

COMM 553
Political Economy of Global Telecommunications and Information
Fall 2019

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Course description: In recent years, the governance of new media has taken the global center stage. In the US, policymakers are debating new data protection rules, how to reign in on fake news, how to prevent increased consolidation in the aftermath of net neutrality, and even the possibility of breaking up dominant players. The EU has passed stringent new privacy (GDPR) and copyright rules (Article 13 of the EU Copyright Directive) that some argue threaten to fragment the Internet, while China and other countries continue to build cyber walls that reassert national sovereignty over the global digital ecosystem.

In this class, we will examine the political and economic forces shaping new media governance, and how this is likely to affect the organization of Internet and new media markets around the world. We will survey contemporary debates on hot-button issues such as net neutrality, algorithm regulation, data privacy, copyright and safe harbor, cross-border data flows and content regulation in social media, and examine how policy responses to these issues differ between countries and regions and why this matter for the future of the Internet and the digital economy at large. The class is aimed at M.A. students interested in acquiring rigorous policy analysis tools, as well as doctoral students whose research interests intersect with regulatory and policy issues.

Class structure: The course will follow a seminar teaching format, which means keeping lectures to a bare minimum. Much of the class will be based on open discussions (grounded in class readings) and case studies developed by students. As a result, keeping up with weekly readings is essential. A substantial part of the class time will be dedicated to student's research projects, which will be developed over the course of the semester and presented to the class in the final weeks. We may also have occasional guest speakers join the conversation.

Course requirements: There are two requirements for the course:

1. **Weekly memo (25% of final grade).** Each week students will write a short memo of approximately 500 words (about 1 page) that engages with the week's readings. The goal of the memo is to critically reflect on the reading and present at least two questions for class discussion. Memos will not be graded individually but as a whole class activity. However, they will be marked each week as follows:
 - “check+” = thoughtful analysis that moves the conversation forward;
 - “check” = a good effort that contributes to class, but could have been stronger;
 - “check -” = not quite up to expectations, let's talk about how to improve.
2. **Research project (75% of final grade).** Students will develop a research project in which they are expected to examine a policy issue relevant to the class. Projects will be developed throughout the semester following the guidelines below:

- Project pitch & weekly check-ins (10%). Every week there will be short updates on everyone's projects. These are not formal presentations, but students should come ready to talk about progress and challenges encountered.
- Class presentation (25%): a 20-minute oral presentation similar to a presentation at an academic conference or business meeting.
- Final paper (40%): delivery of written research paper at the end of the semester.

Reading material: The foundational books for the class are:

Drake, William J., and Ernest J. Wilson. *Governing Global Electronic Networks: International Perspectives on Policy and Power*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.

Mueller, Milton. *Networks and States: The Global Politics of Internet Governance*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.

A detailed reading list for each week with additional material will be provided in later versions of this syllabus.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems:

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) / Title IX - (213) 740-5086

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421

studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Class schedule (tentative)

Part I: Introduction to Political Economy

Week 1: Political economy foundations.

- What is political economy? Theoretical foundations.
- The positive political economy tradition. The critical political economy tradition.
- International regime theory. Legacy and new developments.

Week 2: Economic foundations and the theory of regulation.

- Economic and business principles of media and information industries.
- Economies of scale and scope, network effects, standards, multi-sided markets.
- Public, private and club goods.
- Why regulate information industries and what for?

Week 3: Globalization and the governance of communication networks.

- The governance of global communication networks: why, how and who.
- Institutions: from ITU to WTO to ICANN.
- National sovereignty and jurisdictional challenges in new media governance.

Part II: Policy and Regulatory Changes

Week 4: Deregulation and modularization in the telecommunications industry: from POTS to 5G.

- The old telecommunications regime.
- Technological and political changes.
- Deregulation or reregulation?
- Modularization and competition in networked industries.

Week 5: The Internet in political economy perspective.

- Technical and policy origins of the Internet.
- The Internet layers model.
- Internet governance: critical resources and beyond.
- Multistakeholderism and its critics.

Week 6: Internet fragmentation?

- Is the Internet fragmenting? Why and how?
- CDNs, private networks and firewalls.
- Geolocalization and the rebirth of national sovereignty online.

Part III: Key Contemporary Debates

Week 7: Network neutrality: why it matters.

- Problem definition.
- Theories and models.
- International approaches.

Week 8: Consolidation and competition in the digital ecosystem.

- Mergers and competition in media, information and telecommunications.
- The problem of market definition.
- Vertical vs horizontal integration.
- Does ownership matter? Why and how.

Week 9: Privacy and data trade.

- The political economy of privacy.
- New regulatory developments: the EU's GDPR.
- Cloud services, data localization and international data trade.

Week 10: Social media governance.

- Safe harbor and copyright law.
- Rules of entry and conduct.
- Content moderation: how and for what?
- Balancing free speech and protection.

Week 11: Spectrum politics.

- Why spectrum policies matter.
- Licensed vs unlicensed spectrum.
- Spectrum allocation regimes worldwide.
- Institutions and private actors in the spectrum allocation debate.
- 5G and beyond.

Week 12: Cybersecurity.

- The politics of cybersecurity.
- International regimes for cybersecurity.
- Balancing security, surveillance and free speech.

Week 13: Universal service and digital inequality.

- The digital divide in international perspective.
- National broadband policies.
- Digital divides beyond access: skills and outcomes.

Week 14: The governance of algorithms and AI.

- Algorithms, targeting and discrimination.
- The role of the state in AI and algorithm regulation.
- Privacy and transparency in AI.

Week 15: Final project presentations.