

SI 430 Course Syllabus

SI 430: Information Technology and Global Society
Syllabus (last updated: September. 04, 2018)

Fall 2018 – Mon/Wed, 5:30-7:00pm – North Quad 2185

Instructor: Mustafa Naseem (mnaseem@umich.edu)

Clinical Assistant Professor of Information

Office hours: Tuesday 2-3 30 pm & by appointment

3445 North Quad, School of Information

Course Schedule (with READING DETAILS) can be found [here \(Links to an external site.\)](#)Links to an external site. (log in with your umich id)

SI 430: Course Summary

This course will explore advantages and disadvantages of *accessand use* of digitized information in both the local and global contexts, providing students a framework to analyze the design and use of IT in a social context.

Information Technology has become increasingly more pervasive, where at some point in 2015, the world passed the point where there were more mobile phone accounts than there are people on the planet. This increased access and use of digitized information has unforeseen social impacts and has raised new ethical issues. With every passing year, information technology plays a greater role in global events. This trend raises questions that human civilization has never before encountered: Can and do foreign adversaries use technology to affect the outcome of elections? Can a mobile phone help the children of dollar-a-day farmers in India? What tools does the Sri Lankan police have to request the takedown of a sensationalized and factually incorrect video on Facebook that is leading to lynching and unrest?

Yet, despite information technology's role in our public and private lives, few people have any kind of a framework for thinking about how technology and society interact. In this course, students will examine recent and current global events featuring information technology, and through both discussion and introspection, construct their own personal hypotheses of technology and society. Along the way, students will hear about the ways in which information technology is touching the remotest places in the world, gain an introduction to formal theories of technology and society, and stress-test their critical thinking skills!

This course is self-contained. There are no course prerequisites, but a willingness to engage in introspection, class discussion, thoughtful writing, and deep critical thinking is necessary.

In 2018, there will be an emphasis on topics related to technology in education, *health* and *politics*.

SI 430: Course Etiquette

This class is going to engage some challenging subjects involving some of the most contested political topics of our time. These topics can be deeply meaningful and significant to people, and rightly so. These are also topics on which people often have

different views, perspectives and experiences. And these are good things. But it can also, at times, make dialogue difficult.

The class discussion environment is one of mutual respect and support. All views are welcome. So too is disagreement. Not everyone has to agree. In fact, if everyone agreed, there wouldn't be much learning going on.

That said I expect our conversations to always be conducted respectfully. That means you are asked to listen and engage – especially when a colleague says something that you disagree with. It is perfectly OK in this class for people to “agree to disagree.”

Please be aware that my job as a professor is to challenge you. I will sometimes present arguments for positions that I don't even hold. Other times I will present arguments for or against positions that I fully expect are contrary to those held by most students. Sometimes I'll spend half the class arguing one side of an argument and the other half of the class arguing the other side.

Don't worry -- that's my job.

Specifically, my job is to help you to think, to consider alternative points of view, to figure out how to engage difficult subjects. If that means that you might be intellectually challenged or even made uncomfortable in this class, then good, that means I've earned my professor paycheck that day. But if you want to know what I really think about an issue, just ask, I'm happy to share.

You will probably hear me say this in class more than a few times: “I do not care what you think, but I do care how you think.” What does this mean?

This means what I care about is if you are a critical thinker. I care if you can articulate a coherent argument. I care if you can listen to someone else, hear what they say and offer a thoughtful response (whether in agreement or not). I care that you are respectful and engaged. I care that you engage the course materials and discussions. And I care that you get something out of this class that sticks.

Bottom line: This class operates under the idea of a welcome environment for difficult discussions. Our conversations are confidential; we assume the best of each other; we recognize that we are all human and make mistakes; and even though this class is a seminar format, it is sometimes OK to choose to be silent rather than engage.

SI430: Aims

The aim of this course is to have students:

- Develop the ability to systematically and critically study the impacts of technology on a given social context, particularly an unfamiliar or global context not native to the students
- Understand the social and ethical considerations arising from widespread use of IT by individuals, organizations, and societies.
- Develop an understanding of the capabilities of current and emerging IT systems and evaluate their impact on a range of stakeholders

SI 430: Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will have:

- Familiarity with seminal, international applications of information technology in an international context, especially in health and politics.

- An initial understanding of the main categories of theory in technology and society: utopianism, skepticism, technological determinism, social determinism, socio-technical theory, and instrumentalism.
- A sense for why it's important and useful to have a theory of technology and society, and an understanding of what is desirable in a theory of technology and society.
- A defensible personal hypothesis about technology that can be used to guide future thinking about technology, both for personal and professional contexts.

