



Course and Examination Fact Sheet: Spring Semester 2024

4,720: Technologien/Technologies: Afrocentric Perspectives on Human Rights and Justice in the Cyberspace

ECTS credits: 3

Overview examination/s

(binding regulations see below)

decentral - Presentation, Analog, Group work group grade (50%)

Examination time: Term time

decentral - Written work, Digital, Individual work individual grade (50%)

Examination time: Term time

Attached courses

Timetable -- Language -- Lecturer

[4,720,1.00 Technologien/Technologies: Afrocentric Perspectives on Human Rights and Justice in the Cyberspace](#) -- English --
[Wodajo Kebene Kejela](#)

Course information

Course prerequisites

None

Learning objectives

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Assess comparatively and critically the mainstream Western-centric view and Afrocentric understanding of digitalization, emerging technologies, and human rights risks and injustice in cyberspace;
- Apply the Afrocentric model of duty-oriented responsibility to human rights risks and injustice in the digital space;
- Understand the rights and responsibilities (of companies, the state and users) in cyberspace from human rights and Afrocentric perspective and are able to apply these perspectives to their own experiences as students, digital users and in their practical and research activities;
- Deal with different interpretations and grasps of cyberspace and impacts of emerging technologies.

Course content

Innovation in digital technologies is one of the defining features of the 21st century. AI, automation, robotics, platform technologies and the combination of all those shape and mediate human life in manifold ways. The relevance of these technologies traverses public and private sectors, including but not limited to finance, healthcare, welfare provision, marketing and advertisement, peace and security, and the justice system.

Given this growing relevance, a great hope is often placed on the emancipatory power of technology, precisely in solving socioeconomic and political problems. The promise of such emerging technology, however, is not without risks and limitations. Emerging technologies pose a diverse spectrum of risks toward human rights and social justice such as exclusion, privacy invasion, systemic discrimination, amplification, and deepening existing inequalities and structural injustice.

While risks from emerging technologies are shared phenomena across geographies, the impact is not felt equally everywhere. However, while the ramifications can compound pre-existing problems and challenges, particularly in the Global South, it is Western perspectives that dominate and shape the discourse on such technologies. Therefore, this course invites students to think through and critically assess



1. emerging technologies and their impact, particularly on the African continent;
2. the place of Afrocentric views and epistemologies in understanding the digital landscape and their part in digital governance.

The course exposes students to an alternative perspective to the mainstream call to "fill the digital divide" in Africa. Before deploying efforts around "filling the digital divide", the concept of technology and Africa that is deeply entangled with colonial thinking needs to be problematized. IT needs to be detached from the persistent imagination of Africa as the "untechnological" continent that can only be redeemed by the "civilizing mission" of the West and, more recently, Chinese tech Industries. In a way, the whole assessment of what cyberspace is, its impact and the governance system need to be decolonized and indigenized. The decolonization and indigenization approaches are undertaken in three steps:

1. revisit the mainstream Western thinking embedded in the definition, impact assessment (pros and cons) and governance frameworks of emerging technologies.
2. Compare the mainstream individualistic liberal legal and political thinking to the indigenous African perspective (Afrocentric view) of communality and duty-oriented responsibility for digitally mediated harms.
3. Identify and challenge the discrepancies and allow integration on intersecting areas. This way, the students will be familiar with different perspectives and approaches to address human rights risks, and injustice emanate from emerging technologies.

Course structure and indications of the learning and teaching design

Topic 1: Introduction: The first class will feature a brief thematic introduction and be used to introduce and exchange thoughts on the overall course content/topics, lecture methodology, and assessment methods.

Topic 2: Introduction to the Afrocentric perspective: This topic will introduce the African-centered worldview, African ways of perceiving reality, ways of knowing, and value systems in the cyberspace context.

Topic 3: What is the digital space and what it means to be human in this space?: Students will be introduced to debates on what constitutes the digital space and how humans are perceived in this space. Cyberpunk movie will be used and students will be asked to reflect.

Topic 4: Cyberspace as a networked relational space and the African perspective: Topic 4 introduces the digital space as a "sociotechnical networked space" based on insights from interdisciplinary studies - law, sociology, science and technology studies (STS) and African philosophy of society and personhood within the context of the digital space.

Topic 5: Rights and duties in the digital space a human rights perspective: This topic will discuss rights and responsibilities in the digital space. Whether these rights and responsibilities differ from the rights and responsibilities in the physical world. A guest lecturer will be invited.

Topic 6 Human rights risks and injustice in the digital space: Topic 6 will allow students to examine practical examples of human rights risks in this space. This will take a case discussion/study form.

Topic 7: Digital Rights and duties in light the African ethics of duty: Under Topic 7, students will be introduced to how the conception of rights and duties in the African context differs from the mainstream Western view of moral responsibility and the concept of right. It mainly focuses on the African ethics of duty.

Topic 8: Responsibility for (in)justice in the digital space: Topic 8 introduces students to the notion of responsibility for human rights risks and injustice in the digital space. The session will introduce students to apply a perspective of responsibility that integrates the African ethics of duty.

