HIS 393
THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Monday/Wednesday, 4:00-5:20pm

Satisfies: SBS+

Thematic Categories: "Arts, Ideas & Culture,"
"Law, Politics & Social Justice"

Professor Lawrence Frohman

Since the 1970s, it has become increasingly common to say that we live in an "information society" or the "information age." Although most people equate the advent of the information society with the invention of the computer and, more recently, the internet, the roots of the information society reach back to the early 1800s and beyond, and its development was driven by an array of political, economic, and social forces, which collectively shaped the history of information technology as much as they were shaped by it. In this class, we will investigate how information (and the closely related concepts of data and knowledge) became central sources of authority and power from the early 1800s to the present. The class will focus primarily on Europe and the United States. We will discuss such topics as the evolution of information technologies; surveillance, policing, censuses, and state power; networks and infrastructure; changing conceptions of information and information science; cybernetics, Cold War culture, and the counterculture; privacy, secrecy, and social protest in the computer age; the growth of the internet and its impact on capitalism, the media and public life; and big data and the right to be forgotten. The goal of the course is to understand the distinctive ways in which information is shaping contemporary society and altering our sense of what it means to be a human being.