HTS 2084:Technology and Society Fall 2026

Instructor: Declan Abernethy, Ph.D. (Pronouns: he/his/him)
Class Meets: Asynchronous
Office hours: Tuesday-Thursday on Zoom 2-3pm; and other times by appointment (Fill out booking form)
Email: dabernethy3@gatech.edu

Course Description

This course is designed as an introduction to key ideas about technology using historical and contemporary case studies that give us a different way to think about technology and its relationship to society.

Technology is a human product, not an autonomous force. Technology makes nothing happen by itself, but only as the result of human action. We can, therefore, only make sense of technology by understanding it as an integral part of human history.

The theme of ethics is present throughout the course. We learn how human choices shape technological change in ways that affect the principles of a just society. We read about the responsibility of technical professionals to act in the public interest and minimize harm. We look at how people make ethical judgments when participating in technical decision making.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes.

By the end of HTS 2084, students should be able to:

- Give a broad definition of "technology" with examples of various types;
- Identify and describe how technologies influence and are influenced by social, cultural, economic, and political contexts;
- Apply course concepts to analyze contemporary technological case studies and their ramifications
- Develop communication skills through multimedia reflections and writing assignments;
- Explain the ethical implications of technological choice.

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Social Sciences area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

• How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

• Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion

Ethics Attribute Learning Outcomes

HTS 2084 fulfills the Georgia Tech ethics requirement. In this course, students will acquire:

- An ability to recognize ethical and professional responsibilities in real-world contexts.
- An ability to assess actions or decisions based on established ethical principles and theories, or through deliberative processes.
- An ability to consider the implications of actions, both for society as a whole and for individuals.

Asynchronous online format: This course has no face-to-face meetings or any other scheduled activities that involve the class being in the same place at the same time. All of your coursework will be done online with interactive tools that will engage you with your professor and peers. This has its pros and cons: On the one hand, you do not have to attend any required meetings (because there aren't any) and apart from deadlines you can work at your own pace. On the other hand, you cannot allow yourself to fall behind on the material, and you must stay engaged and involved on a daily basis. For that reason, we have various assignments due throughout the week, each week. These will serve as benchmarks for you and help keep you on track. You will not be able to work ahead in this course beyond each week. Every Sunday, Dr A. will open the next week's modules for student use.

Expectations and Time Requirements

Each student is responsible for the following ongoing tasks:

1. **Setting aside a daily block of distraction-free time for engagement and practice.** See below for more.
2. **Checking announcements and email on a daily basis** -- preferably more than once per day.
3. **Maintaining awareness of course activities and dates** by recording all important announcement information and course events into a system (calendar, notes program) that you review on a daily basis.
4. **Attend to details and follow instructions carefully** on course activities.
5. **Communicating with me (Dr. Abernethy) promptly and regularly** if you have any questions, and especially if there are issues that arise that impact your ability to engage in the course.
6. **Keeping careful written records** of your work and your grades.

Email and announcements: **It is absolutely crucial that you read all course-related emails and Canvas announcements and give them your complete attention**. Since this course is asynchronous, there are no other forms of communication that we use, and failure to note important information from these and put them to your notes and personal calendar could have disastrous consequences.

Time requirements: A three-credit course like HTS2084 should be around a 9 hour per week commitment: Three hours in class meetings plus six hours outside of class doing course-related work.
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And in any given week, you might find that you need significantly more time for some concepts than others.

In order to make this time requirement work for you, I urge you to do the following:

1. **Block off a section of your calendar dedicated to HTS2084 that gives you sufficient time to work, and do not violate that time block**. For example, you might block off 8:00am-noon or 1:00-5:00pm each day. This works best if you block off the same times each day. Take breaks during this time block, but do not schedule anything else during it. Treat it as an appointment that you are not allowed to miss.
2. **During your HTS2084time block, stay out of social media and other distractions.** HTS3089 requires your full attention. Social media apps are specifically designed to suck your attention away. You cannot do both. Ideally, you should uninstall all such apps from your phone and computer for the next six weeks. If you can't do that, close the programs and put your phone in airplane mode at the beginning of your block and don't turn the internet back on until the end. Strive for a distraction free environment.
3. **Seek help and ask questions when you get stuck**. Do not just try to "power through" a misunderstanding, because you will end up wasting a lot of time and getting discouraged. You can seek help during the drop-in hour, an appointment with me, and with your peers (as long as it doesn't violate our academic integrity policy). It is not a sign of weakness to say "I don't understand" or "I need help"; rather, it is a sign that you are smart and self-aware. Be brutally honest with yourself: ask yourself, "*Do I really understand this?*" If not, find someone who does and discuss the ideas with them. Use the feedback you receive on your writing to improve. If you're struggling with your writing, you can make an appointment with the communication center for free. https://www.communicationcenter.gatech.edu/

