

Science, Technology & Society

STS

What is STS?

All education is preparation for life: STS education is preparation for life in the 21st century world, where science and technology play a dominant role in all social activities. Science has long since broken through the walls of the laboratory, and technology through the walls of the factory. They are now interwoven into complex systems that structure and shape all human affairs, from war to work to weather.

STS is a deeply interdisciplinary field that explores the origins and implications of this new world in which science, technology, and society have integrated in such a powerful way. An STS perspective is now an essential element in professional preparation for science, engineering, law, business, the military, and medicine, as well as part of civic education for everyone who seeks to make a positive difference in the 21st century.

STS at MIT

What do epidemics, financial derivatives, slot machines, wildlife conservation, and sniper camouflage have in common? These are just some of the diverse faculty research interests you will encounter in STS. Working at the intersection of history, anthropology, and sociology, scholars in STS examine how science and technology express social values, and how changes in science and technology affect human experience.

Founded in 1976, STS is the MIT department with the most experience in interdisciplinary research and teaching at a time when MIT is increasingly recognizing the value of interdisciplinary studies for all students.

Undergraduate Program

Undergraduates can take individual subjects in STS.

Many of these are joint-listed with other departments, and most subjects fulfill the new HASS distribution requirement. Our Tier I subjects gives students a solid introduction to our department (for example, “Bioethics,” “The Rise of Modern Science” and “Evolution and Society”). Other subjects, while open to all undergraduates, are designed to appeal especially to majors in other courses (for example, “Einstein, Oppenheimer, Feynman” for physics majors and “Neuroscience and Society” for biology and brain and cognitive science majors). A number of STS subjects also count towards fulfillment of MIT’s Communications Requirement.

Concentration

The STS Program encourages students to concentrate or minor in STS as an introduction to an interdisciplinary perspective in preparation for professional and civic life. An STS concentration requires three subjects. Students have a great deal of latitude in designing a concentration to complement their other MIT studies with STS subjects of particular interest to them.

Minor

An STS minor requires six subjects. Again there is a great deal of latitude allowed to students in selecting five of them. The sixth is a critical issues small-group seminar where students are encouraged to design reading lists and research projects of particular interest to them. As with other minors at MIT, the STS minor is specified on the undergraduate diploma.

Major

STS majors, as well as minors, enjoy a great deal of curricular flexibility and personal attention. While STS does not offer an independent major, students can double major in STS, completing a full major in

any field of science or engineering as well as a second major in STS. This provides a “dual competency” in science or engineering on one hand, and in social science and humanities on the other--a “dual competency” that is increasingly needed and valued in the world of the 21st century.

Alternatively, students may choose a joint major to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in Humanities and Science or Humanities and Engineering (course 21S or 21E, respectively). In this arrangement, students complete the major requirements in STS plus take six subjects in one science or engineering field.

Advanced undergraduate students are also welcome (with permission of the instructor) to take graduate classes offered as part of the doctoral program in History, Anthropology, and STS (HASTS). Undergraduates also have more informal opportunities to work with HASTS graduate students, and STS faculty on UROPs and other research projects.

Contact Information

For further information about the Program in Science, Technology, and Society check the web at <http://web.mit.edu/sts/> or write to us at:

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You can also call the STS Academic Administrator at (617) 253-9759.

The MