

TECHNO UTOPIA

Dr. Ofer Nur

Spring semester

nur@ucla.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

Short description:

This course surveys the cultural origins, social conditions and various discourses that have shaped and generated what is termed cyber culture. We will begin with an introduction to the science and discourse of cybernetics as it developed since the late 1940s. We will examine the ambivalence towards technology as shaping society and culture, as well as the concepts of community and frontier, both real and virtual and their centrality in American culture. In this context we will explore the various cyber discourses from the point of view of those who justified its redeeming and even utopian qualities.

The course will follow closely the historical development of the internet as a culture and as a product of the Information Society in the age of the cold war. We will examine the culture of the 1960s and how it shaped an ideology that promised social and political redemption, based on cybernetics and more broadly, on technology.

It is going to be our goal in this course to make a nuanced and more sophisticated appraisal of the ongoing controversy raging between and cyberutopians and cyberskeptics.

Assessment:

Minor assignments: 2 short, up to 500 word take-home quizzes (each worth 10%)

Midterm: In-class exam (15%)

Final requirement: Paper (55%)

Participation: Full attendance and participation is worth 10% of your grade.

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Students are permitted a maximum of three absences without penalty. Any additional absences will affect the final grade and may result in failure of the course.

Academic conduct:

Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously. Any instance of academic misconduct which includes: submitting someone else's work as your own; failure to accurately cite sources; taking words from another source without using quotation marks; submission of work for which you have previously received credit; working in a group for individual assignments; using unauthorized materials in an exam and sharing your work with other students, will result in failure of the assignment and will likely lead to further disciplinary measures.