Social informatics refers to an interdisciplinary body of research dedicated to studying the design, uses, and effects of information technologies. Rather than trace the “social impact” of these technologies, social informatics seeks to understand how social contexts shape the form and character of technology. Conversely, it also studies how technology influences society, affects power relations, and restructures social and organizational networks. In the course, we will be developing our understanding of these issues by engaging critically with various debated topics relating to information and communication technologies (ICTs). This course asks students to go beyond the “technical” aspects of ICTs and consider the social relations that are an integral part of designing and adopting a technology or technological system. It also challenges students to think critically about technological change and acquire a more sophisticated understanding of the political, economic, and social considerations that underlie technological development.

By the completion of the course, students will:
1) Understand that the design, use, and application of information technology is a social AND a technical process.
2) Be able apply a range of frameworks that describe how technologies operate in society.
3) Be able to analyze contemporary sociotechnical issues from multiple perspectives.
4) Be able to locate primary and secondary sources of information on social informatics topics, summarize their content, critically engage with the arguments presented therein, and use them as evidence to create their own arguments.