University of Wisconsin-Madison
History of Science 555: Digital Capitalism
Fall 2021

Prof. Devin Kennedy
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Program in History of Science, Medicine & Technology
(he/him)
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Weekly Meetings: Tuesdays 3:30-5:25PM
                    Mosse Humanities Building Room 5257

Office Hours: Thursdays 11:30-1:30
                    and Fridays 2:00-4:00
                    Mosse Humanities 4127
                    Or by Zoom
                    Appointments preferred https://calendly.com/devinkennedy/officehours

*It is expected that you will schedule 3 appointments for 30-minute meetings
with Professor Kennedy to discuss your research interests, your draft, and scholarly sources

Course Description

This advanced undergraduate seminar, a capstone course in the history department and the program in HSMT, examines the origins and evolution of digital capitalism. Focusing in particular on the case of the United States, we will explore how digital technologies and digital technology firms came to define capitalism, its political questions, and its social conflicts in the early 21st century. We will spend the first half of the semester introducing key themes in the histories of capitalism and computer technology through an overview of recent scholarly work on topics including venture capital, tech labor, and state patronage; and engage Shoshana Zuboff's account of emerging "surveillance capitalism" to grapple with the rise of data intensive big tech. In the second half of the semester, students will pursue their own historical research on topics connected to digital technology drawing on a range of critical approaches, engaging, as they chose, intellectual, cultural, environmental, gender, labor, legal histories or science & technology studies (STS) perspectives.

Course Details:

Credits: 3
Level: Advanced
L&S Credit Type: Counts as LAS credit (L&S)

Modality: In-person

Format

The class is taught in a seminar format, meeting once per week for two hours. 75% of class time is devoted to discussion of readings and 25% to collaborative discussions of student research and research methods. This is a reading intensive course with approximately 100-150 pages of reading assigned per week. It is expected that students will meet with the instructor at a minimum of 3 times during the semester in office hours to discuss the course and student research topics.

Credit Hour Details

The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course's learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit or 9 hours per week), which include regularly scheduled meeting times (group seminar meetings of 115 minutes per week), reading, writing, required individual consultations with the instructor, and other student work as described in the syllabus.

Learning Outcomes

Students, upon successful completion of the course, will be able to:

- Situate contemporary the economic, social, and political debates surrounding technology businesses in a historical framework
- Communicate in oral presentations and written work perspectives on the relationship between technology and society
- Understand key episodes in the recent history of computer technology
- Develop creative and engaged political and social questions pertaining to technology in society

Academic Integrity

The purpose of this course is to help you learn a body of historical knowledge, practice methods for understanding history, and gaining tools for writing and presenting your own ideas. Misrepresenting the work of others as your own is a fundamental violation of trust within our community—and a waste of your time. If you are struggling to meet deadlines, or are tempted to use someone else's writing in lieu of your own effort; please contact Professor Kennedy. **A late assignment is always a preferable option to one that risks your grade altogether.** Academic misconduct can result in disciplinary action including failure of the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. For more information, refer to studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/.

A note on online services and Grammarly

 "AI" based essay writing services produce bad writing; and using such services would be academic misconduct. *Do not use them.* I also strongly recommend you not use the popular AI-based writing aid Grammarly. It produces strange constructions and odd vocabulary choices. I

will be able to tell if you're using it, and will suggest strongly that you do not. I am happy to work with you on vocabulary building as well as on grammar if these are stumbling blocks for you. Other resources are recommended below.

Writing Resources

The focus of this class is on the development of writing skills related to academic contexts; how to turn your ideas into text. We won't stress mechanical issues in this course, but there are resources to help you develop and improve those aspects of your writing. The History Lab and the University Writing Center can assist you at all levels of writing practice, from idea formation to proofreading.

The History Department History Lab:
https://history.wisc.edu/undergraduate-program/the-history-lab/
University Writing Center: https://writing.wisc.edu/individual/

Accessibility and Diversity

I aspire to create a classroom strengthened by students who feel heard, safe, and supported. I am committed to providing any accommodations that will enable you to thrive in our course, including but not limited to those requested through the McBurney Disability Resource Center.

