

Narratives of Innovation and Artificial Intelligence

Instructor: Sophia Zuoqiu, D. Sc.
Instructor: Mathew Donaver Evans, Ph.D.

H/SS Elective: Narratives of Innovation and AI

Credit hours: 3

Meeting time: Wednesday 13:50-16:25;

Meeting location: S106

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12pm

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Office Hours: Monday by appointment
Wednesday 9:30 to 12:30
Thursday 9:30 to 12:30 and 13:30 to 16:30

Teaching Assistant: None assigned.

Recitation: None.

Textbook: No single required textbook. The course uses selected book excerpts, published articles, films, and other media provided or identified in class.

Prerequisite: None.

Description:

Artificial intelligence has become the defining innovation story of the present decade, yet the stories told about AI in films, books, marketing, and industry speech are as consequential as the technology itself. This course examines AI through the lens of narrative: how intelligence and innovation are portrayed across Western and Eastern, modern and historical contexts, and how those portrayals shape public expectations, markets, and the direction of development. Students move from the concept and ecosystem of innovation, through competing conceptions of intelligence, including individual, machine, distributed, collective, and superintelligence, to the practical basics of modern AI systems and the hardware that carries them. Throughout, students analyze films, books, and media as primary sources and test their claims against the technical and social realities of AI development.

There is no final examination. Assessment is based on participation, progress work, a midterm, and a final project presented during the closing sessions.

Course Objectives:

The course connects narrative analysis with technical and social understanding of innovation and artificial intelligence. It prepares students to interpret representations of AI across cultures, evaluate claims about contemporary systems, and develop an evidence-based project that relates technological narratives to their practical consequences.

Learning Outcomes:

- 1) Distinguish data, information, knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence, and apply this framework to claims made about AI systems.

- 2) Analyze portrayals of innovation and AI in film, literature, and the media, attending to cultural and historical context.
- 3) Explain the social determinants of modern AI development, including the roles of formal and informal innovation settings.
- 4) Describe the technical basics of contemporary AI, including LLMs, benchmarks, tokens, APIs, and IDEs, and the hardware ecosystems around it, including VR/AR, biomedical devices, and the Metaverse, with appropriate precision.
- 5) Evaluate industry speech about AI products, identifying the values and assumptions embedded in language.
- 6) Develop ethical awareness of how AI affects society.
- 7) Coordinate and advance a semester-long project that connects narrative analysis with technical understanding, and present it effectively.

Assessments:

Assessment Type	Percentage	Classification
Attendance, participation, and in-class activities	15%	Performance / open-ended
Homework: reflections, media analyses, and AI in the news	35%	Open-ended coursework
Midterm	20%	Open-ended analysis
Final project	30%	Open-ended project and presentation

Grade Composition:

Attendance, participation, and in-class activities: 15%

Homework: 35%

Reflections, two short written responses to lecture themes: 10%

Media analyses, two close readings of a film or industry speech: 20%

AI in the news: 5%

Midterm: 20%

Final project: 30%

Project proposal, due Lecture 8: 5%

Progress presentation: 5%

Final project and presentation: 20%

The final project connects a narrative of AI or innovation to its technical and social realities. Students complete the assignment through a proposal, progress presentation, and final report and presentation. The topic is subject to instructor approval at the proposal stage.

Make-up Policy: NO LATE assignment will be accepted.

Grade Composition:

Class letter grade is given within the following score ranges:

90.00 – 100.00 A 85.00 – 89.99 A- 80.00 – 84.99 B+ 76.00 – 79.99 B

73.00 – 75.99 B-

70.00 – 72.99 C+ 66.00 – 69.99 C 63.00 – 65.99 C- 60.00 – 62.99 D 0.00 – 59.99 F

GPA grades will be further determined based on the given letter grades to show on your transcripts.

Academic Integrity:

Unacknowledged direct copying from another person's work, or close paraphrasing of another person's work, is plagiarism and is a serious offence equivalent to cheating in examinations. This applies to work copied from other students and from published sources, including books, reports, journal articles, and online materials.

A close paraphrase must acknowledge the source. Combining unacknowledged passages from one or more sources with a few original words or minor wording changes is over-dependence on sources and is a form of plagiarism.

Use of AI tools is permitted only for designated activities and assignments. Students must document their use, remain responsible for accuracy, and ensure that all submitted analysis reflects their own judgment. University academic integrity policies apply in full.

MATERIAL COVERED*:

*The sequence of topics covered in this course is tentative.

Module I: Innovation, Intelligence, and Creativity

Lecture 1. Introduction and overview. Course framework.

Lecture 2. Fundamentals of narrative.

Lecture 3. Innovation I: fundamentals and portrayals. *Due: Reflection 1*

Lecture 4. Innovation II: factors and ecosystems of innovation.

Lecture 5. Intelligence: definition, or the lack of one. *Due: Reflection 2*

Module II: AI in Society, Media, and Practice

Lecture 6. Portrayals of AI. *Due: Media analysis 1*

Lecture 7. Basics of AI: modern AI development and its social determinants.

Lecture 8. Basics of AI: structure and constraints. *Due: Project proposal*

Lecture 9. Organic and inorganic worlds.

Lecture 10. Market, ethics, and beyond. *Due: Media analysis 2*

Lecture 11. Midterm.

Module III: Synthesis and Final Project

Lecture 12. Project workshop: refining research questions and narrative methods.

Lecture 13. Synthesis discussion: comparing the course's films and books as competing narratives of intelligence and innovation.

Lecture 14. Progress presentations and structured peer review. *Due: Progress presentation*

Lecture 15. Project studio: revision, rehearsal, and instructor consultations.

Lecture 16. Final presentations I. *Due: Final project*

Lecture 17. Final presentations II and course wrap-up. *Due: Final presentation*

Course Policies:

Attendance is expected at all sessions, and presentation sessions are mandatory. During class, electronic devices, including phones and laptops, **are not** permitted unless the instructors authorize them for specific activities or assignments. AI use is explicitly specified by course instructor(s). Failure to disclose AI contribution will result in loss of credit and/or fail in class.