

SOCI 2804: Colonialism, development and the e-Community (Online Course)

COURSE INFORMATION WINTER 2014

Class meetings: Tues. and Thurs. from 9 Jan. – 8 April (online meetings through Desire2Learn):

Time Zone	Atlantic	Eastern	Central	Mountain	Pacific
	1:30pm – 2:50pm	12:30pm – 1:50pm	11:30am – 12:50pm	10:30am – 11:50am	9:30am – 10:50am

Equipment requirements: Computer with speakers, microphone (or webcam) and Internet connection

Instructor: Rob McMahon (Postdoctoral Fellow at University of New Brunswick; PhD in Communication, Simon Fraser University)

Email: rob.mcmahon@unb.ca

Scheduled office hours (7 Jan. – 9 April only): Tues. (Online via Desire2Learn group chat):

Time Zone	Atlantic	Eastern	Central	Mountain	Pacific
	3:00pm – 4:00pm	2:00pm – 3:00pm	1:00pm – 2:00pm	12:00pm – 1:00pm	11:00am – 12:00pm

OVERVIEW

This course explores the relationships between colonialism, the growth of digital networks and applications, and community development. It re-frames problems like the ‘digital divide’ as opportunities for people and communities, while also recognizing that this work faces significant challenges. Historic and ongoing social relations of inequality constrain the abilities of marginalized groups and communities to effectively use and control digital technologies to meet their needs. However, creative actors also interact with these structures to undertake community development projects through struggle, negotiation, compromise and appropriation.

The course has three modules. Module 1 outlines the context of settler colonialism in Canada. It explores how indigenous communities are negotiating the colonial relationship in various ways. This discussion foregrounds the ways that indigenous peoples have always asserted their self-determination, while also highlighting challenges stemming from these conditions. Through two examples drawn from contemporary issues, we will look at some of the ways that indigenous and non-indigenous peoples are grappling with these issues today. The example of residential schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada introduces attempts to address these challenges. Another is shift from colonialism to self-determination through the development of indigenous owned and controlled community radio, newspapers, and TV broadcasting media.

Module 2 of the course examines broadband network infrastructure development, both in Canada and globally. It considers, from a critical sociological perspective, the issues, institutions and actors involved in the emerging ‘network society’. We will then focus on community-driven technology development projects as a response to these developments. In particular, we look at networks and applications designed by and for remote and rural First Nations.

Module 3 of the course will begin with a ‘toolkit’ for community-based research, designed to prepare students for assignments undertaken in the remainder of the course. In this final module, we will explore the opportunities and challenges involved in developing and implementing locally-driven e-Community projects. Taking a critical stance towards emerging technologies, we will examine how they interact with aspects of community and economic development. This includes a consideration of how indigenous peoples are leveraging technologies to gain increased ownership and control over areas like health, education, culture, politics, and economic development. In exploring these issues, students will gain an opportunity to practice community-based research through course assignments focused on e-Community projects across Canada.

The course is closely connected to two ongoing research projects: First Nations Innovation (<http://fn-innovation-pn.com>) and the First Mile (<http://firstmile.ca>). It features materials and guest speakers who are actively involved in these projects. Part of the goal of the course is to engage students in exploring the community technology development initiatives explored in this work. They will gain opportunities to learn about and contribute to the projects, while project partners and research also benefit from the knowledge and expertise held by students.

Course materials draw from a variety of sources. We will focus on work produced by members of indigenous communities, as well as critical scholars of technology development. Along with reflecting on course readings, students are expected to attend lectures from the course instructor and guest speakers. Students will develop assignments (community technology plans; PowerPoint presentations; blog posts; videos; etc) that engage with the theoretical and empirical issues covered in the course. They will be offered an opportunity to publish their work on the First Mile website, which showcases First Nations technology development from across Canada.

Course structure

Module 1: Colonialism and Aboriginal/state relations in Canada

- Topic 1: Colonialism in historical and contemporary contexts
- Topic 2: Residential schools, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and indigenous activism, organization and resistance
- Topic 3: Aboriginal media development, from colonialism to self-determination

Module 2: Digital network and technology development

- Topic 4: Conceptual frameworks: The social shaping of technology
- Topic 5: The network society and development of broadband networks and applications
- Topic 6: Digital divides and alternatives: Putting the ‘last-mile’ first

Module 3: The e-Community: A Framework for First Nations Innovation

- Topic 7: Building a toolkit: Community-based research methods
- Topic 8: Building capacity: Operations and management
- Topic 9: Applications for community development
- Topic 10: Towards an e-Community strategy