If you are in need of additional accommodations, please feel free to speak with Professor Kennedy, or the McBurney Center

The McBurney Disability Resource Center Phone: (608) 263-2741 Address: 702 W. Johnson Street, Suite 2104 Email: mcburney@studentlife.wisc.edu

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. https://diversity.wisc.edu/

Technology

All materials (text, links to audio and video clips) are provided on Canvas, but if you are having trouble, please be in touch.

Face Masks:

In accordance with University Policy, students, faculty, and staff are required to wear a face mask while inside any university building, this will include during lectures, discussion sections, and in office hours. Face coverings must be worn correctly (i.e., covering both your mouth and nose) in the building if you are attending class in person.

Students with disabilities or medical conditions who are unable to wear a face covering should contact the McBurney Disability Resource Center or their Access Consultant if they are already affiliated. Students requesting an accommodation unrelated to disability or medical condition, should contact the Dean of Students Office.

Students not wearing a face covering will be asked to put one on or leave the classroom. Students who refuse to wear face coverings appropriately or adhere to other stated requirements will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards and will not be allowed to return to the classroom until they agree to comply with the face covering policy. An instructor may cancel or suspend a course in-person meeting if a person is in the classroom without an approved face covering in position over their nose and mouth and refuses to immediately comply.

Absences due to Covid-19

Individual students unable to attend in-person seminars for COVID-19-related reasons should contact me, Professor Kennedy to discuss options for access to course materials and activities. Students who must miss multiple class sessions should talk with me and with their academic advisor about the best course of action.

If multiple students must miss in-person class meetings for COVID-19-related reasons, every will be made to avoid a disruption of in-person instruction. Instructors should work with their department, school and college to explore ways to provide students who cannot attend in-person sessions access to course materials and activities. Any interruption of in-person instruction should be temporary and brief.

Religious observations

Please be in touch with Professor Kennedy early in the semester if you expect your observation of religious holidays or events will conflict with course events and assignments. I am happy to help make alternative accommodations.

Regular and substantive student-instructor interaction

Students will receive regular and substantive interaction with instructor, as well as teaching assistants, during in-person seminar meetings, through feedback on written assignments, and in one-on-one meetings in office hours.

Grade Components

1. **Research and writing Exercises 50%**
    1.1. Summary and Synopsis of a Scholarly Source **7.5%** (Summary/Synopsis)
    1.2. Annotated Bibliography **7.5%**
    1.3. Research proposal: 3-5 Pages **10%**
    1.4. Final Research paper: 15 Pages **25%**
2. **Participation and Presentation 50%**
    2.1. Introducing and Leading Discussion of a Course Text (20%)
    2.2. Peer Review Conference: Preparation and Comments on research Proposal (10%)
    2.3. Participation in class discussion, attendance (20%)

Overview of Assessments and Exercises

(further details to be given when exercises are assigned)

Research and Writing Exercises:

1.1. Summary and Synopsis of a Scholarly Source **7.5%** (Summary/Synopsis)

You will write a short blog post on the course canvas of 250-500 words, summarizing one of the readings, noting the *historical* and *historiographical* arguments provided. You'll use this in your introduction and discussion of a course text (assignment 2.1).

1.2. Annotated Bibliography **7.5%**

You will gather a number of secondary and primary sources that will be the basis for your research proposal, and, for each source, provide an approximately 30-to-50 word description and positioning within your research project.

1.3. Research Proposal **10%**

The culmination of the course is a research paper on a topic related to the history of technology, data, science, broadly construed in relation to social, business, cultural, or economic history. The proposal is a memo of about 3-5 double spaced pages in which you describe a research question, summarize some scholarly literature on the subject, describe potential primary sources that could assist in answering it, and provide a description of the 'what' and 'why' of the research: your hypothesis about what the research might show, and why the story matters.

1.4. Final Research Paper **20%**

The final research paper is an argumentative essay on a topic in the history of technology, data, or science, broadly construed in relation to social, business, cultural, or especially economic history. Papers will draw on and work in conversation with both secondary sources *and* demonstrate sustained exploration and original analysis of primary sources including online materials (legal cases, digitized archival sources, government documents, published academic papers) and paper materials (books, archival materials).

Parameters (length, style etc.): Graduate students will consider specific *venues* (e.g. academic journals) for models of style and length, but with the expectation that papers will be generally the length of a full-length research article, about 7500 words.

