

Science, Technology & Society, University of Wollongong
Computers in Society
STS128 & STS228
Spring session, 2002

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.

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.

Classes

Lectures are 4.30-6.30 on Wednesdays, room 67.302. Sign up for a tutorial at the first lecture or contact Brian.

Week	Lecture activity	Tutorial activity
1: July 24	Introduction	(no tutes)
2: July 31	Cheating and the net	Preparing for class activities
3: August 7	Music files	Preparing for class activities
4: August 14	Class activities (see p. 3)	Preparing for class activities
5: August 21	Class activities (see p. 3)	Preparing for class activities
6: August 28	Class activities (see p. 3)	Preparing for class activities
7: September 4	Class activities (see p. 3)	Preparing for spiels
8: September 11	Preparing for spiels	Preparing for spiels
9: September 18	Spiels (see p. 3)	Essay writing support
10: October 9	Essay writing activity	Essay writing support
11: October 16	No class	No class
12: October 23	Question & answer activity	Essay writing support
13: October 30	Evaluation	No class

Assessment

Component	STS128	STS228	credit points
Class activity	30%	22.5%	1.8
Spiel	10%	7.5%	0.6
Essay	60%	45%	3.6
Article analysis		25%	2.0

Attendance To pass the subject, you must attend at least 80% of lectures and tutorials. (Classes are omitted from the calculation when a certificate is provided justifying absence on medical or compassionate grounds.) If you are present for only part of a class, that counts as fractional attendance.

With the agreement of all students, the following modification will be used. For those with less than 80% attendance, a corresponding percentage will be subtracted from the overall mark. For example, with 72% attendance, $80\% - 72\% = 8\%$ will be subtracted.

Additional information The STS Program Handbook should be considered a supplement to these subject notes. Consult the handbook for policy on late submission, plagiarism, etc. Staff are committed to the use of nonsexist and nonracist language in all work submitted for assessment. The subject coordinator reserves the right to hold an additional oral examination for any piece of assessment.

Subject notes for STS128/228, Computers in Society, Spring session 2002

Class activities You will work with a group of 2 to 4 students in your tutorial. Each group will pick a suitable topic. Possible topics include:

artificial intelligence and religion/spirituality	virtual reality
cinema and computers	information warfare
cybersex	science fiction and computers
disability 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 introduce and apply at least one social theory. Some possibilities are:

- political theories: liberalism, representative government, participatory democracy, fascism, socialism, anarchism, totalitarianism
- economic theories: neoclassical economics, Marxism, political economy, Gandhian economics, humanistic economics
- religious “theories”: Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, atheism
- other theories: feminism, environmentalism, racism, altruism, pacifism, militarism

To find references about theories, consult introductory textbooks in economics, sociology or political science, or search library catalogues or the web using the name of the theory or related terms.

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 *Serious Creativity*, *Parallel Thinking*, *Six Thinking Hats*, *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. (You don’t have to use all this time but you will be guaranteed at least this much.)

Class activities will be assessed using these criteria

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

Spiel

You give a talk short talk (5 to 10 minutes) in lecture time on 18 September on a topic of your choosing related to the subject matter.

Spiels will be assessed using these criteria

- knowledge of topic
- speaking performance
- use of techniques such as cue cards, eye contact, overheads

Essay

Write a fictional dialogue between two people (or possibly more) concerning a case study concerning computers in society. The people ostensibly engaging in the dialogue can be fictional or real, dead or alive, but should not be staff or students at the university. For example, the dialogue might involve Bill Gates, Natasha Stott Despoja, Lara Croft, Aristotle, Charles Babbage, Sherlock Holmes, Osama bin Laden, Madonna, Homer Simpson or Mother Teresa, but not, for example, me or you. The dialogue should be as realistic as possible within the assumptions about the participants and situation. Virtually the entire essay should be dialogue. You may add the equivalent of “stage directions” (see typical plays for examples).

The topic of the dialogue should be on solutions to problems involving computers in society rather than on problems and their causes.

Each participant in the dialogue should speak from and/or advocate a political, economic, religious or other social theory (see examples under class activity, p. 3).

Participants in the dialogue should not normally refer to references explicitly (with the exception of well known writers). You, as the author of the dialogue, should provide footnotes at appropriate places, explaining what sources the speakers might be using, drawing inspiration from or bouncing off. A sample essay will be provided to show how this can be done. A minimum expectation is four different sources about the computer/society issue and three different sources about each of the two theories.

All the dialogue should be written by you. Do not use have your characters speak using text from published articles or interviews.

You are encouraged to work in a team on the essay. For example, in a team of three, one team member could investigate the computer/society issue and the other two members could study two theories. You can write your own individual essay or contribute to a group essay (for two or three students, no more). Group essays are the same length and are marked identically to individual essays, with equal marks to all contributors unless you specify otherwise.

Put your name(s) on the cover sheet but not elsewhere on the essay.

Length: 2000 words.

Due date: 4.30pm on Wednesday 30 October, by hand in class or under my office door (room 19.2059). Alternatively, mail the report to me by express post no later than 4.30pm 30 October.

Essays will be assessed using these criteria (roughly equally)

- knowledge of case study
- understanding of theories
- use of sources
- quality of the dialogue

Article analysis (STS228 only)

Choose a substantial scholarly article published in the past year on a topic involving computers and society and analyse it using two theories. Submit a copy of the article along with your analysis.

Length: 1500 words.

Due date: noon Monday 11 November

Article analyses reports will be assessed using these criteria

- understanding of the article
- understanding of the theories
- application of the theories in analysing the article
- 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.)