**Course Title:** Which Side of History? How Technology Is Reshaping Democracy and Our Lives  
**Course Code:** EDUC 159 / COMM 159 / POL 59  
**Instructor:** James Steyer  
**Course Schedule:** Mondays for 8 weeks (September 27 - November 15, 2021)  
**Course Time:** 5:30-7:00pm (PT)

**Course Summary:**  
Technology, with its 24/7 influence on our lives, has transformed our entire society. This course, led by Stanford Professor James Steyer, who is also founder and CEO of Common Sense Media, will examine a number of critical issues: How can we hold tech platforms accountable? How do we protect the privacy of consumers? How can we ensure the mental health of our society? Guest speakers—including Hillary Clinton, Nick Kristof, Sacha Baron Cohen, Reid Hoffman, Ellen Pao, FCC Chair Jessica Rosenworcel, Thomas Friedman, Nick Kristof, Vivek Murthy, Kara Swisher, and a number of others—will bring a unique perspective on the remarkable impact of technology on our lives.

*Note: This course is designed for the entire Stanford community, and Continuing Studies students will be joined by Stanford Pre-Collegiate Studies students, Stanford undergraduates, and Stanford graduate and professional students.*

*This course may not be taken for a Letter Grade. To receive Stanford course credit as an undergraduate, graduate, or professional school graduate student, you must attend every class session and submit questions to the speaker(s) for at least 3 classes. These questions must be submitted 24 hours before we’re slated to meet.*

**Attendance and Recording:** Class sessions will be recorded.

**Grade Options and Requirements:**
- No Grade Requested (NGR)  
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)  
  - Continuing Studies Students must attend and/or watch at least 7 class sessions.

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose the Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*
**Required Textbook:**

**Your Instructor:**

**James P. Steyer** is Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Common Sense, the nation’s leading nonpartisan organization dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and impactful voice they need to thrive in the 21st century.

Jim is also an award-winning Stanford Professor and a nationally known author. Prior to launching Common Sense, Jim was chairman and CEO of JP Kids, a leading educational kids’ media company. Before that, he was the founder and president of Children Now, the highly respected national advocacy and media organization for children, which he founded in 1988.

Jim’s longstanding commitment to disadvantaged children and to teaching began decades ago when he was a remedial reading tutor to at-risk kids in New York City public schools. Since then, he has taught reading and math to disadvantaged students in Harlem, East Palo Alto, and Oakland, California, and he spent more than 10 years as a volunteer teacher to second-, third-, and fifth-graders in East Oakland. While he was in law school. Jim was a founder and original chairperson of the East Palo Alto Community Law Project. This nonprofit law office served for over 30 years as the primary source of legal services for lower-income families in East Palo Alto and has been the training ground for hundreds of students at Stanford Law School.

For more than 30 years, Jim has taught a variety of courses on civil rights, civil liberties, and education issues at Stanford, where is a Consulting Professor in the Stanford School of Education. He has received the university's highest teaching honor, the Walter J. Gores Award for Excellence in Teaching, which is awarded annually to three Stanford professors, and a number of other Stanford teaching awards.

Earlier in his career, Jim was a law clerk for Justice Allen Broussard of the California Supreme Court, and an Assistant Counsel at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Jim grew up in New York City and went to college and law school at Stanford University.

**Select Works**

James P. Steyer, Talking Back to Facebook: The Common Sense Guide to Raising Kids in the Digital Age (2012), also available at your favorite online or actual bookstore

James P. Steyer, The Other Parent: The Inside Story of the Media’s Effect on Our Children (2002), also available at your favorite online or actual bookstore

Weekly Schedule:

Monday, Sept. 27, 2021 (Week 1)
History is Watching

Guest Speakers:

1. David Axelrod, former Senior Advisor to President Obama, CNN political commentator, and Director of the University of Chicago Institute of Politics.

Which Side of History readings:

- Introduction by James Steyer (pp. xi-xx)
- “An Open Letter to Mark Zuckerberg” by Aaron Sorkin (pp. 61-63)
- “We’re All Connected but No One’s in Charge” by Thomas Friedman (pp. 173-177)

Additional Readings:

Future of Tech Commission & Benenson Strategy Group: “Tech Attitudes Survey,” (September 23, 2021) (poll on online privacy protections and holding social media companies accountable for “illegal and harmful content” posted on their sites)

The Facebook Files, Wall Street Journal: “Facebook knows, in acute detail, that its platforms are riddled with flaws but hasn’t fixed them. That’s a key finding of a [recent] Journal series . . . based on an array of internal company documents.”

- Facebook Says Its Rules Apply to All. Company Documents Reveal a Secret Elite That’s Exempt.
- Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show
- Facebook Tried to Make Its Platform a Healthier Place. It Got Angrier Instead.
Facebook Employees Flag Drug Cartels and Human Traffickers. The Company’s Response Is Weak, Documents Show.

How Facebook Hobbled Mark Zuckerberg’s Bid to Get America Vaccinated

Karina Newton, Head of Public Policy, Instagram, *Using research to improve your experience*, Facebook (September 14, 2021) (published in response to The Facebook Files) https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/using-research-to-improve-your-experience?draft=140564944937515


**Biographies**

**David Axelrod** is a journalist, political strategist, and NYT best-selling author who was the principal architect of President Barack Obama’s campaign strategies. As Senior Advisor to the President, he was a key figure in shaping the administration’s agenda and its significant legislative victories, including the economic stimulus program, health care reform, and financial regulatory reform.

