POS 4025: Technology and Politics   Spring 2026

Class meeting times:
Tuesday, 10:40-11:30AM
Thursday 10:40AM-12:35PM
Matherly 016
[Professor Thiele](#)
[Links to an external site.thiele@ufl.edu](#)
Office Hours: Tuesday 11:45-2:45pm, Anderson Hall 302

About the course

How will your personal, social and political life be impacted, and potentially transformed, by emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, digital media, synthetic biology, nanotechnology, robotics, quantum computing, augmented reality and virtual reality?

Technology and Politics helps students understand and prepare for the impacts of fast-moving technological developments. The course is interdisciplinary, integrative and largely discussion based.

Student Learning Outcomes
Students taking this course will learn how to:
1. Critically analyze the risks, dangers, costs, benefits, and opportunities stemming from technological developments.
2. Engage and understand diverse viewpoints.
3. Think responsibly and creatively about the future.
4. Communicate effectively regarding the ethical, political, and social issues and challenges associated with technology.

Work expectations:
Classes will be lecture and discussion based, and you will be reading books and journal articles, listening to podcasts, and viewing films and videos. You will be quizzed and examined on all this material.
Class attendance is required, and absences will be penalized.
No phones or laptops can be used during class, and should be put away at all times. If your phone is visible, you will be marked absent.

Prof. Thiele is eager to respond to all email inquiries—unless the requested information is available on Canvas, in other documents provided, or was addressed in class. If you do not receive a response to an email inquiry, it is because the information was already made available to you. In such cases, refer to available documents or confer with a classmate.

Required Readings:
Rob Reid, *After On* (Del Rey, 2017). Please purchase this book.
Online readings and resources are listed on the Course Syllabus.

Recommended Readings:
Leslie Paul Thiele, *Human Agency, Artificial Intelligence, and the Attention Economy: The Case for Digital Distancing.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025. Available from UF library as an e-book.
N.B. A significant portion of the lectures will be based on this book. Students may choose to reinforce their understanding of the course lectures by reading it.

Assignments and Grading
Details available on Canvas at *Assignments*
Attendance and Participation: 10 points
In-class quizzes: 12 quizzes worth 6 points each, for a maximum of 60 points
In-class exam: 30 points

Grading Scale:

A	100-93%	C	< 77 – 73%
A-	< 93-90%	C-	< 73 – 70%
B+	< 90– 87%	D+	< 70 – 67%
B	< 87– 83%	D	< 67 – 63%
B-	< 83 – 80%	D-	< 63 – 60%
C+	< 80 – 77%	E	< 60 %

N.B. – Grades are not rounded up. So, for example, a 92.99 is an A-, and an 86.99 is a B.
Please be aware of UF's Academic Policies and Resources
Links to an external site..

Course Schedule:

January 13: Introduction to class

January 15: Technology, Politics, and the Human Prospect
    Readings: Leslie Paul Thiele, "Technology and the Human Prospect" (in Files) (75); "The Politics of Technology
Links to an external site." at the *Frontiers of Political Science* (2:2: May 2020) (10); Listen to Prof. Thiele's interview with Rob Reid when Reid visited UF, posted to his podcasts: Episode 42: Life, the Universe & Everything – Live, from Florida! (56)
Links to an external site..

January 20, 22: Agency and Regulation in the Attention Economy
    Readings: *After On* to p. 53; *After On podcast*: Meron Gribetz on Augmented Reality (78); "Recognizr: Facial Recognition Coming to Android Phones" (10);
Links to an external site.NeoScribe, "Augmented Reality 2030" at
Augmented Reality 2030 (15); Links to an external site.

                    Explore: https://www.magicleap.com (15); Links to an external site.Auto-doxxing smart glasses (10).
Links to an external site.

