The purpose of this course is: to introduce and familiarize students of public policy and leaders—present and future—with options and alternative approaches toward structuring and molding what is increasingly called Information Society. The emerging era is also termed the knowledge society, knowledge economy, the digital age, post modern society and even post-post industrial society.

Whatever name you like, this course will attempt to identify and analyze policies and politics that define, support and/or hinder movement towards various types of information societies—for there are many probable outcomes and many kinds of information societies—utopian to dystopian, democratic to authoritarian, inclusive to exclusive, whole and interdependent to multi-tiered and segmented according to wealth, educational attainment, geography, age, gender, ethnicity and/or race.

It should be noted that while ICT has great potential as technologies of freedom; they also have great potential for control and abuse of unpopular individuals, groups and organizations. Information and communication technology (ICT) now make it possible to achieve ubiquitous access to high-speed interactive broadband in any city, state, nation, or the whole world for that matter. In other words, it is technically possible to connect everyone to everyone else either by wire or wireless means. But would this necessarily be a good society or a pleasant place to live in? The same technology that can provide surveillance for security and accountability can also be used for social control and the targeting of unpopular groups and individuals. The same technology that can bring instant and cheap communication and can provide answers to difficult questions or to unlimited entertainment content or access to lifelong learning opportunities and government services can also be used to unduly influence and persuade non-critical, naive users by spying on individuals' preferences and practices, and/or to divert and distract citizens away from self-governing, participatory democratic activity.

Whatever the future uses of ICT, policies are currently being constructed that will limit future choices. The key questions that this course will constantly ask are: What kind of society do we want to become? Who should participate in deciding this future society? How will these questions be decided—democratically by all stakeholders or by a limited number of experts, politicians, lobbyists or corporate executives, or some combination of all the above, or still yet, by doing nothing but relying on the market and consumer choice decide these important issues by default. There are choices to be made. Important public policy events currently taking place include a high possibility that the Communications Act will again be rewritten, if not whole, then in major part as members of Congress become increasingly dissatisfied with the result of the faulty 1996 Telecommunications Act. In addition, in November 2005, the Second World Summit on Information Society will meet and decide on many of the questions asked in this
syllabus. Meanwhile, digital ICT tools and gizmos continue to become better, more powerful, smaller, smarter and cheaper. Increasingly, the future belongs to those who are hyper-adaptive and have ready access to the right kinds of information, skills and knowledge. Increasingly, wireless technologies are moving toward ubiquity, especially if new technologies like high-speed broadband WiMax and multi-channel broadcasting fulfill their promises of cheap and efficient means of connecting consumers and citizens to government, firms and markets, lifelong education opportunity, friends, entertainment, etc. Increasingly, the number of information content channels are expanding—increasing the range of choice, but undermining traditional mass advertising and mass audiences, thus, increasing the gathering of personal information of consumers in order to engage in one-to-one selling of commodities, services, candidates and ideas. Increasingly, propaganda, censorship, loss of privacy, fear of terrorist, and the impact of globalization are part of our public agenda. These issues will also be discussed in this exploratory course.

This course will provide a broad survey for public policy students interested in pursuing a career in the policy and regulatory arena concerning information technology, media content, First Amendment and privacy issues, issues regarding equity and access to information and its technologies. Is the attainment of an information society a national goal of the United States and/or of other nation states of the world? Should information society policy and its components—those involving information, knowledge, skills, literacy, media, public education, research and development, communication technology and telecommunications infrastructure—be among the primary public policy goals of any society that wishes to become or remain competitive in a rapidly developing, interdependent world where, increasingly, information is available in digital forms on interactive networks and electronic gadgets, and, moreover, where having the right (or relevant) information, skill or knowledge at the right time (e.g., timely or when needed) gives an individual, group, organization, community, region or nation state strategic advantages over their competition? If not, then why not?

What exactly is Information Society anyway and what does the term imply? Is it the same thing as globalization or the Americanization of the world?

"Information Society" is the term that is used to capture the increasing contemporary influence of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

If a government does not have a focused national information policy per se, can it simply get by with a mixture of ad hoc rules, regulations, laws and public policies that may well be obsolete and/or inappropriate for the country and its citizens and workers in a digital communication age where advantage goes to those who are hyper-adaptive?

What is the role of information and communication policy regarding national defense, civil liberty, civic society, freedom of expression, democracy, skills acquisition, competitiveness, public health, equity, justice, self-realization, art, public health, and the distribution of government services, etc.?