Required Texts:

All readings or other materials will be available in pdf form on Perusall or Canvas or easily accessible online. Please do note that the readings for this class will be challenging. Therefore, even if a reading seems short, be prepared to take the time to read it carefully.

Class Requirements:

Sociology and History are disciplines about storytelling and argumentation. Discussion is integral to student development. Just because this is an online, asynchronous course, does not preclude discussion. Class participation is vital to your learning and will, therefore, be a significant part of your grade. In lieu of in-person discussion, you will be expected to participate using a mix of online platforms including Perusall and Canvas discussion boards. Please familiarize yourself with these tools, and please read the materials *before engaging in* the discussion.

Grading

Reading Annotations (25%): Each lesson of the semester will include material posted, typically on Perusall. Students will be expected to do the readings (or watch videos) and engage with each other and the content. Some lessons will include guided questions that I come up with; others will be student-led discussions based on readings. There will be 13 reading annotations discussions in total. More information on how to get full credit will be included in the Perusall explainer video.

Blog Posts (25%): Students will be expected to create and run their own blog around a theme of their own interest as it intersects the course to help develop their thinking on course content. When you have blog assignments you will be expected to write at least 300 words (but more is great!) that cover the topic, lectures, and readings as well as conversations we've had in class during the week. These will assess your general understanding of the topic and its broader application. In addition, students will be asked to incorporate one additional source/piece of media of their finding to add to their response each week. Some blog posts will have targeted prompts, but most will allow students the creativity and flexibility to engage with content on their own. Students will also be expected to meaningfully comment (a total of at least 100 words) on at two other classmate posts. **Blog posts responses are due Sunday at midnight Eastern time for their corresponding week unless otherwise stated. Responses are due by the following Sunday. There will be 7 total blog posts and peer comment opportunities (subject to change).**Passwords for blogs should be set to HTSFall26.

Three Minute Thesis (3MT) (20%): At the end of the semester, students will use what they have learned through their blogging as it relates to course content and their interest/major to create a three-minute video for the class. More information will be provided during the semester. The 20% grade for the 3MT will be broken down into parts that will be due as the semester passes. These are listed below with their corresponding percentage of the project grade:

- 10/4: Thesis (5%)
- 10/18: Elevator pitch/ 30s summary (5%)
- 11/1: Draft 3MT Script (15%)
- 11/15: Feedback on 2 peers' scripts (10%)
- 12/6: Submission and self-reflection (65%)

Analysis Papers (20%): Two papers. You will get a prompt on a Monday morning and must submit your paper by the end of the week. Students will be required to write two analytic papers that will ask you to apply course material to make an argument. More details about these papers will be provided as the semester progresses.

Self-Reflections (10%): At three points throughout the semester, you will be asked to do self-assessments and reflections on your goals, your work, and learning. At the beginning of the semester, you will write a statement in which you set your personal goals for the course (2.5%).

You will also write two self-assessments (one midway through the semester, 2.5%, and one at the end of the semester, 5%) in which you reflect on the learning process, evaluate your performance, and situate what you are learning in the class in relation to your life and potential career. The last reflection functions in lieu of a Final Exam. The self-reflection assignment will require you to synthesize what you've learned during the semester and reflect on the course. The assignment will be graded on a pass/fail scale. More information will be shared closer to the assignment date.

Grading Scale:

A = 90-100%
B = 80-89
C = 70-79
D = 60-69
F = 0-59

Grades for each category are weighted as listed above. This means that each grade subcomponent will be calculated as a percentage. The scores for each category are then combined for your final grade. For example, if you average 95% on your writing responses, you will have earned 28.5 out of 30 % for this grade category. If you have questions about this please ask sooner rather than later.

