

About the midterm exam, spring 2016

The exam will consist of two essays worth 50 points each. Those two essays will be responses to two of the four prompts you see below. NOTE WELL you do not get to pick which two prompts you will answer. Instead, I will throw a die at the beginning of the exam period to determine which two prompts students will address.

Keep in mind that your grader is looking for mastery of the sociology of technology. That is, I need to see that you are an accomplished student of SOCI 3390, not just an intelligent somebody from off the street.

Possible essay prompts:

1. According to the U.S. Patent and Trademark office, 138 patents were issued in 2012 for inventions relating to toothbrushes. Discuss this state of affairs in terms of ideas we covered in the first three weeks of class.
2. How does this course influence your understanding of the development of self-driving cars? In your answer, say something about Gordon's "death of innovation" thesis.
3. Next semester, students with concealed carry permits will be allowed to carry handguns on campus and into classrooms. What can you say about this new law and the controversy around it in terms of diffusion, resistance, and the long history of gunpowder?
4. Imagine a conversation between Bijker, Winner, and Foucault about the controversy surrounding Apple's refusal to unlock the San Bernardino iPhone. Write out the transcript of this conversation like the script for a play:
Foucault: "I think that..."
Bijker: "Yes, but..."
etc., etc.

A word about studying for an exam of this type: it's ok to talk in a very general way with classmates about these prompts or to ask each other clarifying questions about them. It is plainly out of bounds to divvy up the labor by, for example, having four students prepare a thorough answer to one prompt each, then exchange notes. Somewhere between those two scenarios, cheating commences. Consider that the goal of an exam is to get each student to master the material for himself or herself. If you're undermining that goal, you're cheating. If I catch you cheating, I will (at least) give you a zero for the exam and bring academic dishonesty charges. If the boundaries in this regard aren't clear to you, ask me about them!