Why and how is information regulated in the United States and other countries, and, in whose interests?

What is information? Who owns information? Who owns media? Who owns intellectual property? What difference does ownership of information content, communication conduits, and mass media make anyway?

Information: there is no universal definition of this concept. Sometimes it is used as a synonym to data or knowledge. If we consider the verb "to inform", i.e. to convey something new, the specificity becomes clearer. To get information means to get an answer to a question. A message can become information without a question if this message changes the user’s picture of the world...

--Russian Information Society
If freedom of expression, universal access to public information content and efficient government services are key long-term policy goals of a society, what kinds of information public policies ought to be pursued and what kinds ought to be avoided?

How much personal privacy should an individual reasonably expect in a time of national crisis or permanent war on terror?

*You have zero privacy anyway. Get over it.*

--Scott McNealy, CEO, Sun Microsystems

Should the U.S. participate in global information policies and join in multilateral policymaking with less developed nations or with nation states where conflict with our national priorities and values may occur? If, indeed, knowledge is power, what kinds of incentives or motivations would justify any equitable distribution of knowledge and/or information content or infrastructure and related resources? After all, other forms of power are not given away but are negotiated or fought for.

Can poor nations or regions somehow *leapfrog* the communications/digital/skills/knowledge gap and become truly competitive and influential in the 21st century? How and under what circumstances? In other words, what kinds of ways can Information Society policies aid in a nation’s overall development process?

What is the appropriate role of public service media in an era of channel abundance coupled with media ownership concentration and where self-censorship is legal and the most effective form of censorship that deprives the public of its ability to be informed and self-governed? How can minority voices and viewpoints be effectively heard in Information Society?

Who decides these issues anyway? What are the processes and politics that realize desired public interest, democratic, public policy outcomes? What are the alternative ways of making information policy?

If you’ve read this far, you have noticed that there are lots of questions and no answers provided. Raising and discussing these issues and searching for appropriate answers, or, at least, answers that could better serve the public interest is the grist of this course. Conversations and even arguments tend to be topical, relevant, informative and very interesting. This course will attempt make you *think different* and reexamine your prior assumptions about information, knowledge, communications and power.

"Content in news, educational, cultural and entertainment programmes, songs, games ... play a pivotal role in the building of the Information Society.
"Therefore the creation, production and formulation of content must be encouraged at all levels, not only at the national level of all developing countries but, within the same nation, at the local and community levels, to ensure that developing nations do not remain information consumers of a content conceived by others."

– Thabo Mbeki

**Course Requirements:**

Students must stay abreast of the reading assignments and participate fully in class discussions at each class meeting. Regular attendance and active participation by each student is expected. In lieu of a schedule of dry, boring lectures, informed discussions and dialogue between and among the students and instructor is desired and encouraged. Classes will proceed on the assumption that everyone has done the readings and has opinions and perspectives worth sharing. The instructor will, from time to time, introduce new material via e-mailings or distributions of articles that will supplement, compliment, and make current the topics
under review. An occasional guest lecturer will be invited to discuss his or her experiences and expertise on relevant issues. Instructor will also make occasional use of multimedia materials.

Students are required to write 3-4 short papers on assigned topics, and one final researched public policy related paper (with appropriate citations of authorities contained in footnotes and/or endnotes) of 15-20 pages in length.

The first writing assignment, due at the beginning of the second meeting of the class is to draft and submit a short paper defining, comparing and contrasting the terms: education, propaganda, advertising and knowledge. The purpose of this exercise early in the course is to get students use to questioning all their prior assumptions about information and technology. After all, even analog books and pencils and paper are information-knowledge-communication technology.

Students should plan to meet with the instructor early during the semester to discuss research issues. A research outline will be due in mid- to late October. The final paper is due in December (or a reasonable time thereafter if the crunch of exams and requirement of other courses unduly conflict).

NOTE: If you are sure you will take this course, please notify instructor via email at Nolan_Bowie@harvard.edu as soon as possible following Shopping Day. Please include your email address and full name in the text of the message. This will facilitate information sharing, course planning, and communication with instructor and among all students of the class throughout the semester.