Undergraduate students will discuss the structure and style of academic writing in class and during office hour meetings with Professor Kennedy. Papers will be at least 6000 words, and use a consistent footnote style to appropriately cite sources (MLA, SAGE, or Chicago style)

Participation and Presentation

2.1 Introducing and Leading Discussion of a Course Text (20%)

Each student will take responsibility of introducing a course text—sign ups and further details will be provided. This exercise will begin around week 6.

2.2 Peer Review Conference: Preparation and Comments on research Proposal (10%)

In addition to feedback from Professor Kennedy, each student will receive feedback from a peer in the form of a peer review conference. Each student will be responsible for reading, commenting on, and discussing another student's paper. We will dedicate class time to a peer review conference, and you will be provided with a guide on how to read and support another writer in the course of this conference.

2.3 Participation in class discussion, attendance (20%)

You must attend all class meetings. You are permitted one "freebie" unexcused, unexplained absence. If something comes up (a doctor's visit, family situation) you should be in touch to request an excused absence, but please try to do so in advance if possible, to arrange alternative work. You will lose 10% on your discussion grade for each additional unexcused absence. (e.g. if you finish with a 90% on your participation as described in the rubric below, but you have three unexcused absences you'll receive an 85% on your discussion grade for the semester).

Covid: If you cannot attend class due to Covid illness or quarantining, we will make special arrangements including virtual makeup sessions.

Discussion Participation Rubric

Excellent (90-100)	Good (80-90)	Competent (70-80)	Pass (60-70)	Fail (0-60)
- Consistent preparation and regular involvement in discussion - Explores questions rigorously - Comes to class with questions and ideas - Draws on material from other weeks in the course - Engages others respectfully, building on and giving credit to students work - Leaves space for other students to speak	- Generally prepared and involved in discussion - Draws on course materials in responding to questions or adding to discussion - Engages others respectfully, building on and giving credit to other students' Comments	- Involved in discussion, but does not demonstrate adequate preparation - Contributes when called upon but not actively engaged in the discussion	- Contributes when called upon but not actively engaged - Responses are on-topic but do not demonstrate awareness of course materials of course	- Uninvolved - Unexcused - Disruptive or disrespectful to peers

Week-by-week Overview

UNIT 1: Capitalism and its Digital Form

The goal of this course is to understand the historical interaction between digital technologies (their development, use, context) and capitalism so as to situate the current moment in a longer narrative. In Unit 1, we set the stage for that effort by quickly grounding ourselves in the social scientific literature on capitalism, its history, and the current debate on various digital capitalisms.

We ask: What is capitalism, and how have social scientists interrogated capitalism as a subject of history? What might be distinct about capitalism in a digital society, and what does this mean about technology's role in history?

Week 1:

No class week of September 7

Week 2: Capitalism and the 'History of Capitalism'

First Meeting: **September 14** / **3:30-5:25pm**

***Meet with Professor Kennedy during office hours this week or next

Preparation:

Read [on canvas]

1. Paul Bowles *Capitalism* (2013), Chapters 1-4 (66 pages)
2. Jonathan Levy, "Capital as Process and the History of Capitalism" *Business History Review* (2017) (27 pages)
3. Walter Johnson, "To Remake the world: Slavery, Racial Capitalism and Justice" *Boston Review* (2018) https://bostonreview.net/forum/walter-johnson-to-remake-the-world (14 pages)

***Meet with Professor Kennedy during office hours

Week 3: Platform Capitalism or Surveillance Capitalism?

Meeting: **September 21** / **3:30-5:25pm**

***Meet with Professor Kennedy during office hours this week or next

Assignment 1.1 Provided

Preparation:

Read [on canvas]

1. Rana Foroohar <u>Don't Be Evil: How Big Tech Betrayed its Founding Principles and all of Us</u> Chapters 11, 12 (39 pages)
2. Shoshanna Zuboff "Big other: surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization" *Journal of Information Technology* (2015) 30 75-89. (13 pages)
3. Frank Pasquale "Two Narratives of Platform Capitalism" *Yale Law & Policy Review* (2017) 35 (12 pages)
4. Tressie MacMillam Cottom "Where Platform Capitalism and Racial Capitalism Meet: The Sociology of Race and Racism in Digital Society" *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* (2020) 6 No. 4 441-449 (8 pages)

UNIT 2: The Political Economy of Digital Technology From World War II to the 1990s

In Unit 2, we explore themes in the history of digital technology, drawing on the business and economic history of computing to seek out the origins of digital society in the United States and its associated political economy. Where did computer technologies come from? What historic fusions of state power, private industry, and scientific expertise? What does a *historical* approach yield in the study of capitalism?

