Marion Fourcade
UC Berkeley
Sociology
Thursdays 4-6pm Barrows 402
Office hours: Monday 3:45-5:45pm

SOC 290 - SOCIOLOGY AND THE DIGITAL EVERYTHING

How do digital technologies (re)constitute our physical and mental beings? How do they shape social interactions, the working of institutions, the production of social practices and beliefs, and the pursuit of profit? What are the theoretical, methodological and normative implications of technological change for the practice of social scientific knowledge? In this new course, we will reflect on the political, cultural and economic dimensions of the digital society, and debate the possible futures of sociology. The syllabus draws from a wide range of academic and non-academic texts, including pieces by Virginia Eubanks, Frank Pasquale, Yuval Harari, Natasha Dow Schüll, Fred Turner, Norbert Wiener, and much more.

Books you should buy (*: on order at the Cal Student Bookstore):


Course website

There is a course website for Sociology 290 on bCourses. All journal articles and book excerpts are available in PDF format (Go to bCourses > Files > Required). You can also access some papers directly by clicking the hyperlinks in the syllabus.

Course Requirements

- **Active participation** of all seminar members to class discussions.

- **Weekly facts** about the topic being discussed that week. Just upload a web link to a news story (or twitter feed, or blog post, etc…) and add a one-sentence summary. Go to bCourses > Pages > page for that week and post the story. No need for your name, it will be fun to guess who posted what.
- **Two in-class presentations.** One presentation will cover the readings for one week. It should be supported by a written memo briefly summarizing the main arguments and raising a number of themes/questions for further discussion in class. The memo should be posted on the course web site no later than midnight, on the day before class, so that people have enough time to read it. I will not grade the memos. The second presentation will take place at the end of the semester and will involve a discussion of the proposed research paper.

- **One three-to-five pages final paper proposal,** due on February 15 at 5pm. (My mailbox or email is fine). The proposal should outline the research question, the research strategy, some relevant factoids, and explain the sociological motivation behind the problem studied (a critical review of the scholarly literature are an acceptable motivation). You are encouraged to come discuss your proposal in office hours.

- **One final research paper** (15-20 double-spaced pages), due on Monday May 13 in both email and paper format. The only imperatives for this requirement are: (i) The paper must address a topic of your choice, related to the digital economy (ii) It must use some of the readings and factoids discussed in this class. The paper may be empirical (e.g., a pilot study) or consist in a research proposal. Additional guidelines will be posted on the course website.

- **Food!** Because we are meeting from 4-6pm, we will all be hungry! Therefore we will take turns bringing a snack for the group. Sign up on the page for food.
January 24. Introduction.

No required readings

**Recommended**


January 31. The Age of Information.


**Recommended**


PART I. THE DIGITAL MODE OF PRODUCTION

February 7. All that is solid melts into air


Recommended


February 14. Working


Recommended


February 21. Law, Culture, Politics


**Recommended**


**PART II. THE LIFE OF OTHERS**

**February 28. Visibility …for whom?**


Recommended


March 7. Sorting


Recommended


Recommended


March 21. Professor Fourcade out of town (class added at the end)

March 28 –No Class (spring break)
April 4. Affect, Experience, Manipulation


Recommended


April 11. Appropriation and Resistance


Finn Brunton and Helen Nissenbaum, 2011. Vernacular resistance to data collection and analysis: A political theory of obfuscation. First Monday 16(5).

Recommended


Francis Tseng. “[Monkeywrenching the Machine.]” *Logic 3.*

**PART III. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THEORY**

**April 18. Social Trends and Dilemmas**


Google’s Selfish Ledger. [Youtube.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQw4w9WgXcQ&feature=youtu.be)

**Recommended**


**April 25. The Political Economy of Ratings**


May 2. (4 hours session)

Conclusion: The Theoretical Relevance of Futurology (1 hour) --
Presentation of students’ projects (3 hours)

**Recommended**