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:

This listing of reference materials—books, reports, and websites—is purposefully long. It is intended to serve as a bibliographic reference of critical information sources that I believe are essential texts, opinions, arguments, perspectives, trends and tendencies necessary to fully understand and appreciate various aspects of the current and emerging information society, not otherwise found in mainstream media. It is not expected that anyone will read or even want to read all or the majority of the referenced materials listed below. After all, it is only a listing of recommended readings. However, even if you decide not to take this course, if you are interested in a particular issue or question regarding information society policy or politics, education policy, national security policy, media policy, social engineering, policy analysis, leadership, governance, social justice, advertising and marketing, propaganda, media ownership concentration, intellectual property, privacy, media pluralism and diversity, minority access, literacy, public broadcasting, ubiquitous broadband, re-regulation and rewriting of the Communications Act, spectrum and network policy, democracy in the digital age, free speech and press, social and economic justice, equity and equality (re digital divide and other opportunity divides), then, in addition to whatever else you’re reading, you may benefit from exposure to some of the materials below [Typed in 8 pts rather than standard 12 pts in order to limit number of pages. If the print is too small to be easily read from the printed page, please go online to my STP-309 the Information Society course website, where web pages are hot-linked and type can be enlarged by zooming on text.]:


The New Global Economy In the Information Age: Reflections On Our Changing World, Martin Carnoy, Manuel Castells, Steven S. Cohen and Fernando Henrique Cardoso.


“The Information Commons: A Public Policy Report,” Nancy Kranich, The Free Expression Policy Project of the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, 2004 (A copy will be provided to students by Instructor at 3rd week of classes).


Learning to Bridge the Digital Divide: Schooling for Tomorrow, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Centre for Educational Research and Innovation and National Center on Adult Literacy (NACL), 2000.


“Copyright as Cultural Policy,” Michael S. Shapiro, Center for Arts and Culture, 2001.


The Success and Failure of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, Mark Lloyd, Editor, Center for Reflective Community Practice (MIT) and Leadership Conference Education Fund, 2002.


Recommended Websites for Understanding Information Society Policy and Politics:

http://www.aspeninstitute.org/site/c.huLWJeMRKpHb.612049/k.612F/Communications_and_Society_Program.htm

www.literacy.org Website of the National Center for Adult Literacy (NCAL) and International Literacy Institute(ILI) at the University of Pennsylvania.

www.freepress.net Website of a national, non-profit media reform organization concerned with

www.newamerica.net  Website of the New American Foundation. Especially see issues under “Wireless Futures” Policy Program and

www.consumerfed.org  Website of Consumer Federation of America. Especially see and review communications issues.

http://www.mediaaccess.org  Website of The Media Access Project, a non-profit, public interest law firm which promotes the public’s First Amendment right to hear and be heard on the electronic media of today and tomorrow.

http://www.democraticmedia.org/index.html  Website of the Center for Digital Democracy, a nonprofit organization committed to preserving the openness and diversity of the Internet in the broadband era, and to realizing the full potential of digital communications through the development and encouragement of noncommercial, public interest programming.


http://www.alternet.org/  Website of AlterNet, a highly acclaimed Internet information source that provides readers with crucial facts and passionate opinions they can't find anywhere else.

http://www.media-alliance.org/  Media Alliance is a 27-year-old media resource and advocacy center for media workers, non-profit organizations, and social justice activists whose mission is excellence, ethics, diversity, and accountability in all aspects of the media in the interests of peace, justice, and social responsibility.

http://www.fair.org  Website of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), the national media watch group, which has been offering well-documented criticism of media bias and censorship since 1986. See especially, “Media Activists Kit”.

http://www.wsis.nl/static/FAQ's%about%WSIS%20and%Information%20Society.html  Website about the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society

http://www.mediacchannel.org  Website of Media Channel, a media issues super-site, featuring criticism, breaking news, and investigative reporting from hundreds of organizations worldwide. See especially, “Media Access Tool Kit,” and “Media Concentration and Cyberdemocracy” web pages.

http://www.bear-left.com/links.html  Excellent Link-library of the three-year old independent left-leaning web sites about ideas and politics. Especially see and brose Bear-Left Links! webpage.

http://islandia.law.yale.edu/isp  Yale Law School’s Information Society Project for Democracy and Civil Liberties for a New Age website.

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/index_en.htm  European Information Society website


http://www.kouvola.fi/domino/webbi/sis.nsf/db707a054af18a0e42256a24002a2a17/8a4c9dabd5a3f5d442256a68002c921e/FILE/sisbroch.pdf  Sustainable Information Society—Values and Everyday Life (Finland).


http://www.swedishembassy.ca/_news/00000009.htm  Sweden takes the lead in embracing the information society (April 2003).


http://www.g7.fed.us/  G8 Global Information Society:

