

DES INV 190-9

Thinking Like a Good Ancestor: Finding meaning in the technology we build

Fridays 10:00-12:00

2 units

INSTRUCTORS:

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DESCRIPTION

The high-speed disruption culture incubated by Silicon Valley companies and startups lacks tools to look beyond the immediacy of its path-to-market strategies. The tech world relies on user experience professionals to look beyond its engineering offices, but even then the scope of what we look at is the short-term reception of our developments by our users, and not the long-term shifts that will derive from them.

The pace of social change, driven by technical innovation, has accelerated to the point where each one of us has become our own ancestor. That is, we each become victims and beneficiaries of the inventions we create. Thus, we propose to translate the notion of ancestry from the domain of genealogical legacy to the context of technological development and innovation.

Through the new concept of Ancestry Thinking, this course will propose ideas to broaden our understanding of the technological ecosystem we live in. Throughout the semester we will discuss ways to internalize what would otherwise remain as externalities or byproducts of tech developments. Our goal is to enable future tech practitioners to build holistic narratives around their developments.

COURSE TOPICS

Ancestry Thinking: A framework for looking at technology from three vantage points that are usually taken for granted

- Assumptions: The inadvertent preconceptions that tend to remain implicit throughout the lifecycle of a project.
 - Offset: Expliciting Assumptions
- Externalities: The side effects of our actions that tend to remain unacknowledged throughout the lifecycle of a project.
 - Offset: Acknowledging Externalities (Internalization)
- Time: The continuum from yesterday to tomorrow that tends to remain out of scope beyond the immediate future.
 - Offset: Scoping Time

COURSE SCHEDULE

The course will be split into 3 main units: Assumptions, Externalities, and Time.

Each unit will have 3 distinct Friday sessions:

- Introduction / Lecture: The instructors will introduce students to each unit through examples & case studies, followed by a group discussion.
- Guest Lecturer(s): The instructors will select one or more guests that will talk about their own professional experiences, followed by a group discussion that links these talks with the unit of the course.
- Group activity: The instructors will design a group activity that will be conducted in the classroom or somewhere near campus where students will be asked to apply the contents of the unit to real life objects, situations or places from their environment at Berkeley.

Calendar

Month	Day	Unit	Description
August	25	Introduction	Instructor & student introductions What do we mean by thinking like a good ancestor? Why does this matter in Silicon Valley?
September	1	Assumptions	Introduction Group Discussion
	8		Guest Speakers (TBC)
	15		Group Activity: 'Bag of Stuff'
	22	Externalities	Introduction & Group Discussion
	29		Guest Speakers (TBC)
October	6		Group Activity
	13	Time	Introduction & Group Discussion
	20		Guest Speakers (TBC)
	27		Group Activity
November	3	Ancestry Thinking	How does this all come together? How can we use this in everyday life?
	10	HOLIDAY	
	17	Final Project Prep	Workshop for students to work on their final assignment

	24	HOLIDAY	
December	1	Final Project	Final project presentations

ASSIGNMENTS

There will be 4 assignments in total: one for each unit and a final project.

Assignment	Start Date	Due Date	Description
Unit 1: Assumptions	9/1	9/22	For each unit, students will be asked to collect 10 real-life examples of the concepts discussed in class. Students will submit these through an online platform where all students can see and comment on each other's contributions. At the end of the semester, each student will have a 'deck' of 30 examples.
Unit 2: Externalities	9/22	10/13	
Unit 3: Time	10/13	11/3	
Final Project	11/3	12/1	Working in groups of 3-4, students will be asked to share with each other the examples they've collected throughout the semester and to find among those 90 to 120 examples trends, similarities, patterns, etc. Based on these, each group will propose a taxonomy to classify/organize the aspects in which the concepts of the class can be applied. Finally, each group will propose, based on their examples and taxonomies, 10 applied principles for thinking like a good ancestor.

Format for each example (assignments 1 through 3):

- Image (Mandatory)
- Caption that links to the unit it is assigned to (Mandatory)
- Link (optional)
- Video (optional)

READING LIST

- *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*, by Donella H. Meadows (2008)
- *Throwing Rocks at the Google Bus: How Growth Became the Enemy of Prosperity*, by Douglas Rushkoff (2016)
- *Predictably Irrational*, by Dan Ariely
- *The Political Mind: A Cognitive Scientist's Guide to Your Brain and Its Politics*, by George Lakoff
- *The Long Descent*, by John Michael Greer
- *Program or Be Programmed*, by Douglas Rushkoff
- *Thinking Fast and Slow*, by Daniel Kahneman