**REL 341**

**Spring 2023**

***Technology, Culture, and Ethics***

**Instructor**: Prof. Sheila Briggs **Place and Time**: CPA 257, MW 2.00 - 3.20

**Office Hours:** M 12.50-1.50 (drop-in); W 12.50-1.50 (by appointment only). Students can meet with the instructor on Zoom outside of the stated office hours. In Spring 2023 all office hours will take place on Zoom until further notice.

**Contact Info:** Email: [sbriggs@usc.edu](mailto:sbriggs@usc.edu) ; phone number (office): 213-740-0267

**Course Description and Learning Objectives**

Technology is not only about how we make artifacts and shape the external work but also fundamentally about how we make ourselves as human beings. After discussing key concepts and definitions of technology, the course considers the broad historical framework in which technologies were able to develop in human societies. Then it looks at the major critiques of technology since the middle of the 20th century. We concentrate on the figure of the cyborg and technology as the enabler of a posthuman future. Our next segment is devoted to the exploration of artificial intelligence through projects in which we search for Sophia AI and create images with DALL-E. We then turn to the vexing question of how technology is linked to social oppression and how that could be broken and replaced. Finally, the course finds in popular culture expression of the hopes and fears generated by technology.

In this course you will:

* Identify the key concepts through which technology’s relations to culture and ethics are stated
* Discuss what factors affect the development of technology in human societies
* Explain the views on technology of major modern and contemporary thinkers
* Compare these views and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in a range of debates about technology
* Select appropriate theoretical frameworks and apply them to specific questions about the value, benefit or risk of a technology
* Argue about the value of technological innovations and whether constraints should be placed upon them.

All readings for the course will be electronically accessible through Blackboard and the Ares course reserve.

**Assessment and Assignments**

One **research** **paper** of 12-15 pages that will carry 30% of the grade. This entails students doing their own research. The paper is due on **April 26**, our last class session. Further details for the preparation and submission of the paper will be given later in the semester.

**One take-home mid-term examinations** (20% of the course grade). Students have one week to complete it after it is distributed on **February 8**.

**Two short reflection papers** (6 pages and 10% of the course grade each) on the artificial intelligence class projects (Sophia AI and DALL-E), discussed in class on **March 6** and **March 22**.

**One take-home final examination due on Monday, May 8.** It will carry 20% of the course grade.

The examinations are in essay format, requiring you to answer two questions. The answer to each question must be at least 4 pages in double-spaced 12-pt typescript.

Detailed instructions will be given for each assignment.

Students should have completed the required reading by the session for which it is assigned.

Course attendance and participation make up 10% of the grade. Students are allowed **six** excused absences for any reason but these six also **include illness, personal emergency, USC sporting events, religious holidays, etc**. After that students will lose a course point (1% of the course grade) for each absence from class..

*Grading Scale*

Grades in the course final will be determined using the following scale

A 94-100

A- 90-93

B+ 87-89

B 84-86

B- 80-83

C+ 77-79

C 74-76

C- 70-73

D+ 67-69

D 64-66

D- 60-63

F 59 and below

**Course Schedule**

January 9: Introduction to the Course.

***Technology and human history***

January 11: What is technology? Lecture on YouTube: https://youtu.be/Ig0WK26yQw8

**January 16: Martin Luther King, Jr, Holiday**

January 18: Fire—the technology that made us human. Readings: Wrangham, New Scientist.

January 23: Technology and the historical factors in the development of human society. Reading: Diamond. Lecture on YouTube (Thinking about the History of Technology with Jared Diamond): https://youtu.be/JuiybKSqJrU

***Critiques of Technology in the 20th Century***

January 25: Technology and the malaise of modern society. Reading: Marcuse

January 30: Technology and the malaise of modern society. Reading: Ellul.

February 1: The essence of technology. Reading: Heidegger.

February 6: The essence of technology. Reading: Heidegger.

February 8: The essence of technology. Reading: Heidegger.

