SOSC 3000K   Understanding Society, Economy, Governance in the Digital Era (3 units)

<u>Instructor:</u>
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Office hours: Wednesday 3:00pm-5:00pm

<u>Course Description:</u>
This course is designed for advanced undergraduate students interested in analyzing social, economic, and political phenomena in the digital age. The course will cover important issues and help students develop social science skills for analyzing digital phenomena. It aims to encourage critical thinking about debates related to digital phenomena and provide insights on how to adapt and succeed in the digital age. The course will be divided into four main sections: a historical introduction to the information technology revolution, economic phenomena in the digital age, social phenomena in the digital age, and governance in the digital age.

<u>Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs):</u>
By the end of this course, students will be able to
1) understand key concepts and theories of social science to analyze the phenomenon in human society in digital contexts.
2) apply concepts and theories to develop explanations of various issues in the digital era.
3) understanding different approaches to social debates arising from the development of digital technologies.

<u>Grading Policy</u>

Participation (10%). Students are expected to actively contribute during the class after finishing the essential reading. Students need to sign the ATTENDANCE SHEET for each class after the add-drop period. Consider that you may have various personal, family, and emergency reasons for missing the class. You will have a maximum of five chances for absences. After the <u>fifth absence</u>, you will lose ALL participation points.

News Presentation (6%).
Starting from the third week, students will be required to present news related to digital technology or digital live in class. These news items need to reflect the social, economic, and political issues related to social media, digital technology, or digital applications. Each student's presentation should be no longer than <u>five minutes</u> and needs to include the following: a brief description of the news; the significance of the news; and a preliminary assessment of the news. Slides must be submitted before/on Monday of the week.

Weekly critical responses (20 %). Starting from the second week, students are required to write two short critical memos related to class-assigned readings and in-class discussions. You must show your insights and arguments about the reading and the reflection of in-class discussion. If you are unsatisfied with the score of two responses, you can do it one more time. I will take the two highest scores from the three responses. By starting to write earlier, you may get more chances to get a higher score. Each response is around <u>two double-spaced pages (12-point front)</u>. The deadline is before/on the following week, Monday (For example, if you do the second week's response, you must submit the response by Monday of the third week (Feb 17, 11:59 pm). <u>*Gen-AI aids are not permitted.*</u> You need to finish the responses yourself. Late assignments will not be graded.

In-course Exam (24%). 12 term explanations (2 points each). The term explanations include concepts, events, or people discussed in class.

Final Group Project (40%). Students will work in groups of two to complete a group project. The TA will help you to form the group. The finished product of the final paper is a case study of a specific social, economic, or political phenomenon in the digital era. Students are encouraged to utilize Gen-AI to assist in completing their final project. The group project will be graded in three parts: 1) Final Presentation (8%). The group will have approximately 10 minutes to present their preliminary findings in class, including Q &A. 2) Final Paper (32%). The final paper will be approximately ten pages including references (12-point font, double spaces). To avoid free riding, the final presentation and paper should attach a page about the detailed division of labor. An individual's grade may be adjusted by the quality of labor. The final paper also should include a **reflection report on the use of Gen-AI**. The report must detail the process and code employed with the AI tool, along with their reflections on AI use (The number of pages of the report is not included in the final paper).

Summary

Assessment Task	Contribution to Overall Course grade (%)	Due date
Participation	10%	Every week
News presentation	6%	Every week
Weekly responses	20%	On/before Monday 11:59 pm
In-course exam	24%	8/4/2025
Final Group Project	40%	18/5/2025

* Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be released within two weeks of the due date.

Mapping ILOs to Assessment Tasks

Assessed Tak	Mapped ILOs	Explanation
News presentation	ILO2	This presentation assesses students' sensitivity to digital phenomena in everyday life and their ability to evaluate them from a social science perspective.
Weekly responses	[ILO1. IOL2. ILO3.]	The weekly responses assess students' ability to think critically about digital social phenomena. Such capacity requires students to develop their arguments from debates between different points of view.
In-course exam	ILO1	The exam assesses students' mastery of basic concepts and facts related to the digital age.
Final Group Project	[ILO1. IOL2. ILO3.]	The final project assesses students' ability to apply concepts and theories to develop explanations of specific economic, social, and political changes in the digital era.

