Information Technology and World Politics

Fall 2010

This upper-level undergraduate course provides a broad overview of the information revolution and its impact on global politics. We will examine previous episodes of transformative changes in communications to place contemporary changes in a broader historical context, examine the development of new information technologies and consider theoretical explorations of the relationship between information technologies and world politics. The bulk of the course, however, will examine the practical impact of the information revolution on state sovereignty, democratization, international political economy, national security, diplomacy, and international organization. There will be a particular emphasis on the role of new information technologies in elections and public administration at the national and international level; the increasing role of robotics in warfare; and the struggle between non-government organizations (NGOs) and authoritarian governments to control information flows over the internet.

Prerequisites:

There are no course prerequisites for this class, however, POS 102 Introduction to Comparative and International Politics is recommended. Students who have not studied international relations may consult with the instructor for some additional background for some additional background readings.

There are no technical prerequisites other than a willingness to learn new skills and devote the necessary time and energy to do so. Students will need to learn basic features of web authoring tools, if they have not already done so. The primary object of the course, however, is not technical training. Rather, it is to help students to become better end users of information technology and to understand its wider economic and political consequences.

Objectives:

By the end of this course: 1) students should have a basic understanding of the current state and historical development of information and communications technologies; 2) students should be able to build a basic website and post documents on it; 3) students should be able to critically evaluate government websites; 4) students should understand the methods of internet filtering employed by governments and countermeasures used by non-governmental actors; 5) students should have developed an appreciation for the consequences of information technologies for the conduct of international relations and be able to explain these consequences in considerable detail.

Texts (available at the UAlbany Bookstore):

Elizabeth C. Hanson, *The Information Revolution and World Politics* (New York: Rowman Littlefield, 2008)


Course Requirements and Grading:

Mid-term Exam about 30%
e-government website evaluation about 20%
Final Exam about 40%
Class participation (including quizzes) about 10%

Participation:
Students are expected to attend all classes, complete all assigned readings in advance of class and be prepared to discuss them. The base line grade for class participation is a D. Routine attendance with minimal participation will earn a C. Regular contributions to class discussion that are appropriate and draw on readings will earn a B. Students who are consistently well-prepared to discuss the assigned readings nearly every class and actively participate in discussions will receive As for class participation.

Late assignments will be penalized. Students must properly reference all sources, including assigned readings, in all written assignments. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated.

Schedule of classes, readings and assignments:

Introduction

8/31 Course overview

Part I Information and Communication Technologies

9/2 Historical Background
Hanson, pp.1-54

9/7 Computers and the PC Revolution
Hanson, pp. 54-57
9/14 The Internet and World Wide Web

Hanson, pp. 57-64.

Friedman, *The World is Flat*, pp. 60-77.


9/16 Web applications, open source software, online communities

Friedman, *The World is Flat*, Ch. 2 (pp.77-126)

Website assignment due

9/21 Nanotechnology

(Class will meet at the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering)

Richard Feynman, “There’s Plenty of Room at the Bottom,” Meeting of the American Physical Society, California Institute of Technology, December 29, 1959, at: [http://www.its.caltech.edu/~feynman](http://www.its.caltech.edu/~feynman)

Eric Drexler, *Engines of Creation*, Ch. 1
[http://www.e-drexler.com/d/06/00/EOC/EOC_Chapter_1.html](http://www.e-drexler.com/d/06/00/EOC/EOC_Chapter_1.html)

Ralph Merkle, *A brief introduction to the core concepts of molecular nanotechnology*  
[http://www.zyvex.com/nano](http://www.zyvex.com/nano)

“Introduction” College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering of the University at Albany  
[http://cnse.albany.edu/about_cnse/introduction.html](http://cnse.albany.edu/about_cnse/introduction.html)

9/23 Nanotechnology and the Future of Computing


[http://www.computing.co.uk/computing/features/2268232/unlocking-potential](http://www.computing.co.uk/computing/features/2268232/unlocking-potential)


**Part II Globalization and the State**

9/28 Economic Globalization and State Sovereignty

Hanson, pp. 139-205

Friedman, *The World is Flat*, Ch. 2 (pp. 126-166)
9/30 New Public Management and E-government


10/5 E-government Worldwide

Assignment due: e-government website evaluation


10/7 E-government Cross-National Rankings

Read Introduction (pp. 1-6) and Part 2 (pp, 57-97), Skim rest.

10/12 Mid-term exam

Part III Foreign Policymaking and State Control

10/14 Diplomacy in the Information Age

Hanson, pp. 97-119


U.S. State Department, Office of Information Resource Management (especially E-diplomacy Office) http://www.state.gov/m/irm/


10/19 State Censorship and Internet Filtering

Robert Faris and Nart Villeneuve “Measuring Global Internet Filtering”

Jonathan Zittrain and John Palfrey “Internet Filtering: The Politics and Mechanisms of Control”

10/21 State Control of the Internet

Ron Deibert and Rafal Rohozinski, “Beyond Denial: Introducing Next Generation Information Access Controls”

Ron Deibert and Rafal Rohozinski, “Control and Subversion in Russian Cyberspace”


10/26 States vs. Civil Society


Part IV International Security

10/28 Revolution in Military Affairs

Hanson, pp. 119-138.

11/2 Information Warfare and Cyberterrorism
Clarke and Knake, *Cyberwar*, Chs. 1-4 (1-149)

11/4 Information Security
Clarke and Knake, *Cyberwar*, Chs. 5-8 (pp. 151-279)

11/9 Information Technology and Homeland Security
https://www.policyarchive.org/bitstream/handle/10207/1648/RL31798_20080827.pdf
Rey Koslowski, “Government Information Technology and Border Security: Comparative Perspectives,” Manuscript

11/11 Military Robotics
Singer, *Wired for War*, chs. 1-10 (pp.19-204)

11/16 Consequences of Military Robotics
Singer, *Wired for War*, chs. 11-16 (pp. 205-325)

11/17 Robots: Command and Control
Singer, *Wired for War*, chs. 17-22 (pp. 326-436)

Part V International Cooperation and Global Governance

11/23 Internet Governance
Andrew Chadwick, *Internet Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2006), Chs. 9, 10

11/30 Media Ownership and Intellectual Property
Hanson, pp. 205-234

12/2 Global Governance of New Technologies
Bill Joy, “Why the future doesn't need us” *Wired* April 2000

12/7 Information Technology and International Development