COURSE TITLE: Society and Technology
COURSE NUMBER: SOC 320

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION:
In this course, students will apply sociological principles to understanding the impact technology has on social organization – from the micro-level of the family to the macro-level of the nation. Students will consider how the technology of the past has shaped our present, and how the technology of the present will determine our future.

II. RATIONALE:
One of the essential hallmarks of our species is our reliance on technology to survive – from the most rudimentary tools developed by our ancient ancestors to today’s plethora of electronic communications. Technology is not developed or introduced in a social vacuum. Nor is it socially neutral – its acceptance has both intended and unintended consequences. Technology is developed, implemented, and experienced within specific social environments. And it impacts and changes those social environments, often in fundamental ways. Paleolithic stone tools, the bow, the stirrup, the plow, the steam engine, the microchip – each of these had major impacts on the societies that developed or adopted them (and each made the development of the next possible). The purpose of this course is to examine the social contexts in which specific technologies are developed and adopted, as well as the social consequences of those technologies: globally, locally, and at the micro-level of family and individual.

II. INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS:

GOAL A:
The student will become familiar with the sociological literature on the relationship between technology and society:

Learning Outcomes: The student will:

A-1 Define “Technology” and be aware of key terms and ideas associated with the sociology of technology.
A-2 Describe the association between science and technology.

GOAL B:
The student will gain an understanding of the social context and impact that technology has on society:

Learning Outcomes: The student will:

B-1 Explain the central place that technology has always had for our species.
B-2 Explain the positive and negative impacts of technology.
B-4 Understand the impact that social media is having on American society.
B-5 Explain the “digital divide” between wealthy nations and poorer nations.

GOAL C:
Students will demonstrate the ability to apply sociological theory to real-world examples:

Learning Outcomes: The student will:

C-1 Apply sociological theories (e.g., Ogburn’s Cultural Lag) to specific examples.
C-2 Be able to articulate technologies’ impacts on American culture using various sociological theories.
C-3 Be able to discuss the impact of at least one technological change from the past on individual freedom and social relationships.

GOAL D:
Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze the complex social environment(s) in which technology is created and consumed:

Learning Outcomes: The student will:

D-1 Be able to critique the role of technology in society.
D-2 Analyze the social impact of technology at the international, national, family, and individual levels.
D-3 Analyze the impacts of politics, business, consumerism, and social movements on technological development.
D-4 Critique common notions of technological “progress.”
D-5 Analyze the costs and benefits of technological innovations on various stakeholders.
D-6 Place reactionary social movements within rapidly changing social environments, identifying the threats (real or supposed; economic or ideological) which are revealed.

GOAL E:
Students will demonstrate an ability to synthesize information presented:

Learning Outcomes: The student will:

E-1 Identify the areas in which major sociological theories are compatible and where they are incompatible.
E-2 Understand sociological views of technology’s social impact within each of the main sociological paradigms (Functionalism, Conflict Theory, Symbolic Interactionism).
E-3 Articulate a unified sociological view which incorporates technology within the social environment.

GOAL F:
Students will be able to critically evaluate the strength and applicability of sociological theories of technological adaptations:

Learning Outcomes: The student will:

F-1 Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of major sociological theories of technological development and adoption.
F-2 Based on an understanding of past interaction between technology and society, predict the social impact of a pending technological change in U.S. society and potential reactionary social movement(s) protesting this change.

GOAL G:
Use appropriate written and oral communication skills

Learning Outcomes: The student will:

G-1 Write clearly, concisely, and appropriately using correct English grammar, punctuation, usage, mechanics, sentence structure, and vocabulary.
G-2 Use appropriate APA format for scholarly writings.
G-3 Speak with confidence, clarity, and conciseness.
G-4 Research, prepare, and deliver professional presentations.