



COMM 309: Communication and Technology

Section: 20491

Time: M/W, 2:00 – 3:20

Room: ANN L105A

Instructor: Prof. Dmitri Williams

Email: dcwillia@usc.edu

Office: ANN 414K

Professor's hours are by appointment, usually before or after class.

TAs

[Alb – Jav] Michie Leccese, mleccese@usc.edu, by appointment only (in-person or Zoom meeting)

[Jens – Paz] Steven Proudfoot, sproudfo@usc.edu, Mondays 2 to 3pm, ASC 1st floor or lobby [\[info/directions here\]](#) and/or by appointment via zoom unless requested otherwise.

[Picc – Z] Jack Lipei Tang, lipei.tang@usc.edu, by appointment only (in-person or Zoom meeting)

Course Description

The uses and effects of technology, the rise of networks, issues of industry, identity, relationships and online community, analytics and data, apps, mobile and new tech.

309 is taught by several different faculty. My class tends to emphasize 1) the social psychology of technology, i.e. how it affects us, our relationships and communities and 2) the systems of policy and business that tend to drive us to particular outcomes.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students will gain a basic exposure to the fundamentals of business and economics, sociology, social psychology, and history by examining technology and its impact on society. Technology is different every semester, so the goal outcome isn't necessarily to get you prepared for what's here now. The goal is to prepare you to understand and take advantage of whatever comes next, i.e. a toolset for the future.

Course Notes

Readings

All readings and slides are supplied via Blackboard. You don't have to buy anything (yay). The materials consist of book excerpts, online articles, magazine clips, research papers, and trade articles.

Do you have to read everything? Only if you want to be smart, and if you want an A. I will have pop quizzes specifically designed to reward students who, and to penalize those who don't. They won't be about obscure details. If it's clear that many students aren't reading, I'll have more of them.

Note Taking: A must

I will use slides and will post them on Blackboard since many students like to have them and to annotate them. To be really, really clear: They are not your notes. They are also not a study sheet for exams. I don't have study sheets. The slides do not cover everything, especially points of discussion or the readings. *I will frequently say or call out important things in class, and you want to be literally noting them.* Active listening is key, and your notes are your notes. Students who don't take notes typically get poor grades.

Attendance, Courtesy and Advice

Aside from “Be excellent to each other,” my number one rule of life is “Just show up.” Attendance is not taken. You can skip it and simply fail at life. And if you miss a quiz, you’ll of course fail that.

Similarly, you all have laptops and can use them to be distracted, but then why come to class? The research on using laptops in class and comprehension and retention is very clear: it hurts you. The more you actively listen and take notes, the better you do, period. So, use laptops to take notes or to look up ideas. Save the games, the ‘Gram and the shopping for later. Laptops are [available for loan](#).

Please respect your classmates and don’t be late or leave early.

Yes, it’s a large class, but if you can participate, please do. Regular, quality participation will get you extra credit.

Lastly, but important: The classroom is a safe space for ideas and discussion, which requires that everyone does their part to create an atmosphere of inclusion and acceptance. There will be no discrimination based on anyone’s background, demographics, or politics, etc. In short, the only thing I don’t tolerate is intolerance. Also, [have a sense of humor](#).

Discord channel

We will set up a Discord channel for you all, and then will leave it so that you can use it to exchange notes, organize, etc. Please see the sections below on safe spaces and professional behavior.

Link: <https://discord.gg/T3kvk7aY3W>

Link won’t expire now!

Grading & Assignments

The papers for this class are graded on both content and format. Papers written unprofessionally will receive poor grades. Spell correctly, and use good grammar. Please read the section on AI below.

Use Times, 12pt, double spaced, with 1” margins.

Exams are graded blind: names are removed before grading for anonymity.

Late assignments lose 10% per day.

Any queries about your grade on an assignment must be submitted to the TA in writing, *no sooner* than 24 hours after you get your grade.

This class is not about memorization or rote learning. There will be some things you need to simply remember, but the bulk of your grade will depend on you *applying* knowledge.

Short assignments (10% each)

1) Black Mirror assignment.

Watch one of the episodes below and write a 1-2 page reaction paper using at least two concepts from the lecture, and your own values or opinions.

