

Technology and Society

Last Updated: Fri, 08/08/2025

Course prefix: HTS

Course number: 2084

Section: A

CRN (you may add up to five):
91136

Instructor First Name: Eric

Instructor Last Name: Schatzberg

Semester: Fall

Academic year: 2025

Course description:

Description. This course explores key ideas about technology using historical cases studies that give us a different way to think about technology and its relationship to society.

I argue that 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.

There are three major parts to the course. The first part focuses on the factors that shape technological change. The second part examines technology in use, touching upon issues of gender, work, and war. The third part concentrates on ethics of technology, with case studies on algorithmic bias, automobile safety, and the shuttle Challenger.

The theme of ethics is present throughout the course, not just in the last third. In this course, we learn how human choices shape technological change in ways that affect the principles of a just society. We examine, for example, how gender prejudices influenced the develop of early automobiles. 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 learning outcomes:

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;

- Describe technological innovation as a complex, nonlinear, and indeterminate process;
- Analyze how human choices and social factors shape technological change;
- Explain the ethical implications of technological choice.

Required course materials:

Course Books and Readings. The following book is required for week 14; be sure to obtain a copy by then:

Richard P. Feynman, "What Do You Care What Other People Think?" (New York: Bantam, 1988).

All other assigned readings are posted to Canvas.

Grading policy:

Grades. Take-home essay exams, 17% each; weekly quizzes, discussions, and other assignments, 39%, attendance, 10%.

Percentage grades will be converted to letter grades as follows: $100 \geq A \geq 90$; $90 > B \geq 80$; $80 > C \geq 70$; $70 > D \geq 60$; $F < 60$.

Attendance policy:

Attendance is required, and counts for 10% of your grade. If you need to be absent, please let me know in advance and I'll do my best to accommodate you. If you are absent because of illness or other unpredictable reasons, please inform me as soon as possible.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Academic Integrity. I expect students to maintain the highest ethical standards in this course. Each student is responsible for knowing the rules on academic misconduct: <http://b.gatech.edu/2CjF1Ro>.

Here's summary for written assignments. Don't copy stuff without 1) citing the source where you found the ideas, and 2) putting phrases in quotation marks when you use the exact words from your source. For a short guide to avoiding plagiarism, see <https://bit.ly/3Tg9XJE>; for more detail, see <http://unc.live/2CiHag9>.

Any student suspected of cheating on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, which will identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

The University System of Georgia and the Georgia Institute of Technology require that I include the following bland language in this syllabus. I neither endorse nor reject these statements.

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.