**Select Works**


**Thomas Friedman** is an internationally known author and three-time Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. His foreign affairs column in *The New York Times*, which he has written since 1995, reports on US domestic politics and foreign policy, Middle East conflicts, international economics, environment, biodiversity, and energy. His latest book, “Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist’s Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations” advances that we need to be prepared as the way we use technology becomes more intertwined with the way we live our lives.

**Select Works**

Tom Friedman, Thanks For Being Late (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016)
https://www.amazon.com/Thank-You-Being-Late-Accelerations/dp/0374273537

Cecilia Kang covers technology and regulation and joined the New York Times in 2015. She is the co-author, along with Sheera Frenkel of the New York Times, of “An Ugly Truth: Inside Facebook's Battle for Domination.” Previously she was the Senior Technology Correspondent for The Washington Post and was a staff writer at The San Jose Mercury News and Dow Jones. She is a 2018 recipient of the George Polk and Gerald Loeb Awards along with her Times colleagues for coverage of Facebook.

Select Works

Cecilia Kang, Lawmakers, Taking Aim at Big Tech, Push Sweeping Overhaul of Antitrust, New York Times (June 29, 2021)


Week 2: Tech and Democracy #1 / Monday, Oct. 4, 2021

Guest Speakers:

1. Hillary Clinton, former secretary of state, U.S. senator, and two-time candidate for president.


Speaker bios and readings for this class session will be distributed one week in advance of this session. The syllabus will be updated to reflect these additions accordingly.

Week 3: Tech and Democracy #2 / Monday, Oct. 11, 2021

Guest Speakers:

1. Kara Swisher, an American tech journalist, she is an opinion writer for The New York Times, a contributing editor at New York, the host of the podcast Sway, and the co-host of the podcast Pivot.
2. Reid Hoffman, an American internet entrepreneur, venture capitalist and author who was the co-founder and executive chairman of LinkedIn. He is currently a partner at the venture capital firm Greylock Partners.

3. Sacha Baron Cohen, an actor, comedian, producer, and writer.

Speaker bios and readings for this class session will be distributed one week in advance of this session. The syllabus will be updated to reflect these additions accordingly.

Week 4: Tech & Its Impact on Kids & Families / Monday, Oct. 18, 2021

Guest Speakers:

1. Vivek Murthy, an American physician and a vice admiral in the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps who has served as the 19th and 21st Surgeon General of the United States under President Obama and President Biden.

2. Laurie Santos, a cognitive scientist and Professor of Psychology at Yale University who is also the Director of Yale's Comparative Cognition Laboratory, Director of Yale's Canine Cognition Lab, and Head of Yale's Silliman College.

3. Chelsea Clinton, an American writer and global health advocate.

Speaker bios and readings for this class session will be distributed one week in advance of this session. The syllabus will be updated to reflect these additions accordingly.

Week 5: Tech and Educational Innovation / Monday, Oct. 25, 2021

Guest Speakers:

1. Sal Khan, an American educator and the founder of Khan Academy, a free online education platform and an organization with which he has produced over 6,500 video lessons teaching a wide spectrum of academic subjects, originally focusing on mathematics and sciences.

2. Eric Yuan, a businessman, engineer, and the CEO and founder of Zoom Video Communications.

3. John King, CNN's chief national correspondent, based in Washington, D.C., and is the weekday anchor of its roundtable political discussion program Inside Politics.
Speaker bios and readings for this class session will be distributed one week in advance of this session. The syllabus will be updated to reflect these additions accordingly.

**Week 6: Tech & Race & Equity / Monday, Nov. 1, 2021**

*Guest Speakers:*

1. Julian Castro, an American lawyer and Democratic politician from San Antonio who was the youngest member of President Obama's cabinet, serving as the 16th United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development from 2014 to 2017.
2. Ellen Pao, an American investor and former CEO of social media company Reddit.
3. Julie Lythcott-Haims, an American educator, author, and public speaker who has written three non-fiction books: *How to Raise an Adult*, on parenting; *Real American*, a memoir; and *Your Turn: How to Be an Adult*.

Speaker bios and readings for this class session will be distributed one week in advance of this session. The syllabus will be updated to reflect these additions accordingly.

**Week 7: How Big Should Tech Be: US & Global / Monday, Nov. 8, 2021**

*Guest Speakers:*

1. Jessica Rosenworcel, an American lawyer currently serving as a member and acting chairwoman of the Federal Communications Commission.
2. Bill Kennard, an American attorney who served as the U.S. Ambassador to the European Union and chairman of the Federal Communications Commission.
3. Jonathan Zittrain, an American professor of Internet law and the George Bemis Professor of International Law at Harvard Law School.

Speaker bios and readings for this class session will be distributed one week in advance of this session. The syllabus will be updated to reflect these additions accordingly.

**Week 8: The Future of Tech / Monday, Nov. 15, 2021**

*Guest Speakers:*

1. Margaret Spellings, President and CEO of Texas 2036, she formerly served as United States Secretary of Education from 2005 to 2009 and as President of the
University of North Carolina, overseeing the seventeen campus system from 2016 until 2019.

2. Deval Patrick, an American politician, civil rights lawyer, author, and businessman who served as the 71st governor of Massachusetts from 2007 to 2015.

Speaker bios and readings for this class session will be distributed one week in advance of this session. The syllabus will be updated to reflect these additions accordingly.