

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 2014

Wednesdays: 7:00 - 10:00 p.m., AT-1010

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 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 2455WA—Computers and Society*.
- 3) Recommended (for the purpose of improving your writing skills): Northey, Margot, Lorne Tepperman and Patrizia Albanese. 2012. *Making Sense in the Social Sciences: A Student's Guide to Research and Writing* (5th ed.). Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Course Topics

Required & Recommended Readings

1. Introduction
Theorizing about the Computer Technology
Political Economy Theories & the Social Context of the Digital Technology—**McChesney**, Chapter 1
Sociology, Science & Computer Technology—Recommended: Bauchspies et al, Preface & Chapter 1
2. The Use of Computer Technology in our Children's Early Education—**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 Computer Technology—**Rifkin**, Chapter 5
 Visions of Technological Utopian **Rifkin**, Chapter 3
 Women's Work in the IT **Scott-Dixon**, Introduction & Chapter 1 (pp:11-29; 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 Recommended 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—Recommended: **J. Stiglitz** (pp: 52-82); Winston—J. Stiglitz, "Making
 Globalization Work" (pp: 174-181) [**Reserve**]
 Globalizing the Social Economy **Rifkin**, Chapter 18

7. International Forum on Globalization—**Winston**, "What Should be off-Limits to Globalization" (pp: 182-195)
 The Impact of Globalization on Developing Countries—Recommended: M. Pendakur & R. Harris —
 R. Harindranath *Citizenship and Participation in the Information Age* (pp:56-64) [**Reserve**]
 Neo-Liberal Globalization & Markets & Inequality in Canada—Recommended: **McBride & Whiteside**
 (pp: 58- 79; 106-111)
 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—Recommended: Rose, Chapter 2 [**Reserve**]; **McChesney**, Chapter 4
 The Origin of the User as a Social Concept Recommended: Pendakur & Harris (pp:19-32) [**Reserve**]
 The Culture of Software Production Recommended 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 Recommended Case Study: Rose, Chapter 4 [**Reserve**]
 The Impact of Advertising—**Recommended Film** (background material): "*The Ad & the Ego*"
 Children & Advertising on the Net Recommended Case Study: Armstrong & Casement, chapter 8
 Computer Users & Technical Knowledge Recommended Case Study: Rose, Chapter 5 [**Reserve**]
 Analyses of Computer Anxiety, Technostress — Recommended Case Study: Rose, Chapter 6 [**Reserve**]
 The Youthful User & Computer Use—Recommended Case Study: Rose, Chapter 7 [**Reserve**]
 The Future User & Responsible Action Recommended 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 Case Study: Pendakur & Harris—M. Lemire (pp:310-321)
 [**Reserve**]
 Cyber-Activism across National Borders—Recommended Case Studies: Pendakur & Harris—K. O'Neill
 (pp:322-335); **How Facebook Changed the World: The Arab Spring** (parts1-4)
 <<http://vimeo.com/45410957>>
 <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 Case Study: 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 12th & 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 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 2455WA—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 4th Edition. Toronto: Nelson Education Ltd.