ISSUES IN CANADIAN POLITICS:
THE POLITICS OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN CANADA
POLSCI 4CA3
Winter 2023

Instructor: Geoff Cameron   **Office:** KTH 513
Email: camerg3@mcmaster.ca   **Office Hours:** Monday, 12:00-2:00pm
Lecture: Tuesday, 8:30-11:20am
Room: KTH 105

Contents

Course Description

Political decisions about the adoption and regulation of new technologies have the potential to reshape fundamental characteristics of our society. In this course, we will begin by examining the nature and history of technology – including the ways in which technological choices are also choices about values and visions of social progress. We will proceed to examine the politics of recent Canadian cases related to the regulation or criminalization or online speech, the extent to which rights to privacy extent to digital activity, the promotion "smart cities," the governance of artificial intelligence, and issues raised by the expansion of digital identification. Finally, we will examine visions of our collective political and technological future in light of the ideas and cases we have examined throughout the course.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Engage constructively with debates about the politics of technological design, technological choice, and the regulation of technology;
- Formulate arguments about the political implications of new digital and communications technology for Canada;
- Contribute meaningfully to discussions on potential regulatory responses to specific emerging technologies.

Required Materials and Texts

- All material posted to Avenue to Learn.

Class Format

The class is scheduled for one three-hour seminar session per week.

As a fourth-year seminar, students are expected to play an active role in the teaching and learning process. The role of the instructor will be to help provide the broader context for the material being reviewed and to facilitate the class discussion when it falters. The instructor will contribute to the discussion by adding insights and posing or reframing questions. To have a thoughtful and intellectual discussion, students are required to read the readings each week. All students must be prepared for and attentive in class.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Seminar Presentation and Discussion - 20%
2. Seminar Participation – 20%
3. Take Home Test – 30% - Due February 14
4. Policy Brief – 30% - Due April 4

Course Evaluation – Details

Seminar Presentation and Discussion (20%)

Working in groups of two to three, you will be responsible for leading one of the weekly seminar sessions throughout the semester. (Weeks 3-13)

Your group will primarily be a facilitator of conversation. This means that you need to arrive in class with a mastery of the week's readings and a plan for stimulating the kind of conversation that will deepen our understanding of the topic. Effective strategies for doing this include: providing an overview of some of the main arguments and debates featured in the readings (stay away from summarizing, focus on conveying ideas in your own words and with your own analysis), asking open-ended questions, picking up on key ideas, using the whiteboard/chalkboard to synthesize arguments and insights, probing the relationship between the week's readings to each other and to other course readings. You will be graded based on your demonstrated ability to convey and draw out core ideas of the week's readings and your capacity to stimulate a conversation that advances our collective understanding.

Seminar Participation (20%)

This quality of this course depends in significant part on the participation of every student. I will not be grading the quantity of your contributions to discussion, as it is expected that every student will actively contribute. However, each student will be graded at the end of the course according to the quality of contributions over the entire course. I regard high quality contributions to be regular, timely, concise, on topic, and oriented towards promoting collective understanding of the course content.

Take Home Test (30%), due February 14

You will submit a 3000-3500 word paper based on a question that will link the various conceptual and theoretical issues raised in the literature and in-class discussions throughout the first part of the course. The take home exam will be based on all materials covered in the seminars and assigned readings throughout the first part of the course.

Policy Brief (30%), due April 4

Choose one policy area pertaining to the governance of digital technology and write a policy brief that states the core issue, describes its importance, summarizes the main contours of debate, and presents a conclusion or recommendation. This policy brief should be written for a non-specialist audience. Think about your audience as being a Member of Parliament, or other person in a decision-making position who needs a quick background on an issue they must debate or discuss with others.

