

# HPSC0095 The Politics of Feeling in Science-Society Relationships

## Course Syllabus

2024-25 session | Dr Stephen Hughes

### Course Information

Conspiracy theories and misinformation, vaccine hesitancy, technological hype, climate anxiety, mistrust of scientific institutions, and legacies of harm and injustice trouble the relationships between science and society. This course aims to understand and respond to these challenges by exploring the powerful emotional dynamics which underpin them. Through interdisciplinary perspectives on affect, the module explores how feelings like anxiety, resentment, desire, grief, love, awe, and optimism drive hype around new technologies, mobilise climate change activists, create conspiracy communities, and provide relevance and meaning in an unstable and uncertain world. It will examine the unconscious and embodied aspects of science-society relationships, asking how affective practices, habits, and routines, unconscious fantasies, denials, and other defence mechanisms, and the limitations and affordances of brains and bodies play their parts in public engagement, responsible innovation, and technoscientific governance. In focusing on the dynamic relational processes of affect and emotion, the course will provide students with the conceptual and practical tools required for understanding, analysing, and responding to the deep psychosocial tensions and conflicts underpinning many of the contemporary challenges in science-society relationships.

### Basic course information

<b>Moodle Website:</b>	Search "HPSC0095"
<b>Assessment:</b>	<b>Individual:</b> 2000-word essay (50%) <b>Group:</b> Panel discussion (equivalent 15 mins per student) (50%)
<b>Timetable:</b>	See <a href="http://www.ucl.ac.uk/timetable">www.ucl.ac.uk/timetable</a>
<b>Prerequisites:</b>	None
<b>Required texts:</b>	None
<b>Course tutor(s):</b>	Stephen Hughes
<b>Contact:</b>	<a href="mailto:stephen.hughes@ucl.ac.uk">stephen.hughes@ucl.ac.uk</a>
<b>Office location:</b>	Room 2.4, 22 Gordon Square
<b>Office hours:</b>	Tuesdays: 11am – 1pm

# Schedule

UCL Week	Lecture Date	Topic	Preparation Activity
6	30 <sup>th</sup> Sep	What is an Emotion? TLDR: No One Knows	Essential readings, learning activities on Moodle
7	7 <sup>th</sup> Oct	The Technopolitical Unconscious: Psychoanalysing Tech Bros	Essential readings, learning activities on Moodle
8	14 <sup>th</sup> Oct	Forbidden Desires: Affect and Power	Essential readings, learning activities on Moodle
9	21 <sup>st</sup> Oct	Feeling the Sociotechnical Imaginary: Utopia and Dystopia	Essential readings, learning activities on Moodle
10	28 <sup>th</sup> Oct	Nightmares and Dreamscapes of Emerging Technology	Essential readings, learning activities on Moodle
11	4 <sup>th</sup> Nov	Reading week	READDDDDDDDDDD
12	11 <sup>th</sup> Nov	The Affective Technopolitics of Genocide	Essential readings, learning activities on Moodle
13	18 <sup>th</sup> Nov	Can the Chatbot Suffer? Fantasies of AI Psychotherapy	Essential readings, learning activities on Moodle
14	25 <sup>th</sup> Nov	Touching/Feeling - Haptics and Virtual Reality	Essential readings, learning activities on Moodle
15	2 <sup>nd</sup> Dec	NPCs, Gen-Z, and Chaotic Post-Irony: Meme Affects	Essential readings, learning activities on Moodle
16	9 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Student-decided Topic	Essential readings, learning activities on Moodle
<b>Essay Due 7<sup>th</sup> January, 5pm</b>			

# Assessments

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%	Description	Deadline	Word limit
50%	Essay	7 <sup>th</sup> Jan, 5pm	2000 words
50%	Discussion	As assigned	15 minutes per student

## Essay

Each student must write a 2000-word essay which critically analyses an area of science or technology that clearly involves emotions in some way. Students must draw from the theories and concepts discussed throughout the module to explore the politics of emotion involved in the example chosen.

You are expected to develop an argument that tells us something about emotions and power in relation to science and technology. This will most likely involve taking a specific theoretical concept or perspective and applying it to your chosen example to show how emotions play a political role in science and technology. Whatever you choose to do it must reflect the content covered throughout the module.

You may go 10% above or below the word count without a penalty.

**Please ensure you have read the marking criteria available on Moodle.**

## Discussion

Students will take part in a 2–3–person panel discussion exploring a topic and readings relevant to the module. These panel discussions will be held during the lecture in the second half of the term. The panel will jointly pick a topic for discussion and draw their readings out of a hat in the first lecture.

