**COMM 106E Midterm 1: released on 2022-04-20, due 2022-04-24 at 11:59pm on Canvas**

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**A note on all word/sentence lengths: these are estimated lengths, you are always free to go over. You can answer these questions fully with fewer words than what is specified, but you would have to be very concise with your language.**

**[3 points] Short answer question 1:** Pick **two** of the following sets of technologies and social issues:

* Smartphones and our attention
* Dating apps and romance
* Social media and our friendships
* Social media and our politics
* Zoom-only classes and education

Then make **three** statements **(about 1-3 sentences each)** that discuss these issues from the following perspectives:

1) a technologically determinist perspective (0.5 pts each)

2) a social constructivist perspective (0.5 pts pt each)

3) a socio-technical systems perspective (0.5 pts pt each)

You do not have to believe in these statements and they will not be graded on their accuracy, truth, alignment with Prof. Geiger’s views, etc., They will be graded solely on how well they represent these three perspectives. You are encouraged to make them provocative and entertaining.

**[3 points] Short answer question 2 (about 100-150 words)**: Bruno Latour says that “Technology is society made durable” (1991, quoted in Gillespie, 2006). What does he mean by this? Give an example of a technology **we have not discussed in class** that is especially durable, and what is the “society” that it is making durable?

**[3 points] Short answer question 3 (50-100 words):** What is the difference between a classification system and a standard? Give an example of two classification systems: one that is a standard and one that is not.

**[11 points] Essay response 1:**

At a large public university on the West Coast of the US, hundreds of thousands of students apply each year to attend, but the school only has room to admit a fraction of those students. Currently, the admissions office uses a weight-and-sum model to rank applications. Some variables are numbers taken directly from applications (ex: GPA, SAT), and other variables are based on a 1-10 score made by a single admissions staffer per application (ex: letters of recommendation, essays). This costs the university millions of dollars of labor per year, and the university is under pressure to cut costs. A new tech startup called ApplAI (pronounced like “apply”) is developing an artificial intelligence system to review applications. They have publicly offered to partner with the university admissions office for a beta test of their system. If the university agrees, ApplAI promise to offer their service to the university for free forever.

ApplAI’s AI system operates such that all the university admissions office has to do is send ApplAI the applications of students who were admitted versus rejected. ApplAI will build a machine learning model, which determines if the numbers and words used in a student’s application are closer to the applications of accepted or rejected students from the previous year. It is unclear how the people at the admissions office will actually use this score in reviewing applications.

You are a student at this university who works for the school paper. You have been told these details by someone you know and trust at the admissions office. Your source tells you that they “do not understand any of this tech stuff,” but that they think this is something that should be publicly discussed. They have asked you to write an article that raises these issues to the broader campus community. Assume there are no ethical issues in reporting these details. You do not need to draw on any specific journalistic knowledge or ways of writing news articles. For the purposes of this essay, you cannot ask any further questions about the case.

Your article should have four parts.

* **[2 pt]** Part 1 (100-200 words): Introduce the issue to your readers (the campus community) in your own words
* **[3 pt]** Part 2 (150-300 words): Discuss issues around this kind of university-company partnership, using terms like “power” and “delegation.” These should not primarily focus on potential issues of bias or discrimination, which is part 3.
* **[3 pt]** Part 3 (150-300 words): Discuss issues about defining who is a good or bad applicant, using terms like “operationalization” and “discrimination.”
* **[3 pt]** Part 4 (100-300 words): Conclude by raising at least three questions you think the admissions office, ApplAI, or anyone else should have to answer, address, or consider before moving forward with this partnership.

Because this is a formal essay, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and readability will be a small part of the grade.