

# PRE 231 History and Philosophy of Technology

3 Credits 8-Week Syllabus Summer 2008

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This class meets for eight (8) sessions. We begin Wednesday, 28 May 2008, and we end Wednesday, 16 July 2008. We meet every Wednesday, at 6:00 PM sharp and end not later than 10:30 PM.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on aspects of the history of technology; the moral and social dilemmas that past technologies gave rise to (even when those dilemmas were not clearly acknowledged); the potentials of selected current technologies; and the moral and social dilemmas that those technologies raise. Students study the ways major thinkers have tried to deal with the dilemmas technologies have posed, and are asked to think through their own responsibilities concerning the technologies discussed.

## READINGS

1. There are three books **required for this course.**

- **Technopoly (*The Surrender of Culture to Technology*)** by Neil Postman, Vintage Books, 1993 (paperback)
- **Society and Technological Change** by Rudi Volti, fifth edition, 2005, ISBN 0-7167-8732-6
- **Cars and Culture: The Life Story of a Technology** by Rudi Volti, 2006, ISBN 0801883997 (Paperback), JHU Press
- **Recommended, but not required, The Age of Spiritual Machines** by Ray Kurzweil, latest edition (paperback).

2. A class notebook (referred to as “CN”) will be distributed at the beginning of the class. It contains the syllabus and other necessary information. Articles will be given in class from time to time. You are expected to read the articles as instructed.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES** This course encourages a developmental understanding of technology and its impact on society, considering the good, the bad, the debatable.

Through reading, research, discussion and reflective writing, students will:

1. examine the evolution and history of technology by probing the past, facing the present and envisioning a preferred future;
2. consider our transformation from a society that uses technology to one that is shaped by it (Technopoly);
3. confront the need for ethical behavior and social responsibility in using technology;
4. explore the long term effects of technological change and wisdom in using it.
5. debate philosophical issues on technology and its impact in various domains.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and active participation in class discussion, activities, and class projects.

2. Read and study text, as well as any handouts or assigned Web sites. **Note: You must have an e-mail address for this class. We will exchange class related item via e-mails, professor to students, students to professor, and students to students (particularly when working on your major project).**
3. See assignments, next page, for explanation of other course requirements.

### **COURSE POLICIES**

**Attendance.** Attendance is an expectation, not an option. You must negotiate with professor for any missed class within three (3) days of the missed class. If you do not contact the professor within three (3) days of your absence, you forfeit 50 points. **Except for extraordinary circumstances, missing more than two classes results in a failure.** You can merit an A if you miss only one class and you do quality makeup work for 25 points. Thus, 25 of 50 points (which a fully attended class merits) can be gained for that missed class. [This applies only for a maximum of two missed classes.]

**If you know you will miss more than two classes during this term, do not enroll in this class at this time.**

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### **Assignments**

<p>1. <b>Class attendance and active participation.</b>  <b>Attendance.</b> Each class fully attended with evidence of active participation, is worth 50 points, for 400 points total. <b>(Note: Read course policies above.)</b>  <b>Active participation.</b> “Active participation” means being actively involved in class discussions and activities. This class requires significant discussion and critical thinking. This means that you need to show participation by reading and doing the assigned work and by coming prepared to discuss it.  <b>It also includes responding to e-mail messages from classmates and the professor. Your team project will involve email. You will computer generate your assignments on line.</b></p>	<p>Attendance + Active Participation 4 0 0</p>
<p>2. <b>Written reflections.</b> Each student will computer generate four one-page assignments. The directions for doing these will be explained the first day of class. Each assignment done well merits 30 points. (Total 120 points)</p>	<p>1 2 0</p>
<p>3. <b>Major project.</b> The purpose of this team project is to focus on a technological topic relevant and significant to course content. Details for the project will be explained in class. Each team will give a 60-75 minute oral presentation focusing on the project topic with the goal of enlightening the class and stimulating discussion. [Time allotment is subject to change and depends on class size.]</p>	<p>2 5 0</p>
<p>4. <b>Grading.</b> To calculate your final grade for an 8-week term, divide the number of points gained by the number of possible points, 770. Determine letter grade by using by using the table below.</p>	<p><u>Total</u> 7 7 0</p>

**Letter grade numerical values**

A+ = 98-100	B+ = 89-91	C+ = 80-82	D+ = 71-73	F = 64 and below
A = 95-97	B = 86-88	C = 77-79	D = 68-70	
A- = 92-94	B- = 83-85	C- = 74-76	D- = 65-67	