You can choose any of the policy areas we cover in the course, as well as those that we do not cover. Your brief must be 3000-3500 words (no more), and it should cite at least 15 sources. You will be marked on the clarity of your writing, the effectiveness of your

analysis, the persuasiveness of your conclusions or recommendations, as well as on grammar, style, structure, spelling, and correct citations.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (January 10)
January 10 – Introduction

PART 1: TECHNOLOGY AND POLITICS

Week 2 (January 17)
January 17 – Technology and Progress
Readings:

- Leo Marx. "Technology: The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept." *Social Research* 64, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 965-88.

- Langdon Winner. "Do artifacts have politics?" *Daedalus* 109(1), 1980: 121-136.

- Neil Postman. "Five Things we Need to Know About Technological Change". Talk delivered in Denver Colorado March 28, 1998.

Week 3 (January 24)
January 24 – Communications Technology and Politics
Readings:

- Harold Innis. *The Bias of Communication*. University of Toronto Press, 1961. pp. 33-60.

- Langdon Winner. "Complexity and the Loss of Agency." *Autonomous Technology: Technics-out-of-Control as Theme in Political Thought*. MIT Press, 1977: 279-305.

- Lewis Mumford. *Technics and Civilization*. pp. 239-241.

Week 4 (January 31)
January 31 – Information Society
Readings:

- Neil Postman. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Knopf, 1992. pp. 3-39; 56-70.

- J.R. Beniger. *The control revolution: Technological and economic origins of the information society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986: 1-27.

- Benjamin Barber. "Three Scenarios for the Future of Technology and Strong Democracy," *Political Science Quarterly* 113(4), 1999: 573-589.

Week 5 (February 7)
February 7 – Surveillance Capitalism and the Algorithmic Society
Readings:

- Shoshanna Zuboff. "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization." *Journal of Information Technology* (2015) 30, 75–89.

- Balkin, Jack M. "Free Speech in the Algorithmic Society: Big data, private governance, and new school speech regulation," UCDL Rev. 51 (2017): 1151-1171.

Notes: Take Home Test Provided

PART 2: CANADIAN CASES

Week 6 (February 14)
February 14 – Online Speech: Hate and Disinformation
Readings:

- Kate Klonick. "The New Governors: The People, Rules, and Processes Governing Online Speech." *Harvard Law Review* 131, 2018: 1559-1603; 1662-1670

- Richard Moon. "What happens when the assumptions underlying our commitment to free speech no longer hold?" *Constitutional Forum* 28, no. 1 (2019): 1-5.

- Mohammed Joe Masoodi and Sam Andrey. "Understanding the Use of Private Messaging Apps in Canada and Links to Disinformation." *IEEE Technology and Society Magazine* 41, no. 3 (2022): 58-70.

Notes: Take Home Test Due

Week 7 (February 21) - Mid-term recess, No Class

Week 8 (February 28)

February 28 – Online Speech: Hate and Disformation, cont.
Readings:

- Chris Tenove and Heidi Tworek. "Online Disinformation and Harmful Speech: Dangers for Democratic Participation and Possible Policy Responses" (February 1, 2019). *Journal of Parliamentary & Political Law* 13: 215-232.

- Canadian Commission on Democratic Expression, "Harms Reduction: A Six-Step Program to Protect Democratic Expression Online," January 2021 (pp.54): https://ppforum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CanadianCommissionOnDemocraticExpression-PPF-JAN2021-EN.pdf

- Sam Andrey, Alexander Rand, M.J. Masoodi, and Karim Bardeesy. "Rebuilding Canada's Public Square: Response to the Government of Canada's Proposed Approach to Address Harmful Content Online." September, 2021: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e9ce713321491043ea045ef/t/615478c6a74009181c27d15e/1632925924146/RebuildingCanada%27sPublicSquare.pdf

Week 9 (March 7)

March 7 – Privacy: Digital Rights
Readings:

- Teresa Scassa, "A Human Rights-Based Approach to Data Protection in Canada," *Citizenship in a Connected Canada: A Research and Policy Agenda,* edited by Elizabeth Dubois and Florian Martin-Bariteau. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2020. pp. 173-188.

