Emerging technologies, from Robotics to Genetic Engineering, Artificial Intelligence, social media, and the Internet, to name just a few, are shaping our world in ways unimaginable only a few years ago. In this course, we will look at some of these technological forces and how they impact a variety of issues such as politics, social relations, health care, education, the environment, defense, etc., etc. This will not be a science fiction class, but many of the things we will examine can feel almost like science fiction. But rather than future gazing into a world that we cannot imagine, the central goal of this course is to explore how the significant technological changes we are witnessing today are affecting our world today.

The central part of this course will be dominated by student/group presentations. In the current educational parlance, we will have a “flipped” classroom: Instead of the professor providing you with information that you will try to remember for a test, we will collectively delve into a whole series of issues and questions. In a very real sense, we will be teaching each other. Small groups of students will focus on particular fields or subjects that interest them (how technology is reshaping medicine, education, agriculture, elections, etc. etc.). We will have several discussions early in the course where we assign groups and pick topics. The idea here will be to allow you to focus on an area of your interest. Each group (2-3 students each) will meet in and outside of class to prepare presentations. I expect to be flexible about the character and nature of these presentations (and hope to be surprised by them). But the starting point, I expect, should be a brief overview of the particular area of interest, how has technological change shaped this field up to this point and how are the technologies that are currently online or being developed reshaping this part of our world. Finally, what are the implications of these changes for us as citizens, consumers, workers and so forth?

I also expect to take advantage of the significant insights that can be brought to these questions through alternative media and films. We will, as an example, view episodes of “Black Mirror” together and discuss their insights and implications. To be honest, I think that creative artists are probably better at thinking about where we are going and how our world is changing than political scientists.

Students from outside the social sciences are also especially welcome.