

Science, Technology & Society, University of Wollongong

Computers in Society

STS128 & STS228

Spring session, 2001

SUBJECT NOTES

These notes, plus additional information, are posted at
<http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/classes/>

Lecturer

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Sometimes you can find me in my office, especially in the afternoons. You are also welcome to contact me by phone (at home after 8am and before 9pm, please), fax or email, to discuss any issue or make an appointment.

Objectives

“Computers in society” is about the social aspects of computers and, more generally, information technologies. It is about understanding the impacts, both good and bad, of computers on society. It is about the choices that people can make concerning computers, and about who has the most power to make such choices. It is about various aspects of society—corporations, governments, families, etc.—and how they have shaped and been shaped by computers.

You don't have to have any special technical knowledge about computers in order to do this subject. The most important thing is understanding how society operates, in particular when computers are involved.

“Computers in society” will be run on a project basis. In this way you will learn key ideas, develop skills in working in groups, and gain practice in formulating and carrying out projects. You are given scope to follow any of a number of directions.

At the end of this subject, it is expected that you should be able to:

- examine critically and discuss social issues concerning computers and other information and communication technologies;
- identify and systematically examine influences shaping the development and introduction of information technologies and their social impacts, and the requirements of their management;
- deploy in your explanations some fundamental concepts used in social analysis.

Furthermore, you should have developed your skills in finding and using arguments and information, in summarising and critically evaluating such material, and in writing, speaking and collaborating in groups.

Tutorials

Tutorials are held in weeks 2 through 13. Sign up for a tutorial at the first lecture or, afterwards, on the noticeboard near room 19.2056.

Lectures

Wednesdays, 4.30-6.30, room 67.302

Week	Lecture activity	Tutorial activity
1: July 25	Introduction	(no tutes)
2: August 1	Cheating and the net	Preparing for class activities
3: August 8	Music files	Preparing for class activities
4: August 15	Class activities (see p. 3)	Preparing for class activities
5: August 22	Class activities (see p. 3)	Preparing for class activities
6: August 29	Class activities (see p. 3)	Preparing for class activities
7: September 5	Class activities (see p. 3)	Planning investigations
8: September 12	To be announced	Planning investigations
9: September 19	To be announced	Planning investigations
10: October 10	Investigation games (see p. 4)	Planning investigations
11: October 17	Investigation games (see p. 4)	Planning investigations
12: October 24	Investigation games (see p. 4)	Report writing support
13: October 31	Investigation games (see p. 4)	Report writing support

Assessment

Component	STS128	STS228	credit points
Participation	20%	15%	1.2
Class activity	30%	22.5%	1.8
Investigation report	50%	37.5%	3
Concept analysis		25%	2

If the mark for the investigation report is higher than the mark for the class activity, the class activity mark will be raised to the investigation report mark.

Oral examinations I reserve the option to request any student to undergo an additional oral examination on any work that they have performed.

Subject notes for STS128/228, Computers in Society, Spring session 2001

Class activities You will work with a group of 3 or 4 students in your tutorial. Each group will pick a suitable topic. Possible topics include:

artificial intelligence and religion/spirituality	inequality and computers
cinema and computers	information warfare
cybersex	science fiction and computers
elections and computers	social interaction and the net
employment and computers	therapy on-line
gender and computers	video games

You can choose a different topic with my agreement.

In dealing with your topic, you should focus on two sorts of issues:

Conflict and cooperation

Advantages and disadvantages to individuals, groups and society

During weeks 4 to 7, each group will coordinate an activity for the lecture class based on its topic. Consider organising a debate, quiz, role play, or small group exercise—try to avoid lots of talking to the class. Consider using overheads, handouts, tapes and videos.

In designing your activity, you should use one or more methods developed by Edward de Bono, as described in books such as *Parallel Thinking*, *Six Thinking Hats*, *Serious Creativity*, *Six Action Shoes* and *Water Logic*. Provide a handout for the class describing the de Bono method(s) that you've used, why you chose them and how they relate to your topic.

You should also include some method to evaluate how well the class has understood what you are trying to get across.

Time allocated for each class activity will be at least 10 minutes times the number of group members, e.g. 30 minutes for a three-person group.

Class activities will be assessed using these criteria

- knowledge of subject matter
- audience involvement
- aids (handouts, overheads, posters, videos, etc.)
- use of de Bono methods
- method of evaluating how well the class has understood your message.

Alternative assessment

If for whatever reason you are unable to join a group or complete the class activity, an alternative is to write an essay.

Essay length: 1500 words.

Due date: Noon on Wednesday 12 September, in my mail box in room 19.2054.

Topic: Write the dialogue between two people about computers. Focus on one of the topics and the two sorts of issues specified for the class activity. Cite, using footnotes or the author-date system, at least 5 different articles, books or web sites. Incorporate use of de Bono's ideas.

Subject notes for STS128/228, Computers in Society, Spring session 2001

Investigation You will work in a team of 3 or 4 students in your tutorial to collect information and run a class game. (The team could be the same as the group for the class activity or could be different.)

- Pick a struggle that involves computers in a significant role. Possible areas include domain name disputes, hactivism (including defacement and denial-of-service attacks), wages and conditions for computer manufacture in the Third World, free versus proprietary software, on-line defamation, intercorporate legal battles, monopoly practices, information warfare, spammers versus opponents, social activists' use of the net, government repression of net dissidents, encryption, net pornography, and corporate and government surveillance.

- Collect information about the topic from each of these sources: (1) on-line; (2) off-line written or recorded (articles, books, videos); (3) interviews or observations; (4) a class game designed and run by your team in week 10, 11, 12 or 13.

- Use one or more of de Bono's methods in designing the game.

- Write an individual report about your team's investigation. (Each student writes their own report.) Include information about the topic and about how your team obtained information. In your report you should discuss: (1) participants in the struggle; (2) goals of the different participants; (3) resources used by participants in the struggle (such as economic, legal, political, ethical and knowledge resources); (4) tactics used by participants; (5) driving forces behind the struggle (that is, what makes the struggle occur?). Compare the quality and quantity of information from different sources.

Length: 2000 words.

Due date: Noon on Monday 12 November, in my mail box in room 19.2054. Alternatively, mail the report to me by express post no later than noon 12 November.

Investigation reports will be assessed using these criteria

- understanding of the struggle
- use of sources and comparisons between them
- The relevance and effectiveness of the class game and insights drawn from it
- argument (starting from clearly articulated premises; mobilising evidence and logic towards a conclusion; recognising assumptions made and limitations)
- quality of expression (organisation of material, clarity, grammar, spelling, etc.)

Concept analysis (STS228 only)

Analyse the struggle chosen for the investigation in relation to one of these concepts: (1) bureaucracy, (2) democracy/participation, (3) market or (4) patriarchy.

Write an essay about the topic in light of the concept. Include discussion of the relevance of struggle(s) (1) in or between bureaucratic organisations, (2) for and against participation, (3) within or against markets, or (4) for and against male domination.

Length: 1500 words.

Due date: same as investigation report.

Concept analyses reports will be assessed using these criteria

- understanding of the concept
- application of the concept to the struggle
- argument (starting from clearly articulated premises; mobilising evidence and logic towards a conclusion; recognising assumptions made and limitations)