January 27, 29: Distraction and Dependence: The Loss of Reflective Self-Direction
    Readings: *After On*, 53-121; *After On podcast*: Adam Gazzaley on Consciousness and Neuroscience (81); Tristan Harris TED Talk, "How a Handful of Companies Control a Billion Minds (17);

[Links to an external site.](#)" *60 Minutes,* [Brain Hacking Links to an external](#)

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[site.](#) , April 9, 2017 (14) ; Zeynep Tufecki, "[We're](#)
[Building a Dystopia Just to Make People Click on Ads (23).](#)
[Links to an external site.](#)
[Links to an external site.](#)
Recommended: Watch the film 'The Social Dilemma' (Netflix)

February 3, 5: Distraction and Dependence: The Loss of Reflective Self-
Direction
     Readings: [Why Your Brain Can't Fight Distraction](#)

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[Links to an external site.](#)   (8); Jaron Lanier. "[Ten](#)
[Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Right Now; (30) Links to an](#)
[external site.](#)" "[Why every social media site is a dumpster fire Links to an](#)

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[external site.](#)   " (10); [Students unplug for 24 hours](#)
[(12); " Links to an external site.Conclusions of 'A World Unplugged' Study"](#)
[(10) Links to an external site.; Links to an external site.](#)Andrew Sullivan, ["I](#)
[Used to be a Human Being Links to an external site..](#)" *New York Magazine*
(Sept. 19, 2016)(15); [The Internet's Final Frontier: Remote Amazon Tribes](#)
[(12); Links to an external site.](#)Jaron Lanier, [How social media ruins your](#)

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[life Links to an external site.](#)   (21); Absolute
Movitation, [You Will Wish You Watched This Before You Started Using](#)

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[Social Media Links to an external site.](#)   (13);
Jonanthan Haidt, [The Devil's Plan to Ruin the Next Generation (15).](#)
[Links to an external site.](#)
[Links to an external site.](#)
Recommended: Watch the *Black Mirror* episode "Nosedive" (Netflix)

February 10, 12: Deskilling: The Atrophy of Cognitive and Social Aptitudes
    Readings: After On, 121-196; After On podcast: Cindy Cohn on Privacy
and Government Intrusion (75).

February 17, 19: Deskilling: The Atrophy of Cognitive and Social Aptitudes
   Readings: Wendell Berry, "[Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer](#)
[Links to an external site.](#)" (2); Wendell Berry "[Feminism, the Body, and the](#)
[Machine Links to an external site.](#)" (30); Jason Bellini, "[AI: The Robots are](#)
[Now Hiring Links to an external site.](#)*" (10); Jason Bellini, "[The Robot](#)
[Revolution Links to an external site.](#)" (10); [Pepper the robot performs](#)

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[Buddhist funeral rites (2) Links to an external site.](#)

; [Introducing GPT4.0 Links to an external site.](#) (23); "[It's Not a Computer, It's a Companion! Links to an external site.](#)" (15); "Living with your favorite character: [Gatebox - Promotion Movie (2); Links](#)

[to an external site.](#)   [AI could be creating a global](#) [knowledge collapse (10); Links to an external site.How A.I. and Social](#) [Media Contribute to 'Brain Rot' Links to an external site.](#)(7); [AI in colleges](#) [and universities Links to an external site.](#) (7); Kori Jane Spaulding, "[It Was](#) [the Damn Phones](#)

[Links to an external site.](#)   " (2).
Note: To view the Bellini videos, you can get a free *Wall Street Journal* subscription through UF, and may have to access them through Safari or Chrome, rather than Firefox.

February 24, 26: Dogmatism: The Eclipse of Common Truths and the Decay of Civic Trust
    Readings: *After On*, 196-252; *After On podcast*: Andy Hessel on Synthetic Biology (78); Check out: http://neurosky.com/about-neurosky/ [Links to an external site.](#) (5); Leslie Paul Thiele, "Digital Politics is the Game: See What Happens When Scholars Play It Well!" *Perspectives on Politics*, 16:4, 1123-1128, December 2018; Eli Pariser, TED Talk "[Beware](#) [Online Filter Bubbles Links to an external site.](#)" (9); TED Talk, Julia Galef: "[Why you think you're right even when you're wrong](#) [Links to an external site.](#)" (12).

March 3, 5: Dogmatism: The Eclipse of Common Truths and the Decay of Civic Trust

   Readings: Yaël Eisenstat's TED Talk, "Dear Facebook, this is how you're breaking Democracy

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Links to an external site.   " (14); Matthew Carney, "Leave No Dark Corner Links to an external site." (8), "Cambridge Analytica Uncovered Links to an external site." (20); WSJ, "Deep Fake Videos are Getting Real Links to an external site." (10); The Doctors Are Real, but the Sales Pitches Are Frauds Links to an external site. (5); "Exposing China's Digital Dystopian Dictatorship Links to an external site.

