

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

**Sociology 2455 FA**

**Computers and Society**

**Fall Term 2013**

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

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

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**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 and Recommended Readings** (Available at Lakehead University Bookstore)

- 1) McChesney, Robert W. 2013. *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism Is Turning the Internet Against Democracy*. New York: The New Press.
- 2) Reading Package for *Sociology 2455FA—Computers and Society*.
- 3) Recommended (for the purpose of improving your writing skills): Northey Margot, Lorne Tepperman & Patrizia Albanese. 2012. *Making Sense in the Social Sciences: A Student's Guide to Research and Writing* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Toronto: Oxford University Press.

**Course Topics**

**Required & Recommended Readings**

1. Introduction  
The Social Context of the Digital Technology—McChesney, Chapter 1  
Sociology, Science & Computer Technology—**Recommended:** Bauchspies et al, Preface & Chapter 1  
Theorizing about the Computer Technology
2. The Use of Computer Technology in our  
Children's Early Education & Computer Use     Armstrong & Casement, Chapter 10  
Learning, the Natural World & Computer Use     Armstrong & Casement, Chapter 11  
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>
3. Technology-Mediated Social Relationship & Interaction —Anabel Quan-Haase (pp:167-189);  
Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together* (pp: IX-XVII; 279-296)

4. Employment & the Development of the New Computer Technology—Rifkin, Chapter 5  
     Visions of Technological Utopian                      Rifkin, Chapter 3  
     Women's Work in the IT                                Scott-Dixon, Introduction & Chapter 1 (pp:30-40)  
     Employment & the Global Economy                    Heather Menzies, (pp:3-19)
  
5. Theorizing about Women's Work Choices in IT & Structural Relations of Gender, Class & Race—Scott-Dixon, Chapter 2 (pp: 63-81)  
     Great Promises versus Material Realities            Case Study: Scott-Dixon, chapter 3 [**Reserve**]  
     New Work versus Same Old & the Inequity of the Labor Market—Case Study: Scott-Dixon, chapter 4 [**Reserve**]  
     Looking Ahead    Case Study: Scott-Dixon, chapter 5 [**Reserve**]
  
6. Perspectives on the Information Society  
     Capitalism, Democracy & the Internet                McChesney, Chapter 2  
     Globalization & Markets & Inequality                J. Stiglitz (pp: 52-82); **Recommended:** Winston—J. Stiglitz, "Making Globalization Work" (pp: 174-181) [**Reserve**]  
     Neo-Liberal Globalization & Markets & Inequality in Canada—McBride & Whiteside (pp: 58-79; 106-111)  
     Globalizing the Social Economy                      Rifkin, Chapter 18
  
7. International Forum on Globalization, "What Should be off-Limits to Globalization"—Winston (pp: 182-195)  
     The Impact of Globalization on Developing Countries—**Recommended:** M. Pendakur & R.Harris, *Citizenship and Participation in the Information Age* —R. Harindranath (pp:56-64) [**Reserve**]  
     The Way Forward: Another World is Possible—J. Stiglitz (pp: 265-290).
  
8. The Mythology of Computer Use                      Rose, Chapter 1 (pp:15-42)
  
9. The History of Computing                                Case Study: Rose, Chapter 2 [**Reserve**]; McChesney, Chapter 4  
     The Origin of the User as a Social Concept  
     The Culture of Software Production                    **Recommended:** Pendakur & Harris (pp:19-32)[**Reserve**]  
    Case Study: Rose, Chapter 3[**Reserve**]
  
10. The Roots of Digital Culture                            Millar, Chapter 1  
     The Political Economy of Communication & the Internet—McChesney, Chapter 3  
     Current Theorizing about Digital Technology& Race, Class, & Gender—Millar, Chapter 2
  
11. Computer Consumer & the User                      Case Study: Rose, Chapter 4 [**Reserve**]  
     The Impact of Advertising—**Recommended** Film (background material): "*The Ad & the Ego*"  
     Children & Advertising on the Net                      **Recommended:** Armstrong & Casement, chapter 8  
     Computer Users & Technical Knowledge                Case Study: Rose, Chapter 5 [**Reserve**]  
     Scholarly Analyses of Computer Anxiety, Technostress—Case Study: Rose, Chapter 6 [**Reserve**]  
     The Youthful User & the Mythology of Computer Use—Case Study: Rose, Chapter 7 [**Reserve**]  
     The Future User & Responsible Action                    Case Study: Rose, Conclusion [**Reserve**]
  
12. Citizenship, Democracy & the internet                McChesney, Chapter 5  
     Computers, Information & Surveillance Technology—Winston—J. Stanley & B. Steinhardt, "Bigger Monster, Weaker Chains" (pp: 222-235)
  
13. Digital Journalism    McChesney, Chapter 6  
     Resistance to World Trade Talks--**Recommended:** Pendakur & Harris—M. Lemire (pp:310-321) [**Reserve**]  
     Cyber-Activism across National Borders—**Recommended:** Pendakur & Harris—K. O'Neill (pp:322-335);  
         Case study: *How Facebook Changed the World: The Arab Spring* (parts1-4)  
    <<http://vimeo.com/45410957>>  
    <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EnUzdkL\\_WU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EnUzdkL_WU)>
  
14. Reform in Digital Revolution                            McChesney, Chapter 7

15. Artificial Intelligence, Robotics & Nanotechnology—Winston—Rodney Brooks, "Us and Them" (pp: 249-262);  
 "Nanoscience, Nanotechnology & Ethics: Promise & Peril"—Winston—Ray Kurzweil (pp:301-309)  
 Biotechnology & Nanotechnology & Weapons of Mass Destruction— **Recommended:** Winston—B. Joy, "Why  
 the Future Doesn't Need Us" (pp: 285-300)  
 Biotechnology & Genetic Engineering: **Recommended:** 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: October 21<sup>st</sup> & November 25<sup>th</sup> (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 textbook 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:**

**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 13/14: <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 2455FA—Computers and Society**

Armstrong, Allison & Charles Casement. (1998—Chapters: 10 & 11, pp: 167-199). *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). *Science, Technology and Society: a Sociological Perspective*. Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing.

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

McBride, Stephen & Heather Whiteside. (2011—pp:58-79; 106-111). *Private Affluence, Public Austerity: Economic Crisis & Democratic Malaise in Canada*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

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

Quan-Haase, Anabel. (2013—pp: 167-189). *Technology & Society: Social Networks, Power, & Technology*. Toronto: Oxford U Press.

Rifkin, Jeremy. (1995—Chapters: 3, 5, & 18, pp: 42-56; 69-80; 275-293). *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). *User Error: Resisting Computer Culture*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

Scott-Dixon, K. (2004—Intro & Chapters: 1 & 2, pp: 11-29; 31-40;63-81). *Doing IT: Women Working in Information Technology*. Toronto: Sumach Press.

Stiglitz, Joseph E. (2012—pp:52-82; 265-290). *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Turkle, Sherry. (2011—pp: IX-XVII; 279-296). *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books.

Winston, Morton & Ralph Edelbach. (2012—pp:182-195; 222-235; 249-262; 301-310). *Society, Ethics, and Computer Technology*, Revised 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Toronto: Nelson Education Ltd.