

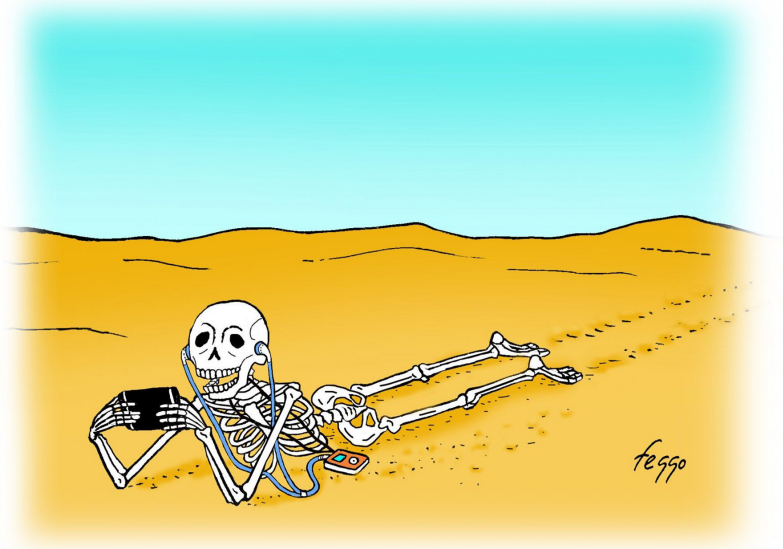
TECHRUPTION

CORE COLLOQUIUM

CCOL-UH 1119

AZZA ABOUZIED AND MATTHEW SILVERSTEIN

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

No new technology emerges without changing the fabric of society around it. We cannot isolate its impact to a single design solution or benefit. This is true of all technology—think of fire, paper, the wheel, the printing press, the steam engine, etc.—but as the rate of technological development and reach accelerates, we are hardly afforded the time to step back and evaluate the implications of a new technology before it becomes ubiquitous. If it brings any good at all, humanity will buy into it, regardless of its other consequences: the fear of being left behind in a competitive wealth race forces adoption at global scale. The goal of this course is to examine technology with an eye toward answering the following questions: Which side effects do we tend to miss when we evaluate a new technology through the narrow lens of its intended purpose? Once we take these side effects into account, might we realize that a technology we previously took to be beneficial is actually harmful? How can we empower ourselves to mitigate the impact of technological advances on our societies and ourselves, or at least control the many ways in which they influence our lives?

COURSE DETAILS

Course Meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:20 AM–12:35 PM, Computational Research (A2) 004

Credits: 4

Prerequisites: None

Corequisites: None

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The central goal of this course is to enable you to think more reflectively and critically about technology and the way in which it affects our lives. This goal is reflected in the course learning outcomes (CLOs) detailed below. Each CLO is linked to various program learning outcomes (PLOs), which are included in an appendix at the end of the syllabus.

Upon successful completion of this course,
you will be able to:

	PLO 1	PLO 2	PLO 3	PLO 4
1. Recognize and describe the ways in which you have become accustomed to or dependent on particular technologies and reflect on whether these technologies are making your life better or worse.	High		Medium	
2. Describe and analyze the various ways in which historical technological developments have fundamentally altered our shared existence (for better or worse).	High			Medium
3. Critically examine recent or emerging technologies in order to identify possible unnoticed but potentially harmful (or even devastating) consequences.	High			Medium
4. Reflect critically, in written and oral form, on a particular recent technology or a particular take on the promise or dangers of technology more generally.	High	High		Medium

TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODOLOGIES

Class Discussions. A colloquium is a place for discussion and debate: the word “colloquium” is derived from a Latin word that literally means “to converse.” You are not really a member of this colloquium if you are not actively participating in our conversation. (We may encourage your participation by calling on you at various points during the semester to summarize and explain ideas and arguments from the reading, and also to share ideas and arguments of your own.) Quality participation in class discussions will enable you to understand and appreciate viewpoints other than your own, which will help you to sharpen and strengthen your own ideas and arguments.

Slow Reading. In order to participate effectively in class discussions, you must read the assigned texts *slowly* and *carefully* before coming to class. Slow reading is *active* reading: it involves not merely passively taking in someone else’s ideas but also engaging with and interrogating those ideas. In other words, slow reading produces a conversation between you and the text. Since we will often want to consult and discuss particular passages from the assigned readings together, you should always *bring your physical copy of the reading with you to class.*

Taking Notes. You should take notes during our class discussions (as well as while you are reading): write down questions that occur to you, highlight or underline passages you do not understand,

and keep track of your own ideas. Since the use of electronic devices is not allowed in class, you must bring both something to write *with* (a pen or pencil) and something to write *on* (paper or a notebook).

Journaling. The course will include a two-week smartphone “detox.” (We will provide you with a Nokia “dumb” phone.) During this detox, you will keep track of your experience without your smartphone in a daily journal, reflecting on how accustomed we have become to uninterrupted internet connectivity, access to instant entertainment, and so forth. Through this daily journaling and reflection, you will be able to uncover some of the hidden impacts of technology on your life and think more critically about the costs and benefits of the hyperconnected life we all now lead.