**Midterm Examination (distributed February 8, due February 15)**

***The Cyborg and the Posthuman***

February 13: The posthuman turn in the theory of science and technology. Reading: Haraway.

February 15: The posthuman turn in the theory of science and technology. Reading: Haraway.

**February 20: President’s Day Holiday**

February 22: Religion and the posthuman. Reading: Thweatt-Bates.

***Artificial Intelligence (The Sophia Project)***

February 27: Students gather information on the Sophia AI to discuss in class

March 1: Smarter than us? Readings Geraci,

March 6: Students discuss their short reflection papers on the Sophia AI in class.

**Spring Break: March 13-15**

***Artificial Intelligence (DALL-E Project)***

March 8: Students devise prompts to create images using Open AI’s DALL-E.

March 20: Smarter than us? Reading: Coeckelbergh

March 22: Students discuss their short reflection papers on creating images with DALL-E in class.

***Technology and Social Oppression***

March 27-29: The algorithms of oppression. Reading: Noble, pp. 1-63.

April 3-5: Searching for Black girls. Reading: Noble, pp. 64-109.

April 10: The perils of searching and being searched for. Reading: Noble, pp. 110-33.

April 12: Classifying people. Reading: Noble, pp. 134-152..

April 17: Changing the algorithms, Reading: Noble, pp. 171-186.

April 19: Carceral technoscience. Reading: Benjamin.

***Technology and Popular Culture***

April 24: The technoscientific imagination and its encounter with religion and popular culture: Reading: Graham

April 26: Cyborgs and 21st-century gaming. Reading: Frykenberg.

**Final Examination (distributed April 26, due May 8)**

**Course Policies and Resources for Students**

You can contact the instructor through email. If your email needs a response, you will receive one in 48 hours (except at weekends).

**Don't cut class**. You are expected to attend every session of the synchronous (“live”) Zoom session as well as completing the work of the asynchronous sessions.

**Submit written assignments punctually**. Late assignments may lose points or not be graded at all! If you are having difficulties completing an assignment, contact the instructor as soon as possible, before or by the time the assignment is due. It is always easier to accommodate student requests for time extensions on assignments, when these are presented *before* an assignment is due. The instructor must submit the final course grade soon after the final examination. The final course grade is precisely that. The instructor cannot alter it, and even students with compelling reasons for not completing the work on time have to undergo a long petition process, which is often unsuccessful.

**Use Blackboard and check your USC e-mail account for course information.** In this semester Blackboard will be the major platform for delivering the course online. Your access to the Zoom address for class sessions is to be found in the Tools section through the “USC Zoom Pro Meeting Lab” tab. Instructions on assignments, course materials and announcements will be posted on Blackboard. I will also contact students through their USC e-mail accounts.

The **Writing Center** is there to help you. You can have up two 30-minute appointments per week depending upon availability. . Writing Center consultants will help you develop ideas and arguments and revise rough drafts for the research paper you produce in the course. There are also workshops covering every aspect of writing where you can improve your skills in specific areas. The Writing Center is still delivering its services during the pandemic and you can access them through: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/>

When the campus is open, the Writing Center can be found on the second floor of Taper Hall (Room 216) and appointments and sign-ups for workshops can be made over the 'phone (213-740-3691). You can also try just walking in, but then you are not guaranteed an appointment, and the center at times will be very busy.

All students are expected to know and follow USC's rules on **academic integrity**. Students must acknowledge all sources (books, journals, videos, web-based and electronic materials, etc.) used in an assignment, whether these are directly quoted, paraphrased or their main ideas summarized. Students should retain notes and any other material that can substantiate that they produced their work consistent with the rules on academic integrity. 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” [https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b](https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b/).

Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable.  See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, [http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/).

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a **disability** is required to register with the Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for OSAS is (213) 740-0776 (email: osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

If an officially declared emergency (other than the current pandemic!) makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information (http://emergency.usc.edu) will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.