SI 430: Assignments and Grading

Grades will be assessed based on the following elements.

- Quality of class participation (10%)
- Readings and small assignments (25%)
- Three statements of personal theory about technology and society [400-2000 words each] (25%)
- Midterm (**Nov 7**) (25%)
- Final paper (**Dec 11**) [2000-3000 words] (15%)

Attendance & Class participation (10%)

: Attendance (-10% to 0%) is mandatory. To receive the high grade of 0%, students should come to every class, on time, and stay for the entire duration of the class. An attendance sheet will need to be signed within the first ten minutes of class, after which students will be considered absent. If for *any* reason students must miss class or a portion of it, they should notify the instructor at least 24 hours before class and make arrangements to get course materials from a colleague. One class absence during the semester will be excused, but students must have notified the teaching team 24 hours in advance. For every subsequent class missed, and every absence I am not notified for, students will lose 5% from their class participation grade. I will cap this at -10%. In short, please come to class.

: Taking initiative (5%) is important in life, particularly in student life. This means going out of one's way to be a good, responsible, and considerate member of the class. It also means speaking up in class and participating actively in class discussions. Students can see these as karma points to collect through the semester, which will then be factored into 5% of their overall grade. Students can win up to 3 initiative points in each class. Twenty points or more will get them the full 5%. These points will be granted on a discretionary basis by the instructor.

: Integrity (5%) is an even fuzzier concept than initiative, but it translates to professionalism. At a base level, it means contributing one's fair share of work in a team-based exercise. However, it also means paying attention during class, respecting time boundaries imposed, not engaging in diversions through various technological devices, among other things. I fully expect all students to come to class with a professional attitude, ready and willing to learn. Integrity points, therefore, work in the opposite direction. Students will be granted 3 integrity points for each class, but if their conduct is lacking in ways mentioned above, they might lose these. Also worth 5%. Also discretionary.

Readings and Small Assignments (20%)

Class readings are an important part of the course, and are weighted accordingly. Students should bring to each class a *hardcopy*(in black ink) of the following:

- Your name, course number (SI 430), and the date the assignment is due at the top.
- A 300- to 400-word review of **one** of the required readings of your choice, in which you provide a brief summary that responds to the following questions:
 - What is the *main point* the author is trying to make? The main point is the one coherent idea that the author wants the reader to remember. It is often, but not always, stated explicitly. The main point is also very rarely a section-by-section summary of the reading.
 - Who is the author? What is their background? What makes them qualified to write the article? What biases might they have?
 - What is particularly interesting to you in the reading, and why?
 - Is there anything specific in the reading that you disagree with or aren't convinced of, and if so, why?
 - Overall, how do you feel about the author's point, as it is made in the reading?
- For *each* of the other two readings, short, one-paragraph descriptions of the main points.

At some point during the semester, it will be announced that the last three questions in the 300- to 400-word review will be changed to the following:

- What other reading (from this class) does the reading relate to, and how?
- On what points would the authors of the two articles agree, and why?
- On what points would the authors of the two articles disagree, and why?
Alternatively: On what points does one author have something to say where the other doesn't? And, what is interesting about that?

There will also be a few small assignments scattered throughout the semester.

Requirements for these will be announced at least a week ahead of time. They will typically require that you do something outside of class and bring the results with you in *hardcopy*.

Statements of Personal Hypothesis about Technology and Society (25%)

Every student will develop a personal hypothesis about technology and society in this course. Throughout the course, you will be given opportunities to have others challenge your hypothesis and to rework your hypothesis. Your hypothesis need not be novel – it could be based on elements of your personal experience, in-class readings, discussions with friends, or other independent reading you might do on your own. The goal is to arrive at a hypothesis that you can defend against competing theories, and which helps you interpret instances of information technology in your own life and in the larger world. There will be three specific instances during the course when you will submit your evolving hypothesis:

- **On the first day [400-1200 words]**– You will be asked to write about how you see technology and society interacting, based on whatever you already know when you come to class. [Those missing the first day of class will be asked to submit this at the next possible class.]
- **Class 9 (Oct. 3) [800-1600 words] – A revision of your hypothesis is due.** You should revise your hypothesis so that it takes into account the readings up until that point. Ask yourself whether points raised by the readings are consistent with your

hypothesis. If they are consistent, explain how. If they don't seem consistent, is there a way to look at them so that they will be? Or, will you need to change/adjust your hypothesis?