Turn Around Time: I will do my best to return assignments with feedback within 7 business days of their submission but know that I'm not perfect!

Late Work and the Token System:

Assignments for this course will typically be due every Sunday at Midnight EST (unless otherwise noted). Please do everything in your power to do your assignments on time. All due dates can be found in each week's modules. **If you cannot submit work for an institute approved absence, it is your responsibility to coordinate with me to make-up your work.**

Beyond institute approved absences, this course uses a **Flexibility Token System** to support learning, revision, and balance across the semester. Tokens are designed to help you manage deadlines, revise work, and recover from short-term disruptions without penalty.

Each student begins the semester with **5 Flexibility Tokens**. Additional tokens may be earned through excellent work and optional activities (see below).

Tokens may be used **at any point during the semester** by submitting a comment on the token use form on Canvas. You do not need to provide personal explanations or documentation when using tokens.

Using Tokens

Extensions

- **1 token = 24-hour extension** on any blog, analysis paper, reading annotation, self-reflection or 3MT project checkpoint.
- Extensions may be stacked up to **72 hours (3 tokens maximum)** per assignment
- Extension requests must be submitted **before the assignment deadline**

Revisions and Resubmissions

- **1 token** to revise and resubmit:
  - A blog
  - An analysis paper
  - 3MT checkpoint
- Most assignments may be revised **up to two times**
- A new due date will be provided when feedback is released, typically 10-14 days.

Missed Assignments

- **2 tokens** to make up a missed reading annotation, blog, analysis paper, reflection, or 3MT checkpoint.
- **Turn in by 10/11 or Final (Due date TBA) for grades**

Important Notes

- Tokens are meant to support flexibility, not to replace consistent participation.
- You do not need to contact the instructor for short-term issues affecting one assignment or one class session—use the token system.
- If an emergency will affect **more than one week of class**, please contact the instructor to make a longer-term plan.

How to Earn more Flexibility Tokens

There will be multiple opportunities to earn more Flexibility Tokens this semester:

- Complete specific assignments listed on the schedule that say you will earn a Token by completing them on time
- Assignments earning an Excellent evaluation noted by Dr A in feedback will earn 1 Token each
- Reviewing an additional film or show (can only be done once) for 1 token

Flexibility Token Quick Guide

You Start With: 5 Tokens

Extensions

Action	Token Cost	Notes
24-hour extension (any assignment)	1	Request before deadline
Up to 72 hours total	Max 3	Per assignment

Revisions

Action	Token Cost	Notes
Revise blog	1	Up to 2 times for any 1 post
Revise analysis paper	1	Up to 2 times for any 1 assignment
Revise 3MT checkpoint	1	Encouraged

Missed Work

Action	Token Cost	Limit
Make up blog	2	Multiple allowed

Earn More Tokens

Activity	Tokens Earned
Excellent assignment	1
Extra film or tv show review	1

Schedule:

Module 1: Background, Theory, and Invention

- **Week 1- August 24-30: Introductions and onboarding**
  - **Read:**
    - Langdon Winner, "Prophets of Inevitability," MIT Technology Review, March 1, 1998, https://www.technologyreview.com/1998/03/01/237058/prophets-of-inevitability/.
    - John Law, STS as Method, The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies
    - David E. Nye, "Can We Define 'Technology'?," in *Technology Matters: Questions to Live With* (MIT Press, 2006).
  - **Watch:**
    - https://www.ted.com/talks/katleen_gabriels_we_design_technology_technology_designs_us?subtitle=en
  - **Do by 8/30:**
    - Create your student blog and introductory post
    - For Token: Getting Started with Perusall

- **Week 2- August 31 – September 6: Key Concepts and Invention as a Process**
  - **Read:**
    - Bruno Latour: "Where are the missing masses? The sociology of a few mundane artifacts", in Bijker, Wiebe E.; Law, John, Shaping technology/building society: studies in sociotechnical change.
    - Scott D.N. Cook. "Technological Revolutions and the Gutenberg Myth." In Mark Tefik (ed). Internet Dreams: Archetypes, Myths, and Metaphors. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996). Pp. 67-82.
  - Optional
    - Thomas Hughes, "How Did The Heroic Inventors Do It? | Invention & Technology Magazine," *Invention and Technology*, 1985, https://www.inventionandtech.com/content/how-did-heroic-inventors-do-it-1.
    -
  - **Do by 9/6:**
    - Blog and Peer Comments 1