Grading Rubrics

News presentation and Final presentation

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Pass --- Failure
Structure (30%)	Students present information in a logical and engaging sequence that the audience can easily follow. The speaker effectively allocates time for each portion, providing the right amount of detail for clarity.	The student presents information in a logical and coherent sequence that the audience can follow. The speaker can allocate each portion of time during the presentation.	It is difficult to follow a presentation because the presenter jumps around. The speaker understands how to manage time.	Cannot understand the presentation because there is no clear sequence of information. Speakers can't allocate time.
Content (50%)	The content and examples reflect key changes in the digital era. The slides are adequate, engaging, and effectively support student expression.	The presentation content is highly relevant to various digital lives and societies, and the slides strongly support student expression.	The content presented is relevant to digital life and society, and the slides support student expression.	The presentation's content is unrelated to the course topic, and the slides' content is challenging to understand.
Expression (20%)	The speaker is in perfect control of the content and can complete the speech without the scripts. The audience can fully receive and understand the speaker's message.	The speaker grasps the content entirely and can express the main ideas fluently; the audience can clearly receive the speaker's message.	The speaker has a basic grasp of the content, and the audience can basically understand the speaker's point of view.	The speaker struggles to convey the main points clearly, leading to confusion among the audience.

Weekly responses

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Pass --- Failure
Argument (70%)	Sufficient, compelling evidence to support key arguments	Evidence is appropriately used to support the main arguments	Arguments have been proposed but lack an argumentative process. Some evidence is used but uneven.	Insights are not reflected, or your arguments are weak and invalid
Writing (30%)	Structure enhances the paper, strong sections, and seamless flow; there is virtually no English error.	The structure supports the paper and clearly ordered sections fit together well. There are Minor English errors.	The structure has disconnections and/or redundancies, as well as frequent English errors.	The structure needs significant reorganization; English writing significantly impairs readability.

In-course exam

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Pass --- Failure
Comprehension (70%)	Demonstrates a deep insightful level of understanding	Demonstrates a good surface level of understanding	Demonstrates an adequate level of surface understanding	Demonstrates an inadequate level of understanding
Expression (20%)	Expressions of ideas are consistently accurate, logical, and clear.	Expressions of ideas are generally accurate, logical, and clear.	Expressions of ideas are generally accurate, logical, and clear.	Ideas are expressed poorly, lacking logical structure and clarity.
Writing (10%)	English is consistently excellent.	English is proficient, with no major errors.	The use of English is fair, though some errors are present.	English is hard to understand.

Final Project

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Pass --- Failure
Topic (15%)	The topic reflects the key change in the digital era. Case studies can be used to establish interesting points concretely.	The topic is highly relevant to the phenomenon of the digital era, and case studies can strongly support the analysis.	The topic is relevant to the phenomenon in the digital era; Case studies can support the analysis.	The topic has little or no relevance to the phenomenon in the digital era.
Argument (40%)	Arguments are clearly stated and defensible. Sufficient, compelling evidence to support key arguments.	Arguments are valid and well-supported. Evidence is appropriately used to support the main arguments.	Arguments have been proposed but lack an argumentative process. Some evidence is appropriately used but uneven.	Insights are not reflected, or your arguments are weak and invalid.
Writing (20%)	Structure enhances the paper, strong sections and seamless flow; Virtually no English error.	The structure supports the paper, and clearly ordered sections fit together well; Minor English errors.	The structure has disconnections or/and redundancies; Frequent English errors.	The structure needs significant reorganization; English writing significantly impairs readability.
Reflection (25%)	Students can clearly demonstrate an analysis of the use of generative AI, its contributions, and its limitations.	Students can analyze the reasons for their interactions with AI. Some reflections on the use of generative AI are clearly offered.	Students can provide a process of interacting with AI and offer some evaluation about the contribution of generative AI to writing.	There is little or no reflection on the use of generative AI tools.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Time
Kitchin, Rob, and Alistair Fraser. *Slow Computing: Why we need balanced digital lives*. Bristol University Press, 2020, chapter 2.
Pressed for Time: the acceleration of life in digital capitalism,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uR1xDyh2oXY, from 4:15 to 39:10.

Week 3: Information and Knowledge
Myers, Steven Lee. "How social media amplifies misinformation more than information." *The New York Times* (2022), https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/13/technology/misinformation-integrity-institute-report.html
"Even disinformation experts don't know how to stop it." *The New York Times* (2024), https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/11/technology/disinformation-tools.html
Budak, Ceren, et al. "Misunderstanding the harms of online misinformation." *Nature* 630.8015 (2024): 45-53.
Bateman, Jon, and Dean Jackson. "Countering disinformation effectively: an evidence-based policy guide", *CEIP* (2024): 1-9.

