

POLISCI 356A: Digital Security and Civil Society

Location: Econ 139

Time: 11:30 – 12:50, Wednesday

Instructor: Divya Siddarth

Faculty Sponsor: Rob Reich, Lucy Bernholz

Course Description: This class will instruct students in the political economy of software and digital infrastructure as they relate to civil society in democracies. We will consider the role of privacy, anonymity, free expression and free association in democracies and examine the digital tools and practices that enable these freedoms. The class consists of three interwoven themes:

- 1) The role of civil society in democracies
- 2) The political economy of digital tools and their influence on society
- 3) Individual and collective digital security

The course is structured as a series of seminars, with homework assignments that involve using various “mass market” tools for digital security and privacy. Students will take an active role in shaping the curriculum for the class by both using the tools and teaching their peers to do so.

Course Objectives: After completing this course, students should:

- (1) Understand the role of civil society in democracies
- (2) Understand the ways in which digital tools and infrastructure expand and challenge democratic practices
- (3) Understand current practices regarding individual data safety and safe data practices
- (4) Consider the political and social tradeoffs inherent in decisions about individual and collective digital practices

Logistics:

This class will meet for one hour once a week. It will be offered for one or two units (details below), credit / no credit. There are no prerequisites for taking the course.

Lectures and Readings:

Since the scope of this course includes material that is recently published, and data security practices are constantly evolving and changing, readings will largely come from online sources and will be provided to students on the Canvas page for the course. There will be no required textbook for the

class. Readings are linked in the syllabus if possible, if not, they are provided in the Files section on Canvas.

The class will be structured as series of discussions of the readings. We will also have guest lectures by Lucy Bernholz, director of the Stanford Digital Civil Society lab, as well as Matt Cagle from the ACLU.

Grading

As a Student Initiated Course, the grading will be strictly Credit/No Credit. The following weights will be applied to the evaluation of the main elements of the course.

- Attendance and Participation: 30%
- Reflection assignments over the course of the quarter: 40%
- Final project (lesson plan): 30%

Assignments

- Reflections
 - Throughout the course, students will be asked to reflect on software installation experiences, experiments, and ethnographies regarding their peers or themselves
- Final project – Lesson Plan
 - Students will choose a topic covered in the course that is of interest to them (or will choose another topic within the scope of the course, and get the instructor's permission to pursue this topic)
 - Students will then craft a lesson plan to teach this topic to their peers who are not in the course, and present the lesson to the instructor
 - These projects will be done in pairs, and class time will be allotted for much of this work
 - **TAs for the class in following quarters will be chosen from those students who have presented exemplary final project lesson plans**

Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (Phone: 7231066, URL: <http://oae.stanford.edu>).

Syllabus

1/10 - Week One (Guest Lecturer: Lucy Bernholz): Introduction

1. Introduction to the class, instructors, fellow students
2. Introduction to digital civil society, its roles in democracy, and the political economy of software
3. Discussion of language of human rights and applications to the class
4. Calibration survey, overview of class structure and expectations

Homework: Reading + Tracking

1. Reading
 - a. Universal Declaration of Human Rights
 - b. UNESCO executive summary an introduction
 - c. Freedom House chart (page 4 and page 11 assigned, feel free to read the rest!)
 - d. OPTIONAL: Donald Trump as a threat to freedom of the press
(<https://cpj.org/2016/10/cpj-chairman-says-trump-is-threat-to-press-freedom.php>)
2. Keep track of phone activity for one hour after waking up and one hour before going to sleep, use template in Files on Canvas

1/17 - Week Two: Rights and Democracy

1. Discuss universal declaration of human rights, how these rights relate to the digital age
2. Overview of trends in the freedom house chart
3. Diagram stakeholders, discuss categories of stakeholders
4. Review installation instructions (homework)

Homework: Installation + Reflection

1. To install at home: See Powerpoint in Files on Canvas
1. Reflect on the experience on the Canvas page
 - a. How long did it take? Did you find yourself using the new software? Why or why not?
2. Reading
 - a. EFF handout on threat modeling (<https://ssd.eff.org/en/module/assessing-your-risks>)
 - b. AccessNow – Look at Digital Security
 - c. Optional: Kate Klanik's *The New Governors*

1/24 - Week Three: Threat Modeling

1. Discuss installation experiences and reflections
2. What specific threats are these software tools addressing? Discuss EFF pamphlet
3. Break into groups based on different profiles, work through threat modeling, present out

Homework: Reading

4. EFF surveillance self-defense: <https://ssd.eff.org/>
 - a. Read overview and 3-5 tutorials. How did you choose which you were interested in? Did you find them useful? Did your behavior / thoughts change after reading?

1/31 - Week Four: Information Ecosystem

1. Introduction to information ecosystem and information security
2. Conduct information experiment with students
3. Discussion of results, what they learned

Homework: Reading + Experiment

1. Helen Nissenbaum, *A Contextual Approach to Privacy*, *Dædalus*, 140 (4) Fall 2011, http://www.amacad.org/publications/daedalus/11_fall_nissenbaum.pdf
2. Perform the experiment we did in class on a peer and reflect on the experience

2/7 - Week Five: Privacy

1. Privacy as a right and as a digital practice, draw from experience from previous downloads
2. Generate a list of the context and threats that make you pay attention to your privacy
3. Discussion of experiences regarding software downloads
4. Discuss pros and cons of VPN and TOR, review download process
5. Install VPN and TOR

Homework: Reflection + Reading

1. Reflect on the experience of using VPN and TOR
 - d. What was the appeal of VPN and TOR to you? Which protection convinced you to use it, if you used it?
 - e. What were barriers to use? Why did you choose not to use it?
3. Carpenter vs. USA case brief: <http://www.scotusblog.com/2017/07/justices-return-cellphones-fourth-amendment-plain-english/>

2/14 - Week Six (Guest Lecturer: Matt Cagle, ACLU): Civil Liberties and Security

1. Discuss installation of software and thoughts / reflections
2. Encryption and civil society: Where liberties and security meet
3. Framing these issues from the perspective of college students, organizations they might join

Homework: Reading

1. Digital security for activists: <https://electronicintifada.net/content/guide-online-security-activists/17536>
2. Review of global activism and digital risk: <https://www.usenix.org/system/files/conference/foci17/foci17-paper-west.pdf>

2/21 - Week Seven (Guest Lecturer: Color of Change): Digital Activism

1. Discussion of digital security and activism, changing political climates, and digital threats to activists
2. Conversation with a digital activist

Homework: Teaching Assignment

1. Teach 2 peers (not in the class) to use the digital security, privacy, and encryption tools discussed in class.
2. Write one page (or shoot 2 minute video) on their motivations or resistance to change and what you learned from trying to engage them.

2/28 - Week Eight: Working Session

3. Discuss how teaching experience went
4. Pick a partner for final project, exchange information
5. Discuss goals, choose skill to teach with partner

Homework: Teaching Assignment

1. Create an outline – what skill and how you want to teach it (in the form of a 5-10 minute interaction with a peer)
2. Frame the need for the tool in the context of human rights and digital civil society
3. Define what success looks like

3/7 - Week Nine: Working Session

1. Work with peer group to modify and improve teaching method outline

Homework: Teaching Assignment

1. Actually execute on your lesson plan with peers
2. Create a presentation for class on what the lesson plan entailed, how teaching went, and whether it was successful

3/14 - Week Ten: Presentations

1. Student groups will present their lesson plans to the class and receive feedback
2. Students will complete end-of-class survey and discuss what they've learned over the quarter, and how to move forward with self-education and peer-education in digital security