you set aside a minimum of 5-6 hours each week and carefully read the required chapters and online articles. Pay particular attention to the review questions which accompany each required reading. The review questions can be used as guidance in your preparations for examinations. When I set the examinations I use the review questions as guidelines. Follow along with the Course Schedule and do your best not to fall behind.

If you have questions or comments, post them in our Discussions forum and I, or one of our classmates, will respond. Or simply email brian.mcmillan@lakeheadu.ca.

Required Reading Material

Volti, Rudi and Jennifer Croissant. 2024. *Society and Technological Change*. 9th Edition. Waveland Press.

The Volti book is available at the LU Bookstore at a cost of \$100.50.

*You are advised *not* to use earlier editions of the Volti book due to recent, significant revisions.

You can obtain an e-version of the Volti book (instant access) at a cost of \$39.32 (90 day rental) using the following link:

<https://www.vitalsource.com/en-ca/products/society-and-technological-change-rudi-volti-jennifer-croissant-v9781478652632>

Online Articles: You are also required to read several online articles throughout the course which pertain specifically to Canada's Indigenous peoples and various technology-related issues. The titles and URLs of these articles can be found in their respective Study Modules in the Content area of the course site (see navigator bar at top of page).

All online articles are free-of-charge.

Video Material

The course of study includes several online videos. While these videos should be considered required viewing and meant to deepen your understanding of important course concepts related to Indigenous issues, they are not covered on examinations.

Grading Scheme

Exam #1	30%
Exam #2	30%
Exam #3	30%
Assignments	10%

Timed Online Examinations

There are 3 examinations scheduled throughout the course of study. The exams are accessed using the *Quizzes* tab on the navigator bar at the top of the page. All 3 exams will be based on the required readings in the Volti book and the online articles pertaining to Indigenous issues. All 3 examinations will be timed online tests. Timed online tests can be taken from any computer connected to the internet. I advise against the use of smartphones or any other wireless devices because of common connectivity problems. *It is your responsibility to ensure that your internet connection during examinations is reliable and secure.*

The examinations will be comprised of 90-100 multiple-choice and true-or-false questions. The duration of examinations will be approximately 120 minutes each.

The first exam covers study modules 1 and 2. The second exam covers study modules 3 and 4. The third exam covers study modules 5 and 6. Please see the *Grading Scheme (above)* for the weighting of exams and the *Course Schedule (Table of Contents)* for examination dates and times.

Timed online examinations must be written during the prescribed examination windows; for example, 1:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m. Eastern Time. You must login during the prescribed examination window and complete the exam in a single sitting. You will not be allowed to commence before the designated start time (e.g., 1:00 p.m.) and you will not be allowed to commence after the designated completion time (e.g., 10:00 p.m.). You will be allowed to login only once. See the *Course Schedule (Table of Contents)* for examination window dates and times.

The timed online tests will be administered through our course website (D2L). At the time of the exam you will be required to login using your usual Lakehead University username and password.

I have set up a mock timed online test to give you a chance to practice logging in, answering questions, and moving from one page to another. Click the *Quizzes* tab on the navigator bar at the top of the page to access the practice quiz.

Please Note: You must complete all 3 examinations in this course on your own with no collaboration with any other person(s) on the days of the examinations. Receiving or giving assistance in direct connection to an examination is a serious violation of the Lakehead University Student Code of Conduct: Academic Integrity; in particular, Section III, para. 26, b., c., e., g. See link below:

<https://www.lakeheadu.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/293/docs/Student-Conduct/Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Academic%20Integrity.pdf>

Please Note: Lakehead University has a strict policy regarding the failure to write formally-scheduled examinations at the prescribed time. Special accommodations, will only be offered when missed examinations are due to medical reasons or other unforeseen extenuating circumstances as defined by University regulations re. Examinations. *Work schedules, weddings, travel activities, faulty technology, etc. are not considered acceptable grounds for rescheduling examinations. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the University's policies and regulations regarding missed and rescheduled examinations.*

Written Assignments

There are two (2) written assignments included in the course of study. Please see details at Content>Table of Contents>Written Assignments

The use of GenAI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) must be conducted in a responsible and ethical manner. GenAI may be used to provide suggestions and insights regarding written assignments, but must never act as the primary vehicle for submissions which are to be graded. Your assignments must be written in your own words and must carefully cite all sources used. If you have any questions about how GenAI tools can and cannot be used in this course, please contact me.

Discussions Forum

Our course site features a Discussions forum (tab located on the navigator bar at top of page) where you can interact with classmates, discuss course concepts/issues, and seek clarification of course content.

If you have an issue of a private nature, please do not use the Discussions forum but rather email me directly: brian.mcmillan@lakeheadu.ca

Please Note: Lakehead University is committed to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities and/or medical conditions to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. If you are a student with a disability and think you may need accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) and register as early as possible. For more information, please contact Student Accessibility Services <http://studentaccessibility.lakeheadu.ca>

Thunder Bay - SAS -- SC0003, 343-8047 or sas@lakeheadu.ca
Orillia - SAS - OA 1030, [705-330-4008 ext 2103](tel:705-330-4008))

End