Moon Sighting. At the end of February (at the start of Ramadan) we will take a field trip to Al Sadeem Observatory in Al Wathba for an immersive experience of moon sighting and space observation. This will give us an opportunity to appreciate and reflect on how technology has shaped the ways in which we measure and mark the passage of time.

GRADED ACTIVITIES

Your grade for the course will be based on class participation, a class presentation, and three written assignments: a detox journal, a topic proposal, and an essay.

Activity	Grade Percentage	Submission Date	Course Learning Outcome(s)
Detox Journal	35%	Week 3	1
Topic Proposal	5%	Week 7	2, 3, 4
Student-Led Discussion	15%	Weeks 12–14	2, 3, 4
Essay	35%	Week 14	2, 3, 4
Class Participation	10%	Ongoing	1, 2, 3, 4

You must complete each graded activity in order to pass the course.

Detox Journal. During the smartphone detox in weeks 2 and 3, you will keep a daily journal, describing and reflecting on the ways in which being without your smartphone is (or is not) affecting your life. Is it changing the way you socialize? The way you study? The way you pass the time while you are in between events? How difficult are you finding the detox? Have you been tempted to ask for your smartphone back? Is being without your smartphone making you feel less anxious, or more? What, if anything, is your experience teaching about the role that technology plays in your life? The complete journal should be at least 10 pages (double spaced).

Topic Proposal. At the end of week 7, you will submit a 1-page proposal for the topic for your class presentation and essay. The topic should be a question or set of questions about a particular technology, or about a particular viewpoint on technology more generally. It does not have to be tied directly to any of the course readings (although it can be). Your topic must be approved before you can begin preparing your class presentation and paper.

Student-Led Discussion. The final three weeks of the course will be largely student led. For either all or half of a class period, you will lead a discussion on a topic of your choosing (related to a reading you will select).

Essay. At the end of the semester you will submit an essay on the topic you proposed and then covered in your class presentation. The essay should be organized around a clear question, and it should have the goal of helping your reader understand what your answer to that question is (and why that is your answer). The finished essay should be 8–10 pages (double spaced).

Class Participation. Active and effective class participation involves *listening attentively* and *asking questions* as well as *sharing your ideas and arguments*. Your goal should not be to talk as much as possible, but rather to contribute to and advance our conversation. You can do this by introducing an interesting idea, putting forward a novel argument, sharing a different perspective, or expanding on or responding to someone else’s ideas. You can also contribute to a conversation by asking helpful questions or even simply by having the courage to admit that you are confused or lost. (Generally, if you are feeling lost, you are not the only one.) At those moments, saying “Wait a minute: I don’t understand what you’re saying!” is a great way to slow the conversation down so that everybody can get back on the same page.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance. The less you attend class, the less you learn. Attendance in class is therefore mandatory. Your final grade for the course will be reduced by $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade (from A– to B+, for example) for *each absence after the first*. You may avoid this grade penalty by submitting a summary of the required reading for the missed class. This summary must be submitted *before the next class meeting*, and we may require you to rewrite it until we are satisfied with it. There are no excused absences: this policy applies to any missed class meeting, regardless of the reason for your absence.

Late Work. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, you will be penalized for late work. Written assignments that are submitted late and without an extension will be marked down $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade (from A– to B+, for example) for every day of lateness. If there are special circumstances (family emergencies, dire illness, and so forth), please contact us *before the assignment is due* to arrange an extension.

Grading Scheme. Graded activities will be assessed using letter grades (A, B+, etc.). To calculate your course grade, these letter grades will be assigned the following numerical values:

A+	A	A–	B+	B	B–	C+	C	C–	D+	D	F
100	95	91	88	85	81	78	75	71	68	65	50

Once your course grade is calculated numerically, it will be converted back to a letter grade using the following intervals:

F	D	D+	C–	C	C+	B–	B	B+	A–	A
[0–60)	[60–67)	[67–70)	[70–73)	[73–77)	[77–80)	[80–83)	[83–87)	[87–90)	[90–93)	[93–100]

Note that the lower bound of each interval is inclusive, whereas the upper bound is exclusive (except for the upper bound for the A range). For instance, the interval for a B+ includes any value that is less than 90 but greater than or equal to 87. Consequently, a grade of 89.89 is a B+, as is a grade of 87.02. There is no rounding (up or down).

Electronic Devices. Use of mobile phones, laptop computers, and other electronic devices is not allowed during class. Please turn off your devices and put them away before class begins. Exceptions will be made for students who require the use of an electronic device in order to participate in class effectively.

