Computers in Society
STS128 & STS228
Spring session, 2003, Wollongong campus

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

Lecturer

Brian Martin, room 19.2059

Mailing address: STS, University of Wollongong, NSW 2522

Phone: 4228 7860 (home), 4221 3763 (work)

Fax 4221 5341

Email: bmartin@uow.edu.au

Web http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/

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 techologies 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.

Theories
We will be exploring a range of social theories and how they can be used to understand computers in society. 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

You can also use theories from psychology, law, education and other fields. 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.

Classes

Lectures are 4.30-6.30 on Wednesdays, room 67.302.

Week	Lecture activity	Tutorial activity
1: July 23	Introduction	(no tutes)
2: July 30	Cheating and the net	Introduction; prepare for class activities
3: August 6	Music files	Concept reports; prepare for class activities
4: August 13	Class activities (see p. 3)	Concept reports; prepare for class activities
5: August 20	Class activities (see p. 3)	Concept reports; prepare for class activities
6: August 27	Class activities (see p. 3)	Concept reports; prepare for class activities
7: September 3	Class activities (see p. 3)	Concept reports
8: September 10	Class activities (see p. 3)	Concept reports; essay writing support
9: September 17	STS228 only	No tutes
10: October 8	Essay writing activity	Concept reports; essay writing support
11: October 15	To be announced	Concept reports; essay writing support
12: October 22	Question & answer activity	STS228 only
13: October 29	Evaluation	No tutes

Assessment

Component	STS128	STS228	credit points
Concept reports	30%	22.5%	1.8
Class activity	20%	15%	1.2
Essay	50%	37.5%	3.0
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 *Faculty of Arts Undergraduate Handbook 2003* should be considered a supplement to these subject notes. See in particular:
• Staff consultation, student representation, p. 128
• Assignments, assessment, p. 129
• Language policy, p. 130
• Plagiarism, pp. 131-134 [Plagiarism will not be tolerated. For more information, see http://www.uow.edu.au/handbook/courserules/plagiarism.html]
• Sub-Dean matters, p. 135.
See also Code of Practice—Teaching and Assessment,
http://www.uow.edu.au/about/teaching/teaching_code.html

You are not required to pass every component of assessment to pass the subject. I reserve the right to hold an additional oral examination for any piece of assessment.

Concept reports

Each tutorial group will choose a sequence of theories (see p. 1). Each week, starting in week 3, you are expected to have read one or more sources about the theory for that week and, if called on, to report verbally on the following:

- summary of source(s) consulted;
- key ideas about the concept;
- two applications of the concept to issues involving computers;
- an application of the concept to your own life;
- a different application of the concept to the life of one of your class mates.

Concept reports will be assessed using these criteria

- understanding of the sources consulted
- understanding of the concept
- applications of the concept: insight, originality
- verbal expression

Class activities

You will work in 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	information warfare
cinema and computers	science fiction and computers
cybersex	social interaction and the net
disability and computers	therapy on-line
employment and computers	video games
gender and computers	virtual reality

You can choose a different topic with my agreement.

In dealing with your topic, you should introduce and apply at least one social theory (see p. 1).

During weeks 4 to 8, 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 slides, 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 that you've used, why you chose it and how it relates 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 7 minutes times the number of group members, e.g. 21 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 (roughly equally)

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

Essay

Write a fictional dialogue between two or more people who discuss a case study involving 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, Lara Croft, George Bush, J K Rowling, Saddam Hussein, 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 scripts of plays for examples).

Incorporate one of de Bono's methods in the dialogue in some fashion.

Each participant in the dialogue should speak from and/or advocate a political, economic, religious or other social theory (see p. 1).

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. The sample essay (see www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/classes/) shows how this can be done. A *minimum* expectation is four different sources about the computer/society issue, three different sources about each of two theories and one source by de Bono.

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

You are welcome 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 at most three students). 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 a cover sheet but not elsewhere on the essay.

Length: 2000 words.

Due date: 4.30pm on Wednesday 22 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 22 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 2003 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 10 November, either under my office door (room 19.2059), in my mail box (room 19.1048). Alternatively, mail the report to me by express post no later than noon 10 November.

Article analyses reports will be assessed using these criteria (roughly equally)
- 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.)