Week 4: Innovation and the State

Meeting: **September 28**   /   **3:30-5:25pm**

Preparation:

Read: [on canvas]
1. Stuart Leslie *The Cold War and American Science: The Military-Industrial Academic Complex at MIT and Stanford* (1992) Introduction + Chapters 1 + 2
2. Paul Edwards *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America* (1997) Chapters 2 + 3

Week 5: The Financial System

Meeting: **October 5**   /   **3:30-5:25pm**

Preparation:

Read [on canvas]
1. Tom Nicholas, *VC: An American History* Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7
2. Rana Forohoor, *Don't be Evil* Chapter 10 "Too Fast to Fail"

Week 6: Labor and Digital Technology I

Meeting: **October 12**   /   **3:30-5:25pm**

Preparation:

Read [on canvas]
1. David Noble *Forces of Production: A Social History of Automation* Chapters 2, 3, 5 and 7.

Week 7: Labor and Digital Technology II

Meeting: **October 19**   /   **3:30-5:25pm**

<u>**Preparation:**</u>

Read [on canvas]
1. Mary Gray and Siddharth Suri, *Ghost Work: How to Stop Silicon Valley from Building a New Global Underclass* Introduction, Chapters 1 + 2
2. Biao Xiang, *Global Body Shopping: An Indian Labor System in the Information Technology Industry* **Sections TBA**

<u>Week 8: Consumers and Data I</u>

Meeting: **October 26**   /   **3:30-5:25pm**

<u>**Preparation:**</u>

Read [on canvas]
1. Cohen, Lizabeth *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* Chapter 3, 7, 8
2. Lepore, Jill *If Then: How the Simulmatics Corporation Invented the Future, Chapter 7*

<u>Week 9: Consumers and Data II</u>

Meeting: **November 2**   /   **3:30-5:25pm**

<u>**Preparation:**</u>

Read [on canvas]
1. Sarah Igo, *The Known Citizen: A History of Privacy in the Modern America* Introduction, Chapters 6 + 7
2. Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* Chapter 3

<u>Week 10: Ideology</u>

Meeting: **November 9**   /   **3:30-5:25pm**

<u>**Preparation:**</u>

Read [on canvas]
1. Fred Turner <u>From Counterculture to Cyberculture</u> Introduction, Chapter 1 and Chapter 7
2. Barbrook and Cameron "The Californian Ideology"
3. Arjun Appadurai "The Scarcity of Social Futures in the Digital Era" in Kemp and Anderrsson eds. *Futures* (2021)

UNIT 3: *Approaching the Present*

In the final five weeks of our course, we attend to ongoing developments in digital technology and capitalism, drawing on our new historical approaches, and building towards our own independent research

Week 11: Platform Businesses and Democracy

Meeting: **November 16**   /   **3:30-5:25pm**

Preparation:

Read [on canvas]
1. Zuboff *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* Introduction + Chapters 6, 10
2. Zeynep Tufecki *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* **Sections TBA**

Week 12: Platforms and the Environment

Meeting: **November 23**   /   **3:30-5:25pm**

Preparation:

Read [on canvas]

1. Zero Cool [a pseudonym for a Microsoft Employee] "Oil is the New Data" *Logic* 9 December 7, 2019
2. Nathan Ensmenger "The Environmental History of Computing" *Technology & Culture* (2018)

Week 13: The Tech Workers Movement

Meeting: **November 30**   /   **3:30-5:25pm**

Preparation:

Read [on canvas]
1. Joan Greenbaum on the early days of Tech Worker Organizing *Logic*
2. Ben Tarnoff *The Making of the Tech Worker's Movement*

Week 14: Racial Capitalism in the Digital Economy

Meeting: **December 7**   /   **3:30-5:25pm**

Preparation:

Read [on canvas]
1. Safiya Noble *Algorithms of Oppression* **Sections TBA**
2. Yeshimabeit Milner, "Abolish Big Data" Medium 2019

Week 15: Flex/Research Discussions and Wrap-up Conversation

FINAL Meeting: **December 14**   /   **3:30-5:25pm**

No Exam