

# INLS 690-222: Social Informatics

School of Information and Library Science, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Spring Semester 2019

**CLASS TIME:** Wednesday: 12:30- 3:15pm

**CLASS MEETING PLACE:** Manning 303

**INSTRUCTOR:** Mohammad Hossein Jarrahi, PhD

**PHONE:** 919-962-8364 (Office)

**OFFICE:** 200 Manning Hall

**EMAIL:** [jarrahi@unc.edu](mailto:jarrahi@unc.edu)

**OFFICE HOURS:** Each Tuesday from 12:20PM to 3:05PM or by appointment.

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Understanding technological innovation, computerization, and the context of technology use are central to comprehending the social fabrics of our today's society. The object of this course is to explore different conceptualizations of how technology plays a role in shaping organizations, communities, and societies. We will draw on multiple theoretical developments from the field of Science and Technology Studies (e.g., actor-network theory and social construction of technology), social informatics and computer-supported cooperative work to enable a better understanding of the interaction between humans and technology at personal, organizational and societal levels.

This course involves reading, reflecting and discussing some classic sociotechnical work, along with research emphasizing the application of a sociotechnical perspective in understanding the role of information and communication technologies, and knowledge communities. This course helps graduate students gain a broad and conceptual understanding about sociotechnical issues and theories. More specifically it enables students to understand and explain the complexities inherent in the context of technology use and the many ways individuals, groups, organizations adopt and relate to ICTs.

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## STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

The course structure is seminar-based and therefore does not involve traditional lecturing; it largely builds from a lot of class discussions and personal reflections. Through this course, you will contribute to the class discussions through personal reflections that are posted before each class.

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## SCHEDULE

You should regularly check the Sakai site for the course schedule and assigned readings for each class. Please Note: Course schedule may change. The Sakai version will always represent the official and up-to-date syllabus.

|   | DATE  | TOPIC                     | Activities |
|---|-------|---------------------------|------------|
| 1 | 9-Jan | Introduction and overview |            |

|    |        |                                       |   |
|----|--------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 2  | 16-Jan | Marx and Technological Determinism    |   |
| 3  | 23-Jan | Social Construction of Technology     |   |
| 4  | 30-Jan | Social Informatics                    |   |
| 5  | 6-Feb  | Institutional Theory                  |   |
| 6  | 13-Feb | Critical Theory                       |   |
| 7  | 20-Feb | Structuration Theory                  |   |
| 8  | 27-Feb | Activity Theory                       | Book reports                              |
| 9  | 6-Mar  | Boundary Objects                      | Book reports – Final project proposal due |
|    | 13-Mar | Spring Break (No Class)               |   |
| 11 | 20-Mar | Communities of Knowledge and Practice | Book reports                              |
| 12 | 27-Mar | Infrastructural studies               | Book reports                              |
| 13 | 3-Apr  | iConference (No Class)                |   |
|    | 10-Apr | Actor-network Theory                  | Book reports                              |
| 14 | 17-Apr | Sociomateriality and Practice Theory  | Book reports                              |
| 15 | 24-Apr | Final Presentations                   |   |
|    | 3-May  | Final Paper (Due 1:00pm)              |   |

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### COURSE WEBPAGE – SAKAI

Sakai will play a central role in this course. The readings, this syllabus, and all other electronic information about the course (including your grades) will appear on Sakai. In addition, students must upload both personal assignments and reflections to Sakai.

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### ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

Working on a system of 100 points total, different components will carry the following weights:

|                                |           |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| Online portfolio (reflections) | 30 points |
|--------------------------------|-----------|

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Attendance / Participation /In-class activities | 15 points  |
| Book report                                     | 15 points  |
| Final presentation and paper                    | 40 points  |
| Total   | 100 points |

**Online portfolio:** You will create an online portfolio of theoretical frameworks to be referenced later, as you progress through your own research trajectory. These reflections should be critical, insightful, and tied to your own interests and research. Submit reflections online by 8pm Tuesday before each class. You can miss 1 portfolio submission without penalty. Reflections are not simple repetition of the readings, but should include your opinion and critique of the topic in your answers to the questions. Address the following questions/points in your online portfolio:

1. What are the reference disciplines? You may be able to figure these out by examining the work they mostly draw upon and the academic background of the authors themselves.
2. What did you like about this perspective? How does it help you to see the world, technological mediation and human agency (how people shape technological results)?
3. Chose one of these:
  - a) Find and provide a summary of an article that has applied the concept to discuss an empirical case; this is a research study that has primarily used this theory in its argument. Tell us how this work has employed the theory? Is there any new insight?
  - b) Provide at least one example of a real-world event/news item/case study/personal story/ a short YouTube video that illustrates and represent the theoretical perspective in a meaningful manner.
4. What are the implications of the readings for the design and management of information technologies?
5. What is your critique of the perspective, its key ideas, and its applicability? What is missing? What are the blind spots in how it deals with the role of technology?

**Attendance and participation:** This course is structured to engage and stimulate you. Attendance and participation are therefore strongly encouraged, and will be rewarded. This includes attending classes and contributing to class discussions and activities. Your contribution will be judged not only on quantity but quality and consistency as well. Students are required to attend all but one of the classes. However, you have to be present when you are scheduled to present a book report and for your final project presentation. Three points will be deducted for missing the second class and four points will be deducted for missing a fourth class, fifth class, etc.

