SYLLABUS FOR: TECH-NATIONALISM

Course Description:

Due to technological innovation, we are living in a time like never before. Because of technology, we are also more closely connected to one another than we have ever been before. Does this matter? In 2009, hundreds of thousands of Iranians took to the streets and demanded political change via an array of social networking websites; was technology a catalyst for or an impetus to this social movement? Today, most of us have both physical and digital identities — that which we publish online, and that which we carry on our shoulders. While this split prompts the question, “Who are we?” this class will ask a follow-up question, “Where are we?” Where does our online citizenship belong?

This course grapples with the evolving role of technology in forming national identities. Throughout the semester, we will examine technological innovations that first enabled national unity (e.g. the radio and the printing press) and compare their implications to the implications of contemporary technological innovations (e.g. the computer and the 24-hour news cycle). In light of the information revolution, we will examine Facebook, Twitter, and other innovations that have (potentially) empowered the citizen and compare them to technological improvements in national security systems and parastatals that have (potentially) empowered the state. We will regularly ask the question: “How do these innovations contribute to national structures, national identifications, and national affinities?”

We will consult post-structuralist theory that has contributed to our understanding of nationalism and state-structures. After doing so, we can apply said theory to contemporary case studies of technological innovations and, in doing so, attempt to estimate the present and future political implications of those innovations. The states that this course will most closely examine include the United States, the U.K., China, and Iran.

Additionally, we will examine the role that technology has played in redrawning national boundaries, reshaping world trade, and reframing human development. By examining the consolidation (and/or lack of consolidation) of supranational organizations such as the E.U. and the A.U., we will question the role that technology has played in that confederation. We will also discuss examples of technological empowerment in the developing world and the significant implications of rapid technological progress that has deeply affected impoverished communities.

And finally, we will explore the role that recent technological innovation has played, through the lens of social movement theory. We will explore the technological functions that contributed to Iran’s “Green Revolution” in 2009, and by utilizing both securitization literature and social movement literature, we can attempt to explain the revolution’s successes, failures, and its technological impulses.

Learning Objectives:

- To question and better understand how technology is influencing our sense of national belonging
- To question and better understand how technology is contributing to the empowerment of the state
- To question and better understand how technology is contributing to the empowerment of the citizen.

Pedagogy:

In this course, we will regularly discuss the feasibility of structural change. To fully and effectively learn about this topic, I believe we must first enact a structural change inside the classroom. I am not a professor… and this is not my class! There is collective ownership of this class and it should be an entirely holistic experience. YOU are teaching this class! YOU are responsible for the grade! I am not an expert on this topic! The premise of this class is that we will teach each other. I will occasionally invite
guest speakers with expertise to authoritatively speak and answer questions, but by and large, we will teach ourselves and we will teach each other. Because we retain more of that which we discover for ourselves than is taught to us directly, I believe in this method, as long as there is a collective interest in this class.

With this in mind, nearly any part of this syllabus can and should be edited if you believe it should be changed. If there are readings you would like added to this syllabus, just tell the class. If you would like to invite a guest lecturer or even deliver your own lecture, just check with the class first. This is your class to shape, especially in April. In April, you will choose all of the content and the class readings.

Assignments:

This class is not meant to be extraordinarily time-consuming. I have taken two student-led courses prior to this class and I know that students will not devote a great amount of time to this class. The most important part of this class will be to have substantive participation from you, inside of class. If you're not particularly interested in learning about this topic AND participating substantively, this is the wrong class for you. With this in mind, the only assignments for this class will be to bring 3-5 questions to each class that you would like to pose to the class. At least three of the questions should pertain to the reading for that day, and the remaining questions can relate to anything else you are curious about, interested in, or would just like to discuss. You will not put your name on those questions. At the beginning of each class, we will exchange those questions. At the end of the class, I will collect the questions and the percentage of the attendees who have questions out of the attendance total will be the collective grade for the class that day.

READINGS, DATES, AND GUEST LECTURERS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Week 1 (1/16-1/22) – Unearthing Nationalism and Our Pride


Week 2 (1/23 - 1/29) – Developing Nationalism


Week 3 (1/30 - 2/5) – Nationalism Today and Contemporary Theories (Guest lecturer: Barbra Cruikshank or Ivan Ascher)


Week 4 (2/6 - 2/12) – National Identities and Religious Expression online


Week 5 (2/13 – 2/19) – Technology, Privacy, and National Security

1) Browne, Simone, Digital Epidermalization: Race, Identity and Biometrics *Critical Sociology January 2010 36: 131-150,*


Week 6 (2/20 – 2/26) – The TSA Massage and More


Week 7 (2/27 – 3/5) – The Politics of Wikileaks

Readings TBD

Week 8 (3/6 – 3/12) – Cyberwarfare or Cyberterrorism?


Week 9 (3/13 – 3/19) – Spring Break!!!

Week 10 (3/20 – 3/26) – Interpreting Legitimacy Online: e-Rulemaking and Digital Governance (Guest Speaker: Stuart Shulman and/or Jane Fountain)


Week 11 (3/27 – 4/2) – Borders, Movement, and the International Political Economy


Week 12 (4/3 – 4/9) – Applying Social Movement Theory (Guest Speaker: Jillian Schwedler)  
(Tuesday on a Monday schedule)


Week 13 (4/10 – 4/16) - Chinese Democracy Online (Suggested)

Group Project 1 – You choose the Readings


Group Project 2 - You choose the Readings

Week 15 (4/24 – 4/30) - Iranians Online: Tweeting the Revolution (Highly Suggested)  
(Wednesday on a Monday Schedule)

Group Project 3 - You choose the Readings

Week 16 (5/1 – 5/7) – The 24-hour news cycle  
(Tuesday is last day of classes)