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" (5); What OpenAI Did When ChatGPT Users Lost Touch with Reality (10); Links to an external site.How Elon Musk Is Remaking Grok in His Image (5).
Links to an external site.

March 10: Class cancelled: Prof. Thiele at Florida International University Conference in Miami

March 12: Despair: Passivity in the Face of Predictive Power
   Readings: After On, 252-285; After On podcast: Steve Jurveltson on Quantum Computing (70); Google's 'Sycamore' quantum computer

[Links to an external site.](#) (5); Tristan Harris and Aza

Raskin, "[The AI Dilemma Links to an external site.](#)"
(70); Tristan Harris and Aza Raskin, "[AI Myths and Misperceptions Links to an external site.](#)" (27); Kevin Roose, "[How do you change a chatbot's mind Links to an external site.](#)" (10); [Sam Altman Says He's Suddenly Worried Dead Internet Theory Is Coming True Links to an external site.](#) (3); Macgill Davis, "[What is the Quantified Self Links to an external site.](#)" (8).

Spring Break

March 24: Class cancelled: Prof. Thiele at International Studies Association Meeting in Columbus, Ohio

March 26: *Despair: Passivity in the Face of Predictive Power: After On*, 289-382; *After On podcast*: Sam Harris on Terrorism" (135).

March 31, April 2 : The Dispositions, Habits, and Skills of Self-Leadership and Service
    Readings: After On, 382-489; *After On podcast*: James Barrat on Dangers of Superintelligence (56); Concluding pages of Isaac Assimov's *I, Robot* (in Files) (10).

April 7, 9: The Dispositions, Habits, and Skills of Self-Leadership and Service
    Readings: [AI: Mankind's Last Invention: Artificial Intelligence: Mankind's Last Invention](#)

[Links to an external site.](#) (20); "[Deep Learning: Links to an external site.](#)

[Google's Deep Mind Explained!" (15); Links to an external site.](#)

[external site.](#) Wait But Why? on "T[he AI Revolution Links to an external site." (15); " Links to an external site.](#)

[AI Codes its Own 'AI Child' Links to an external site.](#)

"(5); Miquel Casas, "[*The technological singularity and the transhumanist dream"* Links to an external site.](#) (5); '[The Godfather of A.I.' Leaves Google and Warns of Danger Ahead Links to an external site.](#)"(5); Cameron Berg, "[The Evidence for AI Consciousness, Today" Links to an external site.](#) (20); Explore [PauseAI Links to an external site.](#) (5); [Nature restores attention spans Links to an external site.](#) (5); Explore [TimeToRefuse Links to an external site.](#) (5); [Let's Press Pause on Chatbots for Kids](#)
[Links to an external site.](#) (5)
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Recommended: Watch the film '*Ex Machina*'

April 14: Our Vulnerable World

Readings: *After On*, 489-547: *After On podcast*: Steven Webb on Fermi's Paradox/Where are all the aliens? (110) and Episode 40; Wait But Why? on "[The Fermi Paradox Links to an external site.](#)"(10)[.](#)
[Links to an external site.](#)

April 16: In-class Exam

April 21: Our Vulnerable World
Readings: *After On podcast*: Martin Rees On the Future (80); Nick Bostrum, "The Vulnerable World Hypothesis," *Global Policy* 10:4, 2019, pp. 455-476, (40) available at: [https://nickbostrom.com/; Rob Reid, "The Ender" (10) Links to an external site.](#) ; Antón Barba-Kay, *A Web of our own Making,* pp. 246-256 (i.e. the last two pages of the author's text, as well as the appended email from a critic). Available online from UF library (30).

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 Please see the File: *Films, podcasts, books, articles* for a list of helpful resources

And here's some food for thought:
"When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong. The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible. Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."
                    Arthur C. Clarke ("Three laws of prediction")

"Impossible to see, the future is!" and so "Careful you must be when sensing the future….The fear of loss is a path to the Dark Side"
                         Master Yoda, from *Attack of the Clones and Revenge of the Sith*

"I've come up with a set of rules that describe our reactions to technologies:
1. Anything that is in the world when you're born is normal and ordinary and is just a natural part of the way the world works.
2. Anything that's invented between when you're fifteen and thirty-five is

new and exciting and revolutionary and you can probably get a career in it. 3. Anything invented after you're thirty-five is against the natural order of things."

<div align="right">Douglas Adams, from The Salmon of Doubt</div>