In the panel discussion you will briefly introduce your topic and give a short overview of its relevance to the readings. You will then discuss the topic as a group linking the topic to insights from the readings. I will moderate the discussion and ask questions – you will be expected to have a good understanding of the topic. The rest of the class can interact and ask the panel questions via mentimeter. After the main panel discussion, it will be opened up for audience questions and answers.

The panel discussion will last for 30 minutes or 15 minute per student. As it is an assessment, the panel discussion will be recorded so that the second marker and external markers can have access to it. If the panel is happy with the recorded discussion we can publish it as a short podcast.

You don't have to speak at length about the topic – it is not about the amount that you say but the quality of it. It can be a slow conversation. A good panel discussion requires group effort – with everyone contributing and nobody taking over. Talking more does not necessarily mean getting extra marks but saying nothing will certainly mean no marks. The goal is not to debate

each other but to explore different perspectives and build on what each other says.

**Please ensure you have read the marking criteria available on Moodle.**

### **Generative AI Statement**

Students are not permitted to use AI tools. Please see the following statement, adapted from [Olivia Stowell](#), for reasons why AI is not only counterproductive for learning but also an unethical technology:

- This module is designed to improve how you analyse and critically think about emotions in the context of science and society; if you're not doing the thinking, you're not learning.
- Using AI does not produce reliably accurate results ([check out 'ChatGPT is bullshit'](#)).
- Using AI opens up academic honesty issues, both because it raises the question of whether the work is "your" work, and also because tools like ChatGPT rely on taking uncredited material from scholars and writers.
- Generative AI tools like ChatGPT have serious negative environmental impacts, particularly in relation to water usage ([check out this amazing overview](#) for more info).
- OpenAI has exploited workers from the global south, especially workers in prisons and refugee camps, and workers in Kenya, the Philippines, Colombia, and elsewhere (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for more info).

To put it more bluntly: there are thousands of people in the world who would love to be in your position - getting to be a student at a major UK research university with relatively small class sizes and an extremely prestigious faculty. Education like this is not available to everyone. Furthermore, someone is paying for you to be here (whether that's yourself, parents/relatives, scholarships/grants, loans, etc).

If you choose to spend this (both incredible and incredibly expensive) opportunity to learn by trying to avoid doing the work and learning through the use of AI tools, you are only cheating yourself and contributing to environmental harms and labor exploitation in the process.

For these reasons, the use of ChatGPT or any other AI tools is not a part of this classroom community.

[This policy aligns with Category 1 in UCL's categories of assessment](#)

Students believed to have ignored the categorisation will undergo the standard academic misconduct procedure.

**Please note that students with a Summary of Reasonable Adjustments (SORA) may still be permitted to use other assistive technology required.**

Please be aware that you are responsible for ensuring that the assessment that you submit correctly references the use of other people's ideas and work. If you submit AI generated text that has used the work of human authors and it is not appropriately referenced, this may count as academic misconduct.

For further information on using AI in your assessments, please visit - <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/generative-ai-hub/using-ai-tools-assessment>

*Please see the STS Student Handbook for further guidance on assessments.*

# Course Aims and Learning Objectives

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## Aims

This course aims to critically explore the role that affect, emotions, and feelings play in relationships between science, technology, and society. It aims to equip students with the skills and theoretical sophistication to understand what emotions are and how they configure relationships between science, technology and society.

## Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Understand different theoretical perspectives on emotion.
- Identify and analyse the emotional dynamics underpinning contemporary relationships between science, technology, and society.
- Consider the technopolitical aspects of emotion.
- Discuss how emotional growth could improve the governance and communication of science and technology in specific contexts.
- Reflect on your own emotional relationships to the topics being discussed.

By the end of the course, students should also be able to demonstrate:

- Research skills appropriate to post-graduate taught modules
- Time and project management, working to tight deadlines
- Independence and initiative in project work
- Emotional reflexivity on module topics
- Effective oral and written communication skills with a wide range of audiences

## Reading List

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See weekly lists on Moodle.

## Course Expectations

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In addition to submitting assessed material, students are expected to attend all lectures, contribute to every seminar discussion, and critically read all essential readings. You are expected to be able to discuss the essential reading each week and be willing to discuss the lecture content.

## Important Policy Information

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Details of college and departmental policies relating to modules and assessments can be found in the STS Student Handbook [www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/handbook](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/handbook). All students taking modules in the STS department are expected to read these policies.