        - Reading Discussions on Perusall

- **Week 3- September 7-13: Science, Technology, and Power in the Postcolonial Period**
    - **Read:**
        - Kapil Raj, "Networks of Knowledge, or Spaces of Circulation? The Birth of British Cartography in Colonial South Asia in the Late Eighteenth Century," *Global Intellectual History* 2, no. 1 (2017): 49–66, https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2017.1332883.
        - J. A. Bennett, "The travels and trials of Mr Harrison's timekeeper," in Marie-Noelle Bourguet, Christian Licoppe, H. Otto Sibum, eds., Instruments, travel and science: itineraries of precision from the seventeenth to the twentieth century (London: Routledge, 2002), 75-95
    - Optional:
        - Listen: https://www.bbc.com/audio/play/m000vyn6?fbclid=IwY2xjawPKHbBleHRuA2FlbQIxMQBicmlkETFyRUJRY0hJMnhSc2ZDMU45c3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjIyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHr5njT-UHV3lJiIFd83CeIZm5ebwDutauQieRwi4Z-KhdOdDJqrvcEDF4qkX_aem_ElKPij4dYSCWBcvSkXKscA
    - **Do by 9/13:**
        - Blog and Peer Comments 2
        - Reading Discussions on Perusall
        - Goals Reflection Due
- **Week 4 – September 14-20: Technologies that Changed Modernity: Industry, Mechanization and the Steam Engine**
    - Read:
        - Thomas J. Misa, "Technologies of the Court, 1450-1600," in Leonardo to the Internet: Technology and Culture from the Renaissance to the Present (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 1-32.
        - Jonathan Matusitz, "The Impact of the Railroad on American Society: A Communication Perspective of Technology," *PASOS* 7, no. 3 (2009): 451–60.
    - Do:
        - Blog and peer comments 3
        - Reading discussions on Perusall
- **Week 5- September 21-27: Markets and the Economics of Innovation**
    - Read
        - (40 pp): Ha-Joon Chang, "There is No Such Thing as a Free Market," chap. 1 in *Twenty-Three Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010), 1-10;
        - W. Brian Arthur, "Positive Feedbacks in the Economy," chap. 1 in *Increasing Returns and Path Dependence in the Economy* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1994), 1-12;
        - Paul A. David, "Understanding the Economics of QWERTY: The Necessity of History," in *Economic History and the Modern Economist*, ed. William N. Parker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 30-49.

        - Paul Krugman, “The General Theory of Enshittification,” Substack newsletter, *Paul Krugman*, July 24, 2025, https://paulkrugman.substack.com/p/the-general-theory-of-enshittification
    - Do:
        - Blog and peer comments 4
        - Reading Discussions on Perusall

Module 2: Technology, Society, and Culture

- **Week 6- September 28 – October 4: Technology, War, and Development**
    - Read:
        - David Edgerton. “War.” In The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 138-159.
        - Walter Isaacson, *The Innovators* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 35-85 (chap. 2).
    - Do:
        - Reading discussions on Perusall
        - 3MT Thesis Idea Due

- **Week 7- October 5-11: Technology and Work**
    - Read:
        - Hugh Aitken, “The Taylor System,” chap. 1 in *Scientific Management in Action: Taylorism at Watertown Arsenal, 1908-1915*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 13-48 (pp. 36-46 optional);
        - Stephen Meyer, "The Evolution of the New Industrial Technology," chap. 2 in *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-1921* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 9-36.
    - Do:
        - Reading discussions on Perusall
        - Analysis Paper 1

- **Week 8 – October 12-18: Technology and Gender**
    - Reading:

        - Nelly Oudshoorn, "'Astronauts in the Sperm World': The Renegotiation of Masculine Identities in Discourses on Male Contraceptives," *Men and Masculinities* 6, no. 4 (2004): 349–67, https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X03260959.
        - Clive Thompson, "The Secret History of Women in Coding," *The New York Times*, February 13, 2019, sec. Magazine, https://tinyurl.com/426u789s.
        - Mar Hicks. "Sexism is a Feature, Not a Bug." In Thomas Mullaney, Benjamin Peters, Mar Hicks, Kavita Philip (eds). Your Computer is on Fire. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2021. 135-158.
        - Optional:
            - Andrea Tone, "Making room for rubbers: Gender, Technology and Birth Control before the Pill." History and Technology, Vol 18, No. 1 (2002), 51-76.
    - **Do:**
        - Reading Discussions on Perusall
        - 3MT Elevator Pitch

- **Week 9 – October 19-25: Technology, Infrastructure, and the Environment**
    - Reading:
        - Lee Vinsel and Andrew L. Russell. "Slow Disaster: What the Neglect of Maintenance is Doing to our Infrastructure." In The Innovation Delusion: How Our Obsession with the New Has Disrupted the Work that Matters Most. New York: Currency Books, 2020. 60-80.
        - Sara B. Pritchard. "An Envirotechnical Disaster: Nature, Technology and Politics at Fukushima." Environmental History 17, no. 2 (April 2012) 219-243.
    - **Do:**
        - Reading Discussions on Perusall
        - Blog and peer comments 5

Module 3: Ethics and Future Challenges

- **Week 10 – October 26 – November 1: Technologies of Exclusion**
    - Readings:
        - "Default Discrimination," in *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*, by Ruha Benjamin (Polity, 2019).
        - Winifred R. Poster. "Racialized Surveillance in the Digital Surveillance Economy." In Ruha Benjamin (ed). Captivating Technology: Race, Carceral Technoscience, and Liberatory Imagination in Everyday Life. Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2019. 133-169.
    - Do:
        - Reading Discussions on Perusall
        - Draft 3MT Script

- **Week 11 – November 9-15: AI and the future of work**
  - Reading:
    - Safiya Noble. "Your Robot Isn't Neutral." In Thomas Mullaney, Benjamin Peters, Mar Hicks, Kavita Philip (eds). Your Computer is on Fire. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2021. 199-212.
    - Andres Martinez, "Bonum Certamen | Future Tense Fiction," Issues, December 17, 2025, https://issues.org/futuretensefiction/fiction-bonum-certamen-martinez/.
  - Do:
    - Reading Discussions on Perusall
    - Peer feedback on 2 3MT Scripts
    - Goal Setting/Reflection Assignment 2

- **Week 12 – November 16-22: Technology, Cars, and Risk I**

  - Automobiles, Engineers, and Corporate Responsibility

    - Reading:
      - Charles Perrow. "Introduction." Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. Read 3-14.
      - Ralph Nader, *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile* (New York: Grossman, 1965), vii-x, 1-32;
      - Mark Dowie, "Pinto Madness," *Mother Jones*, October/November 1977, 18-32.
  - Do:
    - Blog and peer comments 6
    - Reading Discussions on Perusall

- **Week 13 – November 23-29: Technology, Cars, and Risk II**
  - Self-Driving Cars
    - Reading
      - Nassim Parvin. "Our Bodies in the Trolley's Path, or Why Self-Driving Cars Must *Not* Be Programmed to Kill." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 43, no. 2 (2018): 302–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243917718942.
      - Meredith Broussard. "This Car Won't Drive Itself." In *Artificial Unintelligence: How Computers Misunderstand the World*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2018.

  - Do:
    - Analysis Paper 2

        - Reading Discussions on Perusall

- **Week 14 – November 30 – December 6:**
    - Wrap Up – Technosolutionism and the environment
        - Jacob Moscona and Karthik A. Sastry, "Does Directed Innovation Mitigate Climate Damage? Evidence from U.S. Agriculture*," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 138, no. 2 (2023): 637–701, https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjac039. **READ INTRO AND CONCLUSION**
        - Jill Lepore, *The Tree Branch*, episode 4, The Last Archive, November 10, 2022, https://omny.fm/shows/the-last-archive/the-tree-branch.
    - Do:
        - 3MT Final Submission and Reflection
        - Reading Discussions on Perusall
- Final TBA