



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

The History of Information Networks - 39217

Last update 23-08-2023

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 1st degree (Bachelor)

Responsible Department: History

Academic year: 0

Semester: 2nd Semester

Teaching Languages: Hebrew

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Prof. Yuval Noah Harari

Coordinator Email: ynharari@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: By appointment

Teaching Staff:

Prof Yuvalnoah Harari

Course/Module description:

The course examines the history of information networks, and their crucial role in history. The course begins with the evolution of language, and the appearance of a new kind of information network about 70,000 years ago, which enabled humans to conquer the world. We then discuss the role of writing in the ancient world and its influence on the rise of new kinds of kingdoms, trade networks and religions; print in the early-modern era; mass media in the late modern era; and the rise of the computer, the Internet and AI in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. We'll examine how information networks are used to decipher humans, decide for them, replace them, and upgrade them, and we'll discuss phenomena like propaganda, fake news, social media and surveillance regimes in a wide historical context. At the end, we'll discuss the possibility that in the 21st century a completely new kind of information network will appear, which will not be based on humans, and which might end human domination of planet Earth.

Course/Module aims:

To offer an introduction to historical thinking about the role and influence of information networks in the past, present and future.

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

At the end of the course, students who participated in it will be able to think historically about information networks, including about present-day phenomena such as artificial intelligence, fake news, social media and surveillance regimes.

Attendance requirements(%):

100

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: Opening lecture followed by open discussion.

Course/Module Content:

1. Introduction.
2. The Sapiens network emerges.
3. Writing in the ancient world.
4. Money, the Bible and the Church.
5. Print in the early modern era and the history of fake news.
6. Mass Media: The Radio, the Pope, Hitler and Churchill.

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7. *The Computer, the Brain, Intelligence and Consciousness: When Turing met Darwin.*
 8. *Hacking humans.*
 9. *Deciding for humans.*
 10. *Replacing humans.*
 11. *War, peace and data-colonialism.*
 12. *Upgrading Humans: Cyborgs, Avatars and Non-Organic Beings.*
 13. *Conclusions.*

Required Reading:

Reading materials for each class will be given every week.

Additional Reading Material:

Reading materials for each class will be given every week.

Grading Scheme:

Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 100 %

Additional information: