

**Professor:** Dr. Mariana Alessandri  
**Office:** ARHU 302 (across from elevator)  
**Office Hours:** Tuesdays, 12:30-1:30 and Thursdays, 3-4pm (and by appointment)  
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### **Required Books**

- 1) Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism* (2014) ISBN 978-1610393706
  - 2) Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (2005) ISBN 978-0143036531
- (All other readings will be posted on Blackboard)

### **Course Description**

We will use the semester to think critically about something that we use all the time but often unthinkingly: technologies and media. One of the strengths of philosophy is that it can help us define happiness, and it can also help chart out a path toward a life of happiness. Philosophy is about both thinking and doing, and this course is about thinking critically so we can live the best lives we can envision. Thinking critically includes reading and writing and learning the philosophical skills of argumentation, but it also involves trying new things, for example, logging how you spend your time in any 24-hour period, and from there determining if there's anything you'd like to change about your time-use in your quest for a happy, fulfilling life. By focusing on technologies and media, you will be able to apply your critical thinking skills directly to your everyday experiences. You will analyze your definition of happiness, as well as where you fall in terms of the happiness continuum. You will ask yourself whether you have enough time to do everything you want to do, whether you are in control of your technology use or not, and other questions like that. I assume we all agree that technology is supposed to make our lives easier and therefore happier, so throughout the class we will analyze various technologies and media and ask them if they are doing that, or if they are making our lives more complicated or harder. The big picture idea for this course is to get you to think critically about what you think happiness is, and how you can work on making progress toward it by either limiting, augmenting, or otherwise changing your technology use. In the first half of the semester, we will learn the skills of critical thinking like judging good from bad reasoning. In the second half, we will use those skills to 1) analyze what different technologies and media offer us, and 2) judge whether they deliver on what they offer.

### **Course Objectives**

- 1) **What I want you to know:** I want you to realize that every debate has at least two sides. Specifically, I want you to become familiar with some arguments for and against different technologies and media. But I also want you to know that not all arguments are created equal, and that there is strong reasoning and weak reasoning. By the end of the semester, I want you to know that there exist tools you can use to identify whether a particular line of reasoning is strong or weak, and I want you to be able to name and learn how to use these tools so that you will have them forever.
- 2) **What I want you to do:** I want you to think critically about technologies and media. Given that there are many views on the topic, I want you to be able to sift through premises and conclusions to distinguish strong from weak reasoning. This is called evaluating arguments. Finally, I want you to use the philosophical tools you learn in this course to evaluate the various arguments for and against various media and technologies.
- 3) **Who I want you to be:** I want you to be the type of person who doesn't just learn certain philosophical tools or evaluate certain arguments but the type that makes commitments to acting in certain ways. It's not enough for me just to have taught you that there are two sides to an argument, or even to have given you the philosophical tools to judge which arguments are flimsy and which are strong. When you find an argument compelling, I want you to be the kind of person who lives in alignment with his/her ideas. Philosophy is about thinking, but it's also about living. And critical thinking is necessary for living well. What you think about the world should shape how you act in it.

### **Summary of Grading**

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Attendance                                       | 10%        |
| Exam on Evaluating Arguments                     | 20%        |
| Critical Reading Project (broken up into parts)  | 20%        |
| Media Fast Postman Essay                         | 20%        |
| Technology/Media Analysis                        | 10%        |
| <u>Subversive Technologies/Deep Work Project</u> | <u>20%</u> |
| Total  | 100%       |

## Grading scale

**A = Excellent (90-100)** – If you receive an A in this class, it means you have not only met all of your requirements but have gone above and beyond. You have dedicated yourself to this class, meaning that you have been here (on time) every required class period, you have carefully done your reading for the day, you have written careful essays, you have learned to express yourself in written form, and you are a great community member. It means that you offered your thoughts and listened respectfully to others.

**B = Good (80-90)** – If you receive a B in this class, it means that you have met all of the requirements, and that you have done so consistently. It means that you have come to class prepared, and that you performed solidly on the exams and essays. If you earned a B it will mean that you are able to follow the lines of philosophical argument. What usually distinguishes an A from a B student is initiative.

**C = Satisfactory (70-80)** – If you receive a C in this class, it means that you have met most or all requirements of this class. You may be good at memorizing arguments or details, but maybe don't quite understand them.

**D = Below Average (60-70)** – If you receive a D in this class, it means that either you were a poor community member or you performed below average on your assignments (or perhaps you failed to turn in one or more assignments).

**F = Failure (below 60)** – If you receive an F for this class, it means that either you missed too many classes, or you did not meet the requirements on this syllabus. If you receive an F, you have failed at being a good community member and will have another opportunity to succeed when you retake the course.

**ATTENDANCE (10%)**: Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes and may be dropped from the course for excessive absences. UTRGV's attendance policy excuses students from attending class if they are participating in officially sponsored university activities, such as athletics; for observance of religious holy days; or for military service. Students should contact the instructor in advance of the excused absence and arrange to make up missed work or examinations. Attendance is worth 10% of the final grade.

**Late Work and Email**: Late work will be accepted within a reasonable time frame, for a reduced grade, upon approval from professor. If you have consistent trouble turning work in on time, please come and talk to me during office hours. If you email me ([mariana.alessandri@utrgv.com](mailto:mariana.alessandri@utrgv.com)) and I don't email back, then I haven't received it.

**Exam on Evaluating Arguments (20%)**: After the first 3 weeks of school, you will be ready to take an exam on constructing arguments and finding good and faulty reasoning.

**Critical Reading Project (20%)**: During the second three weeks of the course, you will be learning how to be a close reader of philosophical texts. There will be homework assignments every night during this time period, varying from 1%-10% of your final grade.

**Media Fast Postman Essay (20%)**: After reading Neil Postman, you will conduct a 24 hour (minimum) media fast. Then you will write a 3-4 page essay detailing how it went.

**Technology/Media Analysis (10%)**: Since we cannot cover all pieces of technology or media, this project will give you a chance to analyze one piece of media or technology that we didn't talk about in detail in class.

**Subversive Technologies/Deep Work Project (20%)**: Your final project will be about trying to find the "silver lining" in the question of technology. This project will be in lieu of a final exam.

## Calendar of Activities

Some important dates for Fall 2017 include:

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| August 31        | Last day to add a course or register for fall 2017           |
| November 15      | Last day to drop a course; will count toward the 6-drop rule |
| November 23 – 26 | Thanksgiving Holiday – NO classes                            |
| December 6       | Last day of classes  |
| December 7       | Study Day – NO class   |
| December 8 -14   | Fall 2017 Final Exams  |
| December 15-16   | Commencement Ceremonies                                      |

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** Students with a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects academic performance) who would like to receive academic accommodations should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as soon as possible to schedule an appointment to initiate services. Accommodations can be arranged through SAS at any time, but are not retroactive. Students who suffer a broken bone, severe injury or undergo surgery during the semester are eligible for temporary services. **Brownsville Campus:** Student Accessibility Services is located in Cortez Hall Room 129 and can be contacted by phone at (956) 882-7374 (Voice) or via email at [ability@utrgv.edu](mailto:ability@utrgv.edu). **Edinburg Campus:** Student Accessibility Services is located in 108 University Center and can be contacted by phone at (956) 665-7005 (Voice), (956) 665-3840 (Fax), or via email at [ability@utrgv.edu](mailto:ability@utrgv.edu).

**MANDATORY COURSE EVALUATION PERIOD:** Students are required to complete an ONLINE evaluation of this course, accessed through your UTRGV account (<http://my.utrgv.edu>); you will be contacted through email with further instructions. Students who complete their evaluations will have priority access to their grades. Online evaluations will be available:  
Fall 2017 (full semester)                      Nov. 15 – Dec. 6

**SCHOLASTIC INTEGRITY:** As members of a community dedicated to Honesty, Integrity and Respect, students are reminded that those who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and expulsion from the University. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism (including self-plagiarism), and collusion; submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person; taking an examination for another person; any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student; or the attempt to commit such acts. Since scholastic dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced (Board of Regents Rules and Regulations and UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines). All scholastic dishonesty incidents will be reported to the Dean of Students.

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION, and VIOLENCE:** In accordance with UT System regulations, your instructor is a “Responsible Employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and so must report any instance, occurring during a student’s time in college, of sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, or sexual harassment about which she/he becomes aware during this course through writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. More information can be found at [www.utrgv.edu/equity](http://www.utrgv.edu/equity), including confidential resources available on campus. The faculty and staff of UTRGV actively strive to provide a learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect that is free from sexual misconduct and discrimination.

**COURSE DROPS:** According to UTRGV policy, students may drop any class without penalty earning a grade of DR until the official drop date. Following that date, students must be assigned a letter grade and can no longer drop the class. Students considering dropping the class should be aware of the “3-peat rule” and the “6-drop” rule so they can recognize how dropped classes may affect their academic success. The 6-drop rule refers to Texas law that dictates that undergraduate students may not drop more than six courses during their undergraduate career. Courses dropped at other Texas public higher education institutions will count toward the six-course drop limit. The 3-peat rule refers to additional fees charged to students who take the same class for the third time.

**Core Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes:** Upon completion of this course, students will have demonstrated mastery of the core curriculum objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication Skills, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility. These objectives for core curriculum classes in Language, Philosophy and Culture are set forth by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). Each associated learning outcome (as defined by UTRGV) is listed here. Student learning outcomes will be regularly assessed to determine whether THECB objectives are being met by students completing core curriculum classes.

1. **CRITICAL THINKING:** Students will demonstrate comprehension of a variety of written texts and other information sources by analyzing and evaluating the logic, validity, and relevance of the information in them to solve challenging problems, to arrive at well-reasoned conclusions, and to develop and explore new questions.
2. **COMMUNICATION SKILLS:** Students will demonstrate the ability to adapt their communications to a particular context, audience, and purpose using language, genre conventions, and sources appropriate to a specific discipline and/or communication task.
3. **PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Students will demonstrate an awareness of the range of human values and beliefs that they draw upon to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making.
4. **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Students will recognize and describe cultural diversity, the role of civic engagement in society, and the link between ethics and behavior.

**Learning Objectives for Philosophy Degree:** This course may also be taken to fulfill a requirement for a B.A. in Philosophy. Students who graduate with a degree in philosophy from UTRGV are expected to have attained a certain level of intellectual development which is characteristic of the intense study of philosophy. The goals for all philosophy classes that count towards the major in philosophy include, in combination with the particular goals for the course, the following objectives:

1. **CRITICAL THINKING AND READING:** Students will demonstrate well-developed critical thinking and reading skills orally and in writing.
2. **HISTORY:** Students will describe the history of Philosophy, by identifying and distinguishing between the major historical and conceptual divisions of philosophy, the positions within those divisions, and major thinkers who contributed to those periods and specializations.
3. **COMMUNICATION:** Students will exhibit well-developed oral and written communication skills; will respond effectively to questions and criticisms of presented material.
4. **ALTERNATIVE POINTS OF VIEW:** Students will demonstrate the capacity to accurately present, analyze and evaluate historically underrepresented philosophical concerns, positions and traditions.
5. **PERSONAL, CIVIC, AND/OR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Students will articulate and evaluate their various activities, identities, values, and goals in order to develop a flexible strategy for ongoing personal growth, community engagement, and/or professional achievement.