Information Societies:
The International Political Economy of Information and Communication Technology
Special Topics COM597

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INTRODUCTION

This course on the political economy of information societies will critically assess theories of international development from across the social sciences. From political science, theories of modernization, dependency, underdevelopment help explain both surges of economic wealth from high tech sectors and the persistence of international institutions for extracting wealth from poor countries. From sociology, world systems theory puts the development of new economic systems into deep historical perspective, and the new institutionalism highlights systems of institutional isomorphism, competitive mimicry, normative emulation, and coercion that might explain how hardware and software systems become global standards. Communication offers theories of technology diffusion, cultural production and consumption online, and topical expertise on how engineering standards and telecommunications policy become tools of social control.

Many social scientists are studying the impact of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) on our economic, political and cultural lives. The range of phenomena studied across the disciplines is impressive: the global economy, the organizational behavior of firms, and the dot-com boom; the technological structure of the world system, the bureaucratic efficiency of states, the international politics of technical standards; cultural production and consumption, intercultural communication, and ownership diversity of digital media systems. The use of new ICTs, such as mobile phones and the internet, is also being studied in different contexts, from small and local organizational field sites such as work places, households, and schools, to large institutions such as states, firms, social movements and justice systems. In addition, there are new social forms of organization in cyberspace, forms of organization that help define and indeed constitute information societies. There is a burgeoning literature on the role of ICTs in transforming the institutions of state, diplomacy, and citizenship.

The goals of this class are to

- to understand the role of information and communication technology in international development;
- to understand the theoretical perspectives on technology and development from different disciplines by exploring their use in cross case comparisons;
- to critically assess these theories, applying them in a personal research project or case study of selected by the student.

What is an information society? How do well do these theories—proposed to help explain transitions from agrarian to industrial society and the evolution of late industrial capitalism—help explain what may be a new stage in political economy: the network society, open society or information society? Is e-government a straightforward means of building state

capacity and further rationalizing public bureaucracies, or are there signs of a deeper transformation in the institution of the state? What is the role of blogs, wikis and other digital media systems in the culture and news diets of people living in authoritarian regimes? While the role of mobile phones and the internet in democratic movements has been feted from Iqaluit to Indonesia, no political revolution has occurred because of the internet. But today, are democratic transitions possible without it? How has the international high tech sector been structured to limit the types of technology production and consumption in different countries? If there are persistent international institutions for extracting natural resource wealth from poor countries, do these institutions have a similar role in extracting information, innovation, or ingenuity from poor countries?

We will critically explore the concepts often used in discussions of contemporary international political economy, including "network society", "digital divide," and "information society". We will also review the theories of modernization, dependency, and underdevelopment that have been used to understand the problems and prospects of development. Case studies from around the world will be used wherever possible. Students will have significant freedom to develop their own research interests through a paper on a topic of their own choosing. Through diverse readings, students will also learn about the various methodologies for studying technology and society.

Although this course has no formal prerequisites, students with at least one substantive course and one methods course in the political, social or communication sciences will be best prepared for the pace and expectations of this course. The course is weighed with a heavier reading load in the early weeks of quarter, while the later weeks student manuscripts will form part of the reading.

EVALUATION

Students will be evaluated through participation in class discussions (20%), a book review suitable for submission to an academic journal (20%), and the submission of a manuscript, the content of which can be negotiated at the beginning of the course (60%). Each student will be expected to present their work to the rest of the group in second half of quarter, and the final manuscript will be due on June 6th. Students are encouraged to draft or redraft a conference paper, thesis proposal, dissertation chapter, or other manuscript as appropriate for whatever stage of their academic career they are in. Case studies of particular countries or particular ICTs are welcome. In important ways, the freedom to develop a manuscript over the course of our 10 weeks of conversations is *more* challenging than writing a class-specific paper, response papers or literature reviews, so students should come to the first meeting with a sense of what they want to draft or redraft.

OUTLINE

March 29th: Why Marx Is Still Important

Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. New York: Penguin, 1993. Read the Forward by Nicolaus (pp. 7-63), the Chapter On Money (pp. 116-238) and the section on community (pp. 472-501). Galtung, J. 1971. "A Structural Theory of Imperialism," Journal of Peace Research 8, 81-117; Palma, G. 1978. "Dependency: A Formal Theory of Underdevelopment or a Methodology for the Analysis of Concrete Situations of Underdevelopment?" World Development 6, 881-924.

April 5th: Digital States and IP (But Not E-Government)

Fountain, J. "Bureaucratic Reform and E-Government in the United States: An Institutional Perspective." In Andrew Chadwick and Philip N. Howard (Eds). *The Handbook of Internet Politics*. London, UK: Routledge, 2009. Margetts, Helen. "Public management change and e-government: the emergence of digital-era governance." In Andrew Chadwick and Philip N. Howard (Eds). *The Handbook of Internet Politics*. London, UK: Routledge, 2009.   May, Christopher. The Global Politics of Intellectual Property Rights in the New Millennium. http://www.e-ir.info/?p=1899

April 12th: What Would an IPE of IT Look Like?
Evans, Peter B. 1995. *Embedded Autonomy*. Princeton University Press. Romer, Paul. 1994. "The Origins of Endogenous Growth". *The journal of economic perspectives : a journal of the American Economic Association.* 8, no. 1: 3.