- **Class 21 (Nov. 21) [1200-2000 words]**– You will apply your hypothesis to analyze a current event that has to do with digital technology in a global context. Research the topic thoroughly, including its larger context – geographical or national context, historical context, etc. Also, see if there are related historical events that it could be compared or contrasted with. Your paper should provide an overview of the topic as well as any relevant background; interpret the topic in the context of your personal hypothesis (briefly state your hypothesis in your paper); compare and contrast with related historical events, as well as with any relevant readings from class; speculate about how events might evolve in the future, relying on your personal hypothesis; and otherwise do all the things a good paper should do, such as have an introduction and conclusion, have a proper bibliography with appropriate citations, etc.

Midterm (25%)

The midterm (**November 7**) will cover *all of the required readings* and classes covered until that day. It will include both simple factual questions and more in-depth analytical questions from the readings and from class discussion. In addition, it will include essay questions requiring you to read new passages and responding to specific questions about them.

Final Paper (15%)

Your final paper (**due: Dec 11**) should be a standalone paper that makes a case for your personal hypothesis about technology and society in a specific context. This should be a well-researched paper in which you make a strong argument to support your hypothesis, back it up with concrete evidence – including evidence from recent global events, consider and explain counterexamples, explain how the hypothesis relates to the various types of theories we discussed in class (e.g., technological determinism, social determinism, etc.), make some predictions about how the future will bear out (based on your hypothesis), and otherwise do all the things a good paper should do, such as have an introduction and conclusion, have a proper bibliography with appropriate citations, etc. The evidence provided for the hypothesis should be appropriate for the hypothesis, and it could include a mix of personal stories, news articles, and books or research papers. It's important that you consider the credibility of your sources – books, research articles, and respected news sources are better than blog posts and marketing websites. You can re-use text from your previous papers in this class, but be sure that you do more than cut-and-paste. The paper as a whole should flow well and make sense to an intelligent layperson. The paper should be 2000-3000 words long.

Course Schedule (AND READINGS):

Course Schedule can be found [here \(Links to an external site.\)](#)[Links to an external site.](#) (login onto google docs with your umich id)

Course Structure

Unless otherwise indicated, assigned readings and small assignments will be reviewed and discussed during the class under which they are listed below. Assigned readings and assignments should be completed *before* the class indicated. Active participation in class discussion is expected.

Most classes will be run as guided discussions, with much of class time spent reviewing and discussing the assigned readings. Students will be called on at random to answer questions or to provide comments – be prepared to be cold-called! To provide quality responses, it will be important to have read and digested the assigned readings.

Occasionally, students will be asked to exchange assignments with another member of the class, and to mark them up with comments. For this purpose, please bring a colored-ink pen that is neither black nor red.

Grading + Late Assignments

Grading policies are non-negotiable. To get an A, students must demonstrate an excellent understanding of subject material and actively contribute to a stimulating classroom environment. This means that they must show up to class, raise their hand in class to participate in class discussions, not give in to phone/laptop distractions, and produce high quality work for all other deliverables. Students should expect to earn a B if they complete all of the requirements for the assignments reasonably well, and demonstrate some aptitude (but not mastery) of the material. They can expect a C if they fail to complete requirements for the assignments, e.g., if they ‘forget’ to submit their final project report. All late assignments lose half the value of the assignment.

Technology in the Classroom

As a general rule, the use of digital devices will not be allowed during class since their use inhibits face-to-face discussion.

Academic Integrity and Misconduct

Unless otherwise specified in an assignment all submitted work must be your own, original work. Any excerpts, statements, or phrases from the work of others must be clearly identified as a quotation, and a proper citation provided. Any violation of the School’s policy on Academic and Professional Integrity (stated in the Master’s and Doctoral Student Handbooks) will result in serious penalties, which might range from failing an assignment, to failing a course, to being expelled from the program. Violations of academic and professional integrity will be reported to UMSI Student Affairs.

Consequences impacting assignment or course grades are determined by the faculty instructor; additional sanctions may be imposed by the assistant dean for academic and student affairs.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way the course is usually taught may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office to help us determine

appropriate academic accommodations. SSD (734-763-3000; <http://ssd.umich.edu> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.) typically recommends accommodations through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students, while acknowledging that a variety of issues, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, and depression, directly impacts students' academic performance. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at (734) 764-8312 and <https://caps.umich.edu/> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. during and after hours, on weekends and holidays or through its counselors physically located in schools on both North and Central Campus. You may also consult University Health Service (UHS) at (732) 764-8320 and <https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site., or for alcohol or drug concerns, see www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources. For a more comprehensive listing of the broad range of mental health services available on campus, please visit: <http://umich.edu/~mhealth/> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site..