

# POS 4025: Technology and Politics

Fall 2024

Class meeting times:

Tuesday, 11:45-1:40

Thursday 12:50-1:40

Little Hall 0201

[Professor Thiele](#)

[Links to an external site.thiele@ufl.edu](mailto:thiele@ufl.edu)

Office Hours: Thursday 1:45-3:45pm, 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* prepares students to grapple with the transformations that will ensue from fast-moving technological developments. The course is interdisciplinary, integrative and largely discussion based. Being prepared for the future entails the cultivation of collaboration skills as well as writing, speaking and digital media communication skills. As such, team projects and multi-media class presentations are crucial course components.

## Student Learning Outcomes

Students taking this course will learn how to:

1. Critically analyze national and risks, dangers, costs, benefits and opportunities stemming from technological developments.

2. Engage and understand diverse perspectives in an age of technological globalization.
3. Think responsibly and creatively about the future.
4. Communicate and collaborate with diverse individuals to develop and share knowledge pertaining to the political, social and ethical challenges associated with technology.

### **Work expectations:**

Students will be reading books and journal articles, listening to podcasts, and viewing films and videos. Classes will be lecture and discussion based. Attendance and participation is required. Oftentimes, the most creative approach to inquiry and problem-solving entails uncovering the complexity of the challenge and deepening the questions that should be asked. Good questions inform. Deep questions transform.

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); FYI, the Audible version is acceptable, and very well done.

Other online required readings and resources are listed in the Course Syllabus.

### **Assignments and Grading**

Details available on Canvas at *Assignments*

Attendance and Participation: 10 points

Pop quizzes: 11 quizzes worth 3 points each, with a maximum of 30 points

In-class exam: 30 points

Collaborative PowerPoint Presentation and Script: 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.

For more information, see UF's [grading and grading policies](#).

*Honor Code* - Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The [Honor Code](#) enumerates specifically prohibited behaviors and sanctions. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

All students are required to abide by [UF's Honor Code](#). An academic honesty offense is defined as the act of lying, cheating, or stealing information so that one gains academic advantage. Plagiarism in presentations or term papers will result in failure of the course.

*Students with disabilities* – If you experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share

their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

*Course evaluation* - Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at [gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/](http://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via [ufl.bluera.com/ufl/](http://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/). Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at [gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/](http://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/)

Students are encouraged to provide both a mid-term and final course evaluation.

## **Academic and Campus Resources**

*E-learning technical support:* Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu)

[Library Support](#)

[Teaching Center](#) - Broward Hall, General study skills and tutoring.

[Writing Studio](#) - 2215 Turlington Hall, Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

*U Matter, We Care:* If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575, or visit [umatter.ufl.edu/](http://umatter.ufl.edu/) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

*Counseling and Wellness Center:* Visit [counseling.ufl.edu/](http://counseling.ufl.edu/) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

*Student Health Care Center:* Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit [shcc.ufl.edu/](http://shcc.ufl.edu/).

*University Police Department:* Visit [police.ufl.edu/](http://police.ufl.edu/) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

*UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center:* For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center](http://ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center).

For information relating to protection of your privacy as a UF Student, visit this site:  
<https://privacy.ufl.edu/privacy-policies-and-procedures/onlineinternet-privacy-statement/>

For information relating to the protection of your privacy in relation to course participation, see these documents for [Zoom](#) and [Canvas](#)

## **Course Schedule**

### **August 22: Introduction to class**

### **August 27, 29: Technology, Politics, and the Human Prospect**

Readings: Leslie Paul Thiele, "Technology and the Human Prospect" (PDF is in Files); "[The Politics of Technology](#)" at the *Frontiers of Political Science* (2:2: May 2020); Listen to Prof. Thiele's interview with Rob Reid when he visited UF, which he posted to his podcasts: [Episode 42: Life, the Universe & Everything – Live, from Florida!](#)

### **September 3, 5: Agency and Regulation in the Attention Economy**

Readings: *After On*, up to p. 53 (Audible through Chapter 4); *After On* podcast: Meron Gribetz on Augmented Reality; "[Recognizr: Facial Recognition Coming to Android Phones](#);" NeoScribe, "Augmented Reality 2030" at [Augmented Reality 2030](#); Gatebox, "Living with your favorite character": [Gatebox - Promotion Movie](#); <https://www.magicleap.com>

### **September 10, 12: No Classes: Professor Thiele is at an academic conference in Seattle**

### **September 17, 19: Distraction and Dependence: The Loss of Reflective Self-Direction**

Readings: *After On*, 53-121 (Audible through Chapter 9). *After On* podcast: Adam Gazzaley on Consciousness and Neuroscience; Tristan Harris TED Talk, "[How a Handful of Companies Control a Billion Minds](#);" TED Talk Scott Galloway on "[How](#)

[Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google manipulate our emotions](#)"; Zeynep Tufekci, "[We're Building a Dystopia Just to Make People Click on Ads](#)."