Episodes you can choose:

Season 2: White Christmas

Season 3: San Junipero or Playtest

Season 4: Arkangel

Season 6: Joan is Awful

Grading rubric: Did you analyze or merely describe? Did you apply concepts from class? Was it thoughtful or surface-level? Was your formatting, spelling and grammar professional grade?

2) Social Media blackout.

From Sep. 27 to Oct. 4, don’t use any social media. You can start Oct. 1 if you have a work reason. Email is OK, and

text is up to you, but see if you can avoid it. On the evening of Oct. 3 (before our Wednesday class) write 1-2 pages about the experience. Was it good, bad, or something else? What were the pros and cons? Did you learn anything about yourself or your friends? Will you do anything differently after the experience? Consider comparing your results with the Facebook Quitting study on Blackboard. You must apply 2-3 concepts from the lecture or the readings.

Grading rubric: Did you answer all of the questions above? Did you apply course concepts? Was it thoughtful or surface level? Was your formatting, spelling and grammar professional grade?

Final Paper

The final paper is an original format as we described in class? Did you do something empirical? Did you have hypotheses and did you address them with evidence? Were the results presented clearly? Did you draw conclusions from them? Did you incorporate concepts from class?

There is an in-depth breakdown of the rubric, advice and expectations [here](#), and materials and a template on Blackboard.

Grade breakdown

Short assignments	20%
Exam 1	25%
Exam 2	25%
Quiz(es)	5%
Final Paper	25%
Participation	Extra credit

Course Grading Policy

Average work does not get a B+ or A-. That may apply in other classes, but it doesn't here. If that's a problem, *don't take this class*.

All assignments need to be completed and handed in on time to avoid a grade reduction. If you are unable to turn in an assignment due to illness or a personal emergency, you must provide written documentation that will allow you to be excused, or discuss your situation with your TA in a timely manner. Do not wait until the end of the semester to sort things out.

In order to pass this class you will need to complete ALL of the assignments. Failure to complete one or more of them will result in an F in the class.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

A/A- outstanding, thoughtful and enthusiastic work

B+/B above average work, demonstrating good insight into assignment

B-/C+ needs improvement on ideas, argument and follow through

C and below fulfilling the bare minimum and showing little understanding of the material

Each assignment will be worth 100 points and will be converted to a percentage score depending upon the weight assigned to each. Your percentage scores on the assignments will be totaled and translated to a letter grade per the scale shown below:

A	95-100
A-	90-94

B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Assignment Submission Policy

All assignments are due on the dates specified. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor/TA, usually with some kind of documentation, grades are reduced by 10% per day late, starting immediately at the time and date due.

Generative AI Policy

AI is going to be part of your life after this class and into your careers. So, our mutual job is to have you learn how to use it intelligently while still making *you* intelligent. Learning to write and think are crucial parts of your training, and if you outsource the mental work you'll be less than you should be. I've tried all of the assignments for this class using AI, and I think it tends to give mostly correct, but flowery output. Some things were just flat-out wrong. It didn't have my voice or ideas, and it won't have yours. If you had the ideas and voice first and then used it, well, that might be different.

When using AI, keep in mind that:

Low quality prompts equal low-quality results.

Don't trust a thing it says. And, you're responsible.

To protect yourself from plagiarism, or accusations of utilizing AI, consider completing your work in Google Docs or another platform that leaves a digital trail of your changes to prove your work is yours and yours alone.

There are also issues of transparency—giving credit for work done by AI, or showing how you used it. My policy is that you can use it, but you need to be clear you did, and how. If you use AI in your assignments, you must include a statement at the end (which won't count in any page totals) explaining how. If you want to use a template for that, here's a good one:

Usage	Tool Used (e.g., ChatGPT-4)	How you edited the output, if at all	Conversation Link (If available)
Topic selection			
Brainstorming and idea generation			
Research			
Source valuation			
Outlining/planning			
Drafting			
Media creation			
Revising			
Polishing			
Other			

Course Schedule

Date	Class #	Session	Readings	Assignment Due
M, Aug. 26	1	Class intro, Structuralism, Prisoner's Dilemma	None	
W, Aug. 28	2	Trust, Systems, Community	Ranked: The Ten Best Cities Optional: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGOLbk9yMgA .	
M, Sep. 2	Labor Day, No Class			
W, Sep. 4	3	Origins and precedents	Czitrom, p. 3-29; McLuhan, p. 3-6 (intro). Watch this (10 min).	
M, Sep. 9	4	Reactions to Tech, Start of Science Fiction as Metaphor	Glassner, p. 29-35, NYT: How China is Policing the Future Just for reference: Possum link w/transcript	