Topic 9: Datafication and commodification: new era of (digital) colonization?: This topic will introduce students to critical evaluation of digitally mediated everyday life built on collecting and commodifying personal data. It draws a parallel between the colonial era and institutional structures that enabled physical resource extraction and the modern-day digitalization and extraction of digital resources (personal data), identities and commodification of such digital resources.

Contextual Studies are considered part of **Contact Learning**; thus, taking part properly implies **regular attendance**. It is the students' own responsibility to ensure that there is **no timetable clash** between the courses they have chosen. A detailed course outline and all relevant documents will be made available on **StudyNet**. Only the current timetable as published on **Courses** does apply.



Course literature

Bayo Oyeade, 'African Studies and the Afrocentric Paradigm: A Critique', *Journal of Black Studies* 21, no. 2 (1990): 233-38.

Julie Cohn, Cyberspace As/And Space, *Columbia Law Review* Vol. 107:210 (2007)

Donna Haraway, A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s, *Socialist Review* 80 (1985): 65-107.

Sabelo Mhlambi, From Rationality to Relationality: Ubuntu as an Ethical and Human Rights Framework for Artificial Intelligence Governance, *Carr Center Discussion Paper*, July 8, 2020.

Additional course information

Dr Kebene Wodajo is a senior scientist and lecturer at ETH Zurich, in Ethics, Technology and Society. Her research and teachings focus on the questions of justice and governance in cyberspace.

Examination information

Examination sub part/s

1. Examination sub part (1/2)

Examination modalities

Examination type	Presentation
Responsible for organisation	decentral
Examination form	Oral examination
Examination mode	Analog
Time of examination	Term time
Examination execution	Asynchronous
Examination location	On Campus
Grading type	Group work group grade
Weighting	50%
Duration	--

Examination languages

Question language: English

Answer language: English

Remark

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Examination-aid rule

Free aids provision

Basically, students are free to choose aids. Any restrictions are defined by the faculty members in charge of the examination under supplementary aids.

Supplementary aids

For this assessment each group will have to submit a presentation/slides before the presentation day.

2. Examination sub part (2/2)

Examination modalities

Examination type	Written work
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Responsible for organisation	decentral
Examination form	Written work
Examination mode	Digital
Time of examination	Term time
Examination execution	Asynchronous
Examination location	Off Campus
Grading type	Individual work individual grade
Weighting	50%
Duration	--

Examination languages

Question language: English

Answer language: English

Remark

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Examination-aid rule

Free aids provision

Basically, students are free to choose aids. Any restrictions are defined by the faculty members in charge of the examination under supplementary aids.

Supplementary aids

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Examination content

1. **Group Presentation (50%):** Students will prepare a group presentation on one of the topics indicated in the syllabus. Each group will consist in between 3-5 students. Students are free to form their own groups, choose their topic of presentation and communicate their group members and presentation topic to the course director. Presentation and discussion will last 50 minutes (around 30 minutes for the presentation and 20 minutes for discussion). All presentation groups must consult with the course director on the content of the presentation. The exact date of the presentation will be communicated on the second or third class.
2. **Written assignment (50%):** Students prepare an individual paper (1500-3000 words excluding references) on topics related to the course. They can work either on technology-related Issues or on a specific Case of their choice or based on course content. The course director will approve topics as well as cases upstream. In both cases, students will hand in a one-page proposal paper plan with a title, a clear research question (for Issues) or description of the issue or problem underlying a specific case (for Cases) and an abstract on the structure of the argument/analysis. Please, note the following: Students are free to send in their proposal for individual paper during the course but advised to do so at the earliest stage so that they will have time to keep developing and improving the paper. Students are encouraged to use reading materials, cases, videos and other resources assigned for each topic as their source material. Moreover, they are free to go beyond and strongly encouraged to use their own disciplinary background, experience and reflection when preparing their term paper. More information will be provided during class. All papers are due by the end of the semester, exact date will be communicated. The earlier you have your proposal approved, the more time you will have to complete your paper.

Examination relevant literature

Students are encouraged to use reading materials, cases, videos, and other resources assigned for each topic as their source material for all examination modes. However, they are also strongly encouraged to go beyond and use their own disciplinary background, experience and reflection when preparing their term paper. More information will be provided during class.



Please note

Please note that only this fact sheet and the examination schedule published at the time of bidding are binding and takes precedence over other information, such as information on StudyNet (Canvas), on lecturers' websites and information in lectures etc.

Any references and links to third-party content within the fact sheet are only of a supplementary, informative nature and lie outside the area of responsibility of the University of St.Gallen.

Documents and materials are only relevant for central examinations if they are available by the end of the lecture period (CW21) at the latest. In the case of centrally organised mid-term examinations, the documents and materials up to CW 13 are relevant for testing.

Binding nature of the fact sheets:

- Course information as well as examination date (organised centrally/decentrally) and form of examination: from bidding start in CW 04 (Thursday, 25 January 2024);
- Examination information (supplementary aids, examination contents, examination literature) for decentralised examinations: in CW 12 (Monday, 18 March 2024);
- Examination information (supplementary aids, examination contents, examination literature) for centrally organised mid-term examinations: in CW 13 (Monday, 25 March 2024);
- Examination information (regulations on aids, examination contents, examination literature) for centrally organised examinations: Starting with de-registration period in CW 15 (Monday, 08 April 2024).