Course Description:

Science fiction books and movies such as The Terminator, X-Men, The Matrix, and Blade Runner dramatize the issue of technology and how technology can benefit, as well as menace society. American society is fascinated with and at the same time phobic about technological developments. While movies, books and other cultural artifacts communicate our beliefs, dreams, and fears of what is possible, scholars argue different views about the role of technology. This class aims to explore the nexus between culture and technology from the perspective of the critical cultural theory. Furthermore, in this class we will examine how the immediate, anonymous, and interactive characteristics of the Internet complicate our identities and sense of community. The digital-native generation is currently constructing and representing their identity online on web sites such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube and different online gaming and business environments. This class will explore how cultural identity is constructed through media in an increasingly digital world, with an emphasis on online identities. The following questions will be explored: How do culture and technology shape and influence each other? How does technology influence, extend or undermine the ways we present ourselves as individuals? Why have certain technologies developed the way they have?

Goals:

The goals of this course are to:
- build a foundation for understanding the relationship between culture and technology;
- build a foundation for understanding identity construction offline and online;
- analyze critically Internet development and its social implications;
- develop academic and professional perspectives;
- become thoughtful users of online media;
- expand writing and information-seeking skills.

Reading:

We will read from a variety of perspectives: popular media, cultural commentary, and philosophical reflections that will include the following readings. Most of the readings will be available online or handed out in class. You will find links to the following readings at my web site at http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~ubaasanj:
Waters, D. (May 9, 2007). Hyper-connected generation rises. *BBC News*


*BBC News* (June 25, 2007). Social sites reveal class divide.


Ess, C. (2001). We are the Borg: the Web as agent of assimilation or cultural Renaissance? *E-philosopher.*


Movies:

- Blade Runners
- X-Men
- the Matrix

Websites:

- YouTube
- Myspace
- Facebook

Class Policies:

**Attendance and Participation:** Students are expected to be prepared and actively participate in every class. This course is designed with a cumulative structure; therefore
Attendance is required. Three "unexcused" absences are allowed. Each additional absence must be explained with proper documentation or I will lower your final grade by a half letter grade. For example, if your grade would have been an A, it becomes an AB. Excused absences (such as those resulting from an official MTU activity) must be documented in advance, and work must be completed prior to the anticipated absence. In the event of an unforeseen emergency or serious illness, it is your responsibility to contact me promptly by email, and to supply adequate documentation.

Your participation points will also come from short informal writings that will not be graded. These will include: reading responses papers, journal writing and reflective statement.

**Reading:** Read all assigned materials prior to coming to class. You will also turn in response papers that will count toward your participation.

**Writing:** There will be several writing assignments where you write essays, annotated bibliography, research projects and group projects. All your graded writing should be typed in 12 pt Times New Roman fonts and double-spaced. Your paper must be stapled together and have page numbers.

**Late Work:** Work submitted after the due date will be penalized by five points for each late day.

**Academic Conduct:** Any form of dishonesty is unacceptable. This includes plagiarism, cheating, and the falsification of data. Plagiarism is the use of others' material, knowingly and unknowingly, that leave the perception it is the author's own. For more information talk to me or visit [http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/stuhandbook/SPPol/Conduct/acadinteg.html](http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/stuhandbook/SPPol/Conduct/acadinteg.html).

**Disability Policy:** Michigan Technological University complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean for Students (487-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office (487-3310).

**Assignments:**

You will complete the following four graded projects for this course.

**Assignment 1: Identity construction in science fiction**  
Due Feb 4

In this assignment, you will explore the identity construction of a fictional character. After you read Barker's chapter on identity and Clark's reading on cyborgs, reflect on how popular culture juxtaposes cyborgs and human beings. You will choose a character from your favorite sci-fi movie. In a 3-4 page essay, you describe, and elaborate how cyborg identity seems to be represented and contrasted to the identity of human beings in terms of language, gender, race, class and hybridity. Summarize the movie and introduce
the character in the first 2-3 paragraphs. Make 2-3 arguments explaining how cyborg/hybrids are compared to human beings. Support your arguments with details from the movie and with your own analysis. Consider how reasonable readers may disagree with you and address their objections. You will also present a brief 3-5 minute oral presentation to the class.

Assignment 2: Annotated bibliography
Due March 5

In this assignment, you will choose a topic related to the identity construction on the Internet. For example, stalking on Facebook, gender and ethnic representation on the Internet, flaming, anonymity and blogging etc. You will select 2-3 readings from the class list that are relevant to your topic and 2-3 readings/articles on your own (the list should sum up to 6 articles). You will summarize each reading in 3-4 paragraphs. The first sentence on each article should clearly articulate what the article is about. Then in 2-3 three paragraphs outline the most important arguments. Then conclude each article by stating how this reading is relevant to your research. This paper should be 4-5 pages long.

Assignment 3: Exploring online communities
Due April 2

This is a group project that will give you the opportunity to explore your cyborg-ness. You will be assigned into groups of 3-4. As a group, you will explore the range of ways that your peers represent characteristics of their personalities online on MySpace.com, Facebook.com, YouTube and in other online environments. Each group also will submit a 5-6 page-long online community analysis essay summarizing your findings. Your group will analyze what you and your peers seem to emphasize as important when your peers and you construct your identities online and how these representations connect/differ/relate to their everyday regular identities. Your group will also present a 10-15 minute presentation to the class.

Assignment 4: Critical analysis of online media use
Due April 25

In this assignment, you will expand upon the annotated bibliography that you completed for Assignment 2. You will explore how your own online experience relates to the readings in your annotated bibliography. Do you generally support the arguments of the authors you read, or do your experiences suggest another perspective? Critique the readings based on your everyday online media experience and practice. This paper will be 5-6 page long.

Grading Policy:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 1</td>
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<td>Presentation</td>
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<td>Assignment 2</td>
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<td>Assignment 3</td>
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<td>Presentation</td>
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<td>Assignment 4</td>
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A = Excellent work that shows exceptional effort and that goes beyond the minimum requirements of the assignment. “A” work will demonstrate an excellent grasp of and engagement with several (if not all) of the class material and concepts we explored. If written, this work will have little or no problems as regards spelling, grammar, organization, and the use of citation of research sources.

B = Very good work that shows a very solid effort and that goes beyond the minimum requirements of the assignment. “B” work will demonstrate a good grasp and engagement of the class material and concepts we studied. This work will have minimal problems as regard spelling, grammar, organization, and the use and citation of research sources.

C = Adequate work that shows that enough effort was expended in order to meet the minimum requirements of the assignment – nothing more, nothing less. “C” work will demonstrate a good-enough grasp and engagement of the class material and concepts we discussed in class.

D = Work that shows a lack of effort that does not fully meet the requirements of the assignment. “D” work will show insufficient grasp and engagement of the class material and concepts. If written, this work will have unacceptable amount of problems as regards spelling, grammar, organization, and the use and citation of research sources.

F = Work that shows no effort that is far from meeting the requirements of the assignment. “F” work will show a poor grasp and engagement of the class materials and concepts.

Class Schedule:

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jan 14, 16 &amp; 18: Introduction</td>
<td>Intro to the course and discussion of the syllabus Response to the syllabus, and discussion of cyborgs Reading: Clark, Ch 1.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jan 23 &amp; 25: Cyborg and popular culture</td>
<td>Discussion of cyborg &amp; cultural identity view Blade Runner Homework: write down notes about the movie, movie characters, the story the movie told about cyborgs, and main conflicts. Reading: Barker, ch 6.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jan 28, 30 &amp; Feb 1: Identity &amp; Subjectivity</td>
<td>Identity &amp; subjectivity Writing center intro</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
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<td>Feb 4 &amp; 6</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>We vs. cyborgs in popular culture (sign-on for oral presentation time) Presentations of Assignment 1. Reading: Negroponte, pp. 89-163. &amp; Selection from Aristotle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 11, 13 &amp; 15</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Continuation of presentation &amp; discussion of Negroponte A library instruction session Reading: Rheingold, &amp; “Hyper-connected generation rises” &amp; Podcasts “to transform” studies</td>
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<td>Feb 18, 20 &amp; 22</td>
<td>Critical view of technology</td>
<td>Luddism and the Unabomber The critique of technological society Reading: Slack, ch 5 &amp; 7 &amp; Postman</td>
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<td>Feb 25, 27 &amp; 29</td>
<td>Social implications</td>
<td>Appropriation of technology Work on library project Reading: Slack, ch 6; Castells</td>
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<td>March 3, 5 &amp; 7</td>
<td>Critical evaluation</td>
<td>Discussion of Castells and Slack Presentations: Assignment 2 Discussion of MySpace, Facebook and YouTube Reading: “Social sites reveal class divide,” “Does virtual reality need a sheriff?” and Dibbell.</td>
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<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
<td>MARCH 9-15</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 17, 19, &amp; 21</td>
<td>Online identity</td>
<td>Online identity Explore different online sites Homework: write journal entry about online identity presentation on the site you explored Reading: Lange; Stutzman</td>
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<td>March 24, 26 &amp; 28</td>
<td>Social implications</td>
<td>Discussion of YouTube &amp; Facebook Social implications Reading: Ross</td>
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<td>March 31, April 2 &amp; 4</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>Group presentations</td>
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<td>April 7, 9 &amp; 11</td>
<td>Social and ethical issues</td>
<td>Discussion of Ess Discussion of Thomas Reading: Ess; Thomas</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 14, 16, 18</td>
<td>Social implications of the Internet</td>
<td>Discussion of Ess &amp; Thomas Global Digital Divide Reading: Haraway; Sunstein</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 21, 23 &amp; 25</td>
<td>Course wrap-up</td>
<td>Course wrap-up, short reflection paper Presentations: Assignment 4</td>
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