- Megan Beretta, "Influencing the Internet: Lobbyists and Interest Groups' Impact on Digital Rights in Canada," *Citizenship in a Connected Canada: A Research and Policy Agenda,* edited by Elizabeth Dubois and Florian Martin-Bariteau. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2020. pp. 135-156.

Week 10 (March 14)

March 14 – "Smart Cities"
Readings:

- Lisa Austin and David Lie. "Data Trusts and the Governance of Smart Environments: Lessons from the Failure of Sidewalk Labs' Urban Data Trust," *Surveillance & Society* 19(2) 2021: 255-261.

- Zachary Spicer, Nicole Goodman, and Nathan Olmstead. "The frontier of digital opportunity: Smart city implementation in small, rural and remote communities in Canada," *Urban Studies* 58, no. 3 (2021): 535-558.

- Mariana Valverde and Alexandra Flynn, eds. *Smart Cities in Canada: Digital Dreams, Corporate Designs*. Toronto, ON, Canada: James Lorimer & Company, Ltd., Publishers, 2020. pp. 7-35.

Week 11 (March 21)
March 21 – Artificial Intelligence
Readings:

- Dirk Helbing. "Will Democracy Survive Big Data and Artificial Intelligence?" *Scientific American,* February 25, 2017: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/will-democracy-survive-big-data-and-artificial-intelligence/

- Aviv Gaon and Ian Stedman. "A call to action: Moving forward with the governance of artificial intelligence in Canada." *Alberta Law Review* 56 (2018): 1137-1165.

- Petra Molnar & Lex Gill. *Bots at the gate: A human rights analysis of automated decision-making in Canada's immigration and refugee system.* Toronto, ON: Citizen Lab, 2018. pp.1-28.

Week 12 (March 28)
March 28 – Digital Identification
Readings:

- Roxana Akhmetova and Erin Harris. "Politics of Technology: The use of artificial intelligence by US and Canadian immigration agencies and their impacts on human rights." In *Digital Identity, Virtual Borders and Social Media*, pp. 52-72. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021.

- Dillon Wamsley and Benjamin Chin-Yee. "COVID-19, digital health technology and the politics of the unprecedented." *Big Data & Society* 8, no. 1 (2021):1-6.

- Matt Malone, "Can We Trust ArriveCAN? Not without Transparency and Accountability," August 10, 2022: https://www.cigionline.org/articles/can-we-trust-arrivecan-not-without-transparency-and-accountability/

- Bianca Wylie and Matt Malone, "Canada's ArriveCAN App is Fostering Inequity at the Border," September 9, 2022: https://www.cigionline.org/articles/canadas-arrivecan-app-is-fostering-inequity-at-the-border/

PART 3: THE FUTURE

Week 13 (April 4)

April 4 – Technological Choice and the Future
Readings:

- Langdon Winner. "Frankenstein's Problem." *Autonomous Technology: Technics-out-of-Control as Theme in Political Thought*. MIT Press, 1977. pp.306-335.

- Jacques Ellul. *The Technological Society.* "A Look at the Future," Alfred A. Knopf, 1954. pp.428-436.

- Lawrence Lessig. *Code: Version 2.0*. Basic Books, 2006. pp.313-339.

Notes: Policy Brief Due

Week 14 (April 11)

April 11 – Conclusion

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments
All assignments must be submitted in either MS Word or PDF format via Avenue to Learn before the beginning of lecture on the due date.

Grades
Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments
Late assignments will be accepted without penalty for three days after the due date. From that point forward, late assignments will receive a penalty of 2 percentage points a day. Extensions will be considered if they are requested in person ahead of time.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness
McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work".

Courses With An On-Line Element
Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office *normally within 10 working days* of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures- guidelines/.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities policy.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy
Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Course Modification
The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Extreme Circumstances
The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.