Mental Health. As a university student, you may experience a range of issues that can interfere with your academic performance, such as heightened stress, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, sleep disturbance, strained relationships, grief and loss, and personal struggles. If you have any well-being or mental health concerns, please consider visiting the Counseling Center (open Sunday–Thursday, 9:00 AM–5:00 PM) on the ground floor of the Campus Center or scheduling an appointment to meet with a counselor (by calling 02 628 8100 or emailing nyuad.healthcenter@nyu.edu). If you require mental health support outside of these hours, you can call NYU’s Wellness Exchange hotline (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week) at 02 628 5555. You can also use the Wellness Exchange’s mobile chat feature (available through the Student Portal). If you need help accessing any of these services or if you are unsure of what to do, please reach out to us directly.

Syllabus Check. If you have read this far, please send us a picture of your favorite pet or pets. If you have never had any pets, please instead email us a picture of some other adorable animal. Send your picture before the end of the first week of the semester. (This is a way for us to check how many of you actually read the syllabus.)

Academic Integrity. At NYU Abu Dhabi, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students, faculty, and staff take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others. In turn, these values create a campus climate that encourages the free exchange of ideas, promotes scholarly excellence through active and creative thought, and allows community members to achieve and be recognized for achieving their highest potential. Students should be aware that engaging in behaviors that violate the standards of academic integrity will be subject to review and may face the imposition of penalties in accordance with the procedures set out in at <https://students.nyuad.nyu.edu/campus-life/community-standards/policies/academic-integrity/>. In this class, using ChatGPT or other generative AI tools (including Grammarly’s AI writing assistant) as an aid in preparing, drafting, and editing any written work is strictly forbidden. (There is no need to use Grammarly at all, since we will not be assessing your writing on the basis of grammar.) *Students who use generative AI as a writing aid will receive no credit for the relevant assignment and will be reported to the Office of Undergraduate Education.* Plagiarism—the passing off of another’s words or ideas as one’s own—is also strictly forbidden. *Students who commit plagiarism will ordinarily receive a failing grade for the course.* Be sure to cite all sources (written or otherwise) that you quote, paraphrase, and consult. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or how to cite your sources properly, please ask us.

COURSE MATERIALS

All required course readings will be distributed in class.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments should be completed *before class* on the date under which they are listed.

January 21 - Introductions

January 23 - Detox Preparation

Kashmir Hill, "I Was Addicted to My Smartphone, So I Switched to a Flip Phone for a Month"

January 28 - Slow Reading

David Mikics, *Slow Reading in a Hurried Age*, "The Problem"

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (begin)

SMARTPHONE DETOX BEGINS

January 30 - Progress and Technology

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (first half)

February 4 - Preparing for the Debate

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (finish)

February 6 - The Debate

February 11 - Detox Reflections

Anna Lembke, *Dopamine Nation*, "Running from Pain" and "The Pleasure-Pain Balance"

SMARTPHONE DETOX ENDS

February 13 - Technology and Time

Lewis Mumford, "The Monastery and the Clock"

February 17 - DETOX JOURNAL DUE (5:00 PM)

February 18 - Conversations

Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, "The Flight from Conversation"

February 20 - Technology and Relationships

Ted Chiang, "The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling"

February 25 - Making Better People

FILM: *Gattaca*

February 27- Against Enhancement

Michael J. Sandel, "The Case Against Perfection"

February 28 - AL SADEEM OBSERVATORY FIELD TRIP

March 4 - Social Media and the Self

Rogers Brubaker, *Hyperconnectivity and Its Discontents*, "Selves"

March 6 - TBD

March 7 - TOPIC PROPOSAL DUE (5:00 PM)

March 18 - Technosolutionism

James C. Scott, *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, "The Resilience of the Vernacular"

March 20 - The Quantified Life

Mark Bowden, "The Measured Man"

March 25 - Technology and Culture

Rogers Brubaker, *Hyperconnectivity and Its Discontents*, "Culture"

March 27 - Technological Omniscience

Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel"

April 8 - Artificial Intelligence

Michael Gerlich, "AI Tools in Society"

April 10 - Generative Ghosts

Meredith Ringel Morris and Jed R. Brubaker, "Generative Ghosts"

April 15 - The Gig Economy

John Oliver, "Food Delivery Apps"

Rebecca Mead, "Airbnb Moves In"

April 17 - Work

Brian Merchant, *Blood in the Machine*, "Fear Factories" and "So Are the Robots Coming for Our Jobs?"

April 22 - Student-Led Discussions

April 24 - Student-Led Discussions

April 29 - Student-Led Discussions

May 1 - Student-Led Discussions

May 6 - Student-Led Discussions

May 8 - Student-Led Discussions

May 16 - ESSAY DUE (5:00 PM)

APPENDIX: PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of the Core Curriculum, students will be able to:

1. Critically examine historical and contemporary topics of global significance, which includes formulating clear, precise questions and arriving at well-reasoned conclusions using (a) qualitative, (b) quantitative, (c) contextual, and (d) creative modes of reasoning.
2. Communicate effectively for various audiences and purposes, including participation in public settings.
3. Demonstrate self-understanding and intercultural competency.
4. Identify and reflect critically on conceptual and ethical complexity.

APPENDIX: BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

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