W, Sep. 11	5	Science Fiction as Metaphor, cont.	Cottom, NYT article	
M, Sep. 16	6	AI, Guest: Prof. Mike Ananny TBD	Two links (Nature and The Guardian), and a podcast. There are three podcast eps. The first is required and the last two are recommended.	
W, Sep. 18	7	Diffusion, Being Digital	Rogers, p. 267-299; Negroponte excerpts Ch. 1 (11-28) Ch. 6 (75-85) Ch. 12-14 (149-183)	Black Mirror Assignment
M, Sep. 23	8	Lessig and code, Structuralism goes bonkers	Lessig, 9-28	
W, Sep. 25	9	CMC	Love in the time of robots (WIRED).	
M, Sep. 30	10	Traditional media business models	Litman, p. 265-272. We'll cover any math in class, or you can use this . Remain calm.	Note: Start blackout today, or no later than this Sunday
M, Oct. 7	11	Social Impact I: Community	Putnam, Ch. 13; Conti, Do Yourself a Favor (The Atlantic)	
W, Oct. 9	12	Social Impact II: Exit, Voice and Loyalty	Galston reading, Optional: two studies on Facebook use	Social media blackout exercise due
M, Oct. 14	13	The Spectrum and the FCC/Midterm Review	Spectrum Map (no, you don't have to memorize it)	Sample question due to TAs
W, Oct. 16	14	Midterm	Note: You will not need bluebooks. You will need a laptop.	
M, Oct. 21	15	Midterm debrief, Politics, Parties, Political Compass	"America Without Family, God or Patriotism," Shirky, p 55-69	
W, Oct. 23	16	Technology and Democracy, cont., Collective action	Shirky, p 1-6 (same PDF), Two WIRED articles on speech	

M, Oct. 28	17	The Networks Perspective, Overflow catchup	Christakis & Fowler, Ch. 3	
W, Oct. 30	18	Analytics, Big Data, Social Value (condensed)	Day in the life of an analyst (3min YouTube). Read SAS' page on what analytics is.	
M, Nov. 4	19	Persuasion	Cialdini, Ch. 1	
W, Nov. 6	20	Term paper workshop	None	Note: submit ideas for next week by Friday to this link . Don't repeat other's. Send in examples of something new, impactful or fun, e.g. long-range batteries , room-temp superconductors .
M, Nov. 11	Veteran's Day, no class			
W, Nov. 13	21	So what else is new? Inventors and investors/Updates from the News Cycle/Comm theories/Lessig TED	Read some of these metaverse predictions (I'm on p. 4), and watch the Apple Vision Pro reveal from June (9 min). Optional report , if you're into AR.	Paper topic due today to TAs.
M, Nov. 18	22	Identity I: Anonymity, Reputation, Roles	None, focus on your outline. Optional: NYT dating story	Paper outlines due to TAs.
W, Nov. 20	23	Identity II: Cues, Front/Backstage, Deception, Etiquette	Meyrowitz, Ch. 3	
M, Nov. 25	24	Identity III and Managing the Commons:	WIRED China Social Credit, Lessig, Ch. 6, Cyberspaces (from Code , same as before) Optional: Watch "Nosedive" and think about how it relates to the China Social Credit system	Submit a final exam question

W, Nov. 27	Thanksgiving Break, No Classes			
M., Dec. 2	25	New media business models, disruption, The Long Tail, Final exam review	WIRED Guide to Blockchain, Wikipedia entry "Creative Destruction" Optional: "The Blockchain: A Love Story/A Horror Story"	You'll do course evals in class
W., Dec. 4	26	Final exam	Note: You will not need bluebooks. You will need a laptop.	
W., Dec. 11		Final Papers Due	Papers due by 5 pm, Wed., Dec. 11	

*Class will be recorded on request for students observing religious holiday

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

The School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations,

or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school's policy.

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

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

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call

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

Office of Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity/Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and

auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

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

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

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

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

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenbergscholarships.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenbergscholarships-and-awards>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.