Transhumanism

HCI 530 – HCI Graduate Seminar
ISC 406 – ISC Undergraduate Elective

This is an interdisciplinary course that studies transhumanism, an international cultural, philosophical, and intellectual movement. The proponents of transhumanism advocate and predict the enhancement of the human condition by developing and making widely available sophisticated technologies able to greatly enhance longevity, mood and cognitive abilities. Influenced by seminal works of science fiction, the transhumanist vision of a transformed future humanity has excited the interest of many researchers and academics.

Students will study the potential benefits and dangers of emerging technologies that could overcome fundamental human limitations as well as the ethics of using such technologies. This course will focus on the transhumanist belief that human beings may eventually be able to transform themselves into beings with abilities so greatly expanded from the current condition as to merit the label of posthuman beings.

It is impossible to cover all of the topics involved in the transhumanism movement in one course. However, this course will touch on multiple philosophical concepts (such as free will, hyperreality, and consciousness), artificial intelligence (such as neural networks and genetic algorithms), and a range of transhumanist ideas and concepts (such as robot consciousness, body augmentation, the singularity, and ethical concerns related to these concepts).

It is expected that upon the successful completion of this course, students will:

- Gain a solid background in basic concepts of the transhumanism movement.
- Be able to think critically about the development and implementation of future technologies
- Be able to assess the ethical implications surrounding the use of these technologies within society.
- Be prepared for more advanced study in specific transhumanist concepts.

Infusion of Ethical Concerns into the Course

It is impossible to teach any course on transhumanism without discussion of the ethical, cultural, and moral implications arising from the implementation of this technology in any society. Throughout the course students are expected to think critically about the technological issues facing society and be aware of multiple possible ways to overcome these impending problems. By the end of the course students are expected to be able to describe and discuss the ethical concerns related to transhumanist concepts and be able to propose solutions to some of these ethical dilemmas and problems.

The Transhumanism course is split into three distinct sections Philosophy, A.I. Technology, and Transhumanist Topics.

The Transhumanist Topics sections is split into individual themes (theme list here) →

- Our A.I. Future
- Our Dangerous A.I. Future
- Talking to A.I. (NLP)
- A.I. in China
- Robots (An Introduction)
- Driverless Vehicles
- Future Work
- Robots and Ethics
- Robot Relationships
- The Singularity
- Consciousness Revisited
- Body Augmentation
- Genetic Engineering
- Transhumanism & Feminism

Topics relating to diversity, equity and inclusion are prevalent throughout most of these individual sections. For example :

- Racism and bias in A.I. systems (Talking to A.I.)
- The way different cultures approach the implementation of technology (A.I in China)
- Philosophical concepts around free will and decision making (Driverless Vehicles)
- Using swarm intelligence to make ethical, culturally specific, decisions (Driverless Vehicles)
- The impact of technology on socio-economic inequality (Future Work)
- Current attempts to introduce diversity and ethics into technology (Robots and Ethics)
- Military 'killer' robots and ethics of decision making (Robot and Ethics)
- Gendered representations of technology in popular culture (Robot Relationships)
- Inclusion of diverse gender and sexual orientation in robot interaction (Robot Relationships)
- Impact of socio-economic inequality on access to technology (Body Augmentation)
- Future gender roles, studying work of Hayles and Haraway (Transhumanism and Feminism)

Students are expected to apply the theories and frameworks from the first two course sections (Philosophy and A.I. Technology) to the topics discussed in the larger, final Transhumanism Topics section of the course.