**Book report:** Students are required to prepare a presentation to the class reporting on a book (or a movie/documentary) that demonstrates effectively and reflectively at least one of the theoretical perspectives we covered in this course.

- Select books/movies/documentaries relative to this course
- Prepare a presentation to the class reporting on the book. Includes an introduction to the key ideas, how they represent and demonstrate prove the theoretical perspective and your critique.
- Please time your presentation for 7-10 minutes.

**Final project:** There are two options for the final paper (and presentation):

- 1) introducing a new theoretical perspective that we have not covered in class, or
- 2) presenting an empirical application of a theoretical perspective we covered in the course based on secondary data. Each student will write a final paper and present it to the class in the final week of the semester.

A project proposal (that will be submitted at an earlier date) will provide feedback about your topic, your plan, and its suitability.

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## LETTER GRADES

The numeric total will translate into a letter grade according to the following scheme:

| Letter | Points       | What it means   |
|--------|--------------|---|
| H      | 95-100       | <b>Clear excellence:</b> Student performance demonstrates full command of the course materials that surpasses course expectations. In INLS 585, this means that the student has contributed on a regular basis to the in-class and group activities with insightful comments supported by professional literature beyond that provided by the basic required readings. Command and understanding of the subject are demonstrated in the written assignments and the final examination. The student initiates issues discussions, leads in summary and conclusions, and shares knowledge with classmates. Leadership and initiative are demonstrated throughout the semester and in group assignments. |
| P      | 80-94        | <b>Entirely satisfactory:</b> Student performance meets designated course expectations, demonstrates an understanding of the topics across the entire semester and supports this understanding with the required readings. The students participate in both in-class and group activities with relevant comments.   |
| L      | 70-79        | <b>Low Pass (Unsatisfactory Work):</b> Student performance demonstrates an incomplete or inadequate understanding of course material and/or is often absent.  |
| F      | 69 and below | <b>Failing:</b> Student may continue in program only with the permission of the dean.   |
| IN     |              | <b>Work Incomplete:</b> A grade of incomplete may be taken only due to illness or special circumstances and only with the permission of the instructor.   |

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## PARTICIPATION AND CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Your participation and thoughtful discussion of the various exercises will make the class a successful learning experience. Since the class exercises and discussion are an integral part of the course, your attendance at every class is expected. If you will be unavoidably absent, please inform me before the class (or as soon afterward as you can).

Any late assignment will incur a penalty of 25% of the grade for each day late. If you have a recurring issue which causes you to repeatedly miss assignments, you will need to provide the relevant documentation from a medical practitioner, counselor, etc. If you are experiencing a personal problem, disability, or lifestyle issue that will interfere with your attendance and performance throughout the semester, I encourage you to contact me as soon as possible.

There is no educationally appropriate reason to be “Facebooking,” tweeting, or web-surfing during class time. You are welcome to use your digital device for note-taking and to support in-class work. As a common courtesy to us all, cell phones and other electronic devices should be in “silent” mode. You should bring your laptops, but only for class purposes (i.e., not for checking email, surfing the web, or working on other class assignments, etc.). Please note that points may be deducted from your participation grade for disruptive behavior such as texting, and inappropriate use of laptops, etc.

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## UNIVERSITY-WIDE POLICIES

**Student Religious Observance Policy:** UNC recognizes the diverse faith traditions represented and supports the rights of faculty, staff, and students to observe according to these. A more detailed student policy can be found at <http://equalopportunity-ada.unc.edu/accommodations/religious-accommodations/>. Under this policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up examination, study, or work requirements missed due to religious observance. Please notify the instructor before the end of the second week of classes.

**UNC Honor System:** The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has had a student-administered honor system and judicial system for over 100 years. Because academic honesty and the development and nurturing of trust and trustworthiness are important to all of us as individuals and are encouraged and promoted by the honor system, this is a most significant University tradition. More information is available at <http://www.unc.edu/depts/honor/honor.html>. The system is the responsibility of students and is regulated and governed by them, but faculty share the responsibility and readily commit to its ideals. If you have questions about your responsibility under the honor code, please bring them to me or consult with the Office of the Dean of Students. The website identified above contains all policies and procedures pertaining to the student honor system. We encourage your full participation and observance of this important aspect.

**Diversity Statement:** If you feel you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, please contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Also, please contact UNC Disability Services at (919) 962-8300 or [disabilityservices@unc.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@unc.edu) at the Student and Academic Services Buildings, located in Suite 2126, 450 Ridge Road, to formally coordinate accommodations and services.

In support of the University’s diversity goals and the mission of the School of Information and Library Science, SILS embraces diversity as an ethical and societal value. We broadly define diversity to include race, gender, national origin, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, sexual orientation and physical and learning ability. As an academic community committed to preparing our graduates for leadership in an increasingly multicultural and global society we strive to:

- Ensure inclusive leadership, policies, and practices;
- Integrate diversity into the curriculum and research;
- Foster a mutually respectful intellectual environment in which diverse opinions are valued;
- Recruit traditionally underrepresented groups of students, faculty, and staff; and
- Participate in outreach to underserved groups in the State.

The statement represents a commitment of resources to the development and maintenance of an academic environment that is open, representative, reflective and committed to the concepts of equity and fairness.