Recommended: Watch the film 'The Social Dilemma' (Netflix)

### **September 24, 26: Distraction and Dependence: The Loss of Reflective Self-Direction**

Readings: [Why Your Brain Can't Fight Distraction](#) (8 minute video); Lanier, Jaron. "[Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Right Now](#);" "[Why every social media site is a dumpster fire](#)"; [Students unplug for 24 hours](#); "[Conclusions of 'A World Unplugged' Study](#)"; Andrew Sullivan, "I Used to be a Human Being." *New York Magazine* (September 19, 2016); [The Internet's Final Frontier: Remote Amazon Tribes](#)

Recommended: Watch the *Black Mirror* episode "Nosedive" (Netflix)

### **October 1, 3: Deskillling: The Atrophy of Cognitive and Social Aptitudes**

Readings: *After On*, 121-196 (Audible through Chapter 17); *After On* podcast: Cindy Cohn on Privacy and Government Intrusion

Teams and Topics for Collaborative Projects Assigned October 1 in class

### **October 8, 10: Deskillling: The Atrophy of Cognitive and Social Aptitudes**

*Readings*: Wendell Berry, "[Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer](#);" Wendell Berry "[Feminism, the Body, and the Machine](#)"; Jason Bellini, "[AI: The Robots are Now Hiring](#);" Jason Bellini, "[The Robot Revolution](#);" [Pepper the robot performs Buddhist funeral rites](#); [Introducing GPT-4o](#); Moore, Justine, Kim, Bryon, Li Yoko, and Casado, Martin. 2024. "[It's Not a Computer, It's a Companion!](#)"

### **October 15, 17: Dogmatism: The Eclipse of Common Truths and the Decay of Civic Trust**

Readings: *After On*, 196-252 (Audible through Chapter 22). *After On* podcast: Andy Hessel on Synthetic Biology; Check out: <http://neurosky.com/about-neurosky/>; Check out the quantified self at [Measured Me](#); Readings: Eli Pariser, TED Talk "[Beware Online Filter Bubbles](#)"

## **October 22, 24: Dogmatism: The Eclipse of Common Truths and the Decay of Civic Trust**

Readings: Leslie Paul Thiele, "Digital Politics is the Game: See What Happens When Scholars Play It Well!" *Perspectives*, 16:4, 1123-1128, December 2018; Yaël Eisenstat's TED Talk, "[Dear Facebook, this is how you're breaking Democracy;](#)" Matthew Carney, "[Leave No Dark Corner;](#)" "[One Clear Message From Voters This Election? More Privacy;](#)" "[Cambridge Analytica Uncovered;](#)" WSJ, "[Deep Fake Videos are Getting Real;](#)" "[Exposing China's Digital Dystopian Dictatorship](#)"

## **October 29: Despair: Passivity in the Face of Predictive Power**

Readings: *After On*, 252-285 (Audible through Chapter 25); *After On* podcast: Steve Jurvelton on Quantum Computing; Chris Anderson, "[The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete](#)" *Wired*, June 23, 2008; Google's '[Sycamore](#)' quantum computer;

Collaborative Presentations due on Canvas

## **October 31: Collaborative Presentations in Class**

## **November 5: Despair: Passivity in the Face of Predictive Power**

Readings: *After On*, 289-382 (Audible through Chapter 31); *After On* podcast: Sam Harris on Terrorism"; Rob Reid, "[The Ender:](#)"

## **November 7: Collaborative Presentations in Class**

## **November 12: Digital Distancing--Dispositions, Habits, and Skills of Self-Leadership and Service**

*Readings: After On*, 382-489 (Audible through Chapter 35); *After On* podcast: James Barrat on Dangers of Superintelligence; Concluding pages of Isaac Assimov's *I, Robot* (PDF is in Files); *Your Undivided Attention*, "[AI Myths and Misperceptions](#)"

## **November 14: Collaborative Presentations in Class**

## **November 19: Digital Distancing--Dispositions, Habits, and Skills of Self-Leadership and Service**

Readings: Nicholas Thompson and Ian Bremmer, *Wired*: "[The AI Cold War that Could Doom Us All](#);" [AI: Mankind's Last Invention: Artificial Intelligence: Mankind's Last Invention](#);" [Deep Learning: Google's Deep Mind Explained!](#)" Wait But Why? on "[The AI Revolution](#);" "[AI Codes its Own 'AI Child'](#)" Miquel Casas, "[The technological singularity and the transhumanist dream](#)" '[The Godfather of A.I.' Leaves Google and Warns of Danger Ahead](#)'.

Recommended: Watch the film '*Ex Machina*'

## **November 19: Collaborative Presentations**

## **November 21: In-class Exam**

## **November 26: No class**

## **November 28: Thanksgiving**

## **December 3: Our Vulnerable World**

Readings: *After On*, 489-547 (Audible through Chapter 38): *After On podcast*: Steven Webb on Fermi's Paradox/Where are all the aliens? and Episode 40: Avi Loeb on Our Interstellar Visitor; and Martin Rees On the Future; Wait But Why? on "[The Fermi Paradox Links to an external site.](#)": Nick Bostrom, "The Vulnerable World Hypothesis," *Global Policy* 10:4, 2019, pp. 455-476, available at: <https://nickbostrom.com/>



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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:

**"The best way to predict the future is to create it."**

**Alan Kay (who created the interface for the first Apple Macintosh)**

**"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."**

**Douglas Adams, from *The Salmon of Doubt***