April 19th: Network Societies, Without Propinquity?
Howard, Philip. Castells and the Media. London, UK: Polity, draft manuscript. Calhoun, Craig. "Community without Propinquity Revisited: Communications Technology and the Transformation of the Urban Public Sphere." Sociological Inquiry 68, no. 3 (1998).

April 26th: A Day in China
Yang, Guobin. 2010. The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009. OR Qiu, Jack Linchuan. 2009. Working-Class Network Society: Communication Technology and the Information Have-Less in Urban China. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.

May 3: Open, Free or Lazy Culture
Endre Danyi, E. (2006). Xerox Project: Photocopy Machines as a Metaphor for An "Open Society". *The Information Society, 22*(2), 111-115. Barley, Stephen. 1996. Technicians in the workplace: Ethnographic evidence for bringing work into organization studies. Administrative Sciences Quarterly 41: 404-441. Kreiss, Daniel, Megan Finn and Fred Turner. "The Limits of Peer Production: Some Reminders from Max Weber for the Network Society." New Media and Society 20(10), 1-17. Some Student Manuscripts.

May 10: States and Transparency (Let's Talk About Wikileaks)
Peter Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination" in International Organization special issue Knowledge, Power and International Policy Coordination 46 (1), January 1992, pp. 1-35; Ronald Mitchell, "Sources of transparency: information systems in international regimes." International Studies Quarterly 42(1), March 1998, pp. 109-130. Jonathan Aronson, "Power and Interdependence: International Intellectual Property Rights in a Networked World", USC, unpublished manuscript. Some Student Manuscripts.

May 17: Digital Divide Research, v1.0
Henisz, W., Zelner, B., & Guillen, M. (2005). The Worldwide Diffusion of Market-Oriented Infrastructure Reform, 1977-1999. *American Sociological Review, 70*(6), 871-897. Milner, H. (2006). The Digital Divide: The Role of Political Institutions in Technology Diffusion. *Comparative Political Studies, 39*(2), 176-199. Some Student Manuscripts.

May 24: Cyberwar, Cyberterrorism and Cybercrime
Denning, D. "Activism, Hacktivism, and Cyberterrorism: The Internet as a Tool for Influencing Foreign Policy." In Networks and Netwars, edited by Arquilla and Ronfeldt. Santa Monica, CA:

Rand Corporation, 2001. Williams, P. "Transnational Criminal Networks." In Networks and Netwars, edited by Arquilla and Ronfeldt. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2001. Some Student Manuscripts.

May 31: A Day with the Pundits
Granovetter, Mark. "The Strength of Weak Ties" The American Journal of Sociology, Vol 78. No. 6 (May 1973), 1360-1380. USIP, Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics. Gladwell, Malcolm, "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will not Be Tweeted," New Yorker, October 4, 2010. Shirkey, Clay, "The Political Power of Social Media", Foreign Affairs, January 2011. Some Student Manuscripts.

POSSIBLE BOOKS TO REVIEW
This is a list of important books published by a major scholarly press in the last year. There certainly others, and you are welcome to propose other titles if they are from a university or scholarly press, are new enough to be worth reviewing, and would advance your own work and be interesting to the rest of the class.

Boczkowski, Pablo J. 2010. *News at Work: Imitation in an Age of Information Abundance*. University Of Chicago Press.
Earl, Jennifer, and Katrina Kimport. 2011. *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age*. 1st ed. The MIT Press, March 31.
Gleick, James. 2011. *The Information: A History, a Theory, a Flood*. Pantheon, March 1.
Hanna, Nagy K. 2010. *Transforming Government and Building the Information Society: Challenges and Opportunities for the Developing World*. 1st ed. Springer.
Jensen, Klaus Bruhn. 2010. *Media Convergence: The Three Degrees of Network, Mass and Interpersonal Communication*. 1st ed. Routledge.
Lastowka, Greg. 2010. *Virtual Justice: The New Laws of Online Worlds*. Yale University Press.
Mueller, Milton L. 2010. *Networks and States: The Global Politics of Internet Governance*. The MIT Press.
Nardi, Bonnie. 2010. *My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft*. University of Michigan Press, May 25.
Papacharissi, Zizi A. 2010. *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age*. Polity.
Patel, Reena. 2010. *Working the Night Shift: Women in India's Call Center Industry*. Stanford University Press.
Streeter, Thomas. 2010. *The Net Effect: Romanticism, Capitalism, and the Internet*. NYU Press.
Turkle, Sherry. 2011. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. Basic Books, January 11.
Vaidhyanathan, Siva. 2011. *The Googlization of Everything:* 1st ed. University of California Press.