Week 4: Development
Schwab, Klaus. "The Fourth Industrial Revolution-What It Means and How to Respond." https://www.weforum.org/stories/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/
"The Great Convergence by Richard Baldwin: 9 Minute Summary", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-oOrQSLLA0&t=7s
Andreesssen Mac. "The Techno-Optimist Manifesto." https://a16z.com/the-techno-optimist-manifesto/
Morozov, Evgeny. *To Save Everything, Click Here: The folly of technological solutionism*. PublicAffairs, 2013, chapter one.

Week 5: Digital Capitalism
Cadwalladr, Carole. "Stewart Brand's Whole Earth Catalog, the book that changed the world." *The Guardian* (2013), https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/may/05/stewart-brand-whole-earth-catalog
Malcomson, Scott. *Splinternet: How geopolitics and commerce are fragmenting the World Wide Web*. OR books, 2016, pp.59-92.

Week 6 Platform
Srnicek, Nick. *Platform Capitalism*. Polity, 2017, chapter 2.
Zuboff, Shoshana, "A Digital Declaration." *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, September 15, 2014, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/the-digital-debate/shoshan-zuboff-on-big-data-as-surveillance-capitalism-13152525.html.
Morozov Evgeny, "Capitalism with New Clothes." *The Baffler*, February 4, 2019, https://thebaffler.com/latest/capitalisms-new-clothes-morozov.

Week 7: Techno-State
Lei, Ya-Wen. *The Gilded Cage: Technology, Development, and State Capitalism in China*. Princeton University Press, 2023, chapter 6.

Week 8: Labor and Work
Woodcock, Jamie. "Technology, labor, and the gig economy." *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Media Sociology*, 2020.
Heller, Nathan. "The bullshit-job Boom." *The New Yorker* 7 (2018). https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/the-bullshit-job-boom

"Why this economist thinks you should take a 'wait-and-see' approach to AI",
https://www.charterworks.com/acemoglu-full-intv/

Week 9: Divide and Inequality
Lupton, Deborah. *Digital Sociology*. Routledge, 2014, chapter 6.
Angwin, Julia et al. "Machine Bias." ProPublica (2016), https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing

Week 10: Democracy and Participation
Diamond Larry, "Liberation technology." *Journal of Democracy*, 2010, Vol.21 (3), p.69-83.
Kreps, Sarah, and Doug Kriner. "How AI threatens democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 34.4 (2023): 122-131.
Walker, Shaun. "Nobody can block it": how the Telegram app fuels global protest." *The Guardian* (2020), https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/nov/07/nobody-can-block-it-how-telegram-app-fuels-global-protest
Sanchez, Gabriel R, et.al, "Misinformation is eroding the public's confidence in democracy." Brookings (2022), https://www.brookings.edu/articles/misinformation-is-eroding-the-publics-confidence-in-democracy/
"Carles Boix and Sir Tim Besley on Democratic Capitalism at the Crossroads,"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U70ASgQVZrs&t=2205s, from 4:00 to 41:00.

Week 11: Governance and Control
Green, Ben. *The Smart Enough City: Putting technology in its place to reclaim our urban future*. MIT Press, 2019, chapter 1.
Dimitrov, Martin K. "Exporting Chinese Digital Authoritarianism." *Routledge Handbook on Global China*. Routledge, 2024. 170-181.

Week 12: Future
Lingel, Jessa. *The Gentrification of the Internet: How to reclaim our digital freedom*. Univ of California Press, 2021, chapter 5.
Webb, Amy. *The Big Nine: How the tech titans and their thinking machines could warp humanity*. Hachette UK, 2019, chapter 8.

Week 13. Presentation

<u>Recommend Readings:</u>
Castells, M. (1996). *The Rise of the Network Society*. Blackwell Publishers.
Brynjolfsson, E., & McAfee, A. (2014). *The Second Machine Age*. W. W. Norton & Company
Sundararajan, A. (2016). *The Sharing Economy*. MIT Press.
boyd, d. (2014). *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. Yale University Press.
Zuboff, S. (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. PublicAffairs.
van Dijk, J. (2020). *The Digital Divide*. Polity.
DeNardis, L. (2014). *The Global War for Internet Governance*. Yale University Press.
Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. Yale University Press.
Johnson, S., & Acemoglu, D. (2023). *Power and Progress: Our Thousand-year Struggle over Technology and Prosperity*. Hachette UK.

<u>Course AI Policy</u>
Generative AI is only permitted and requested to assist students with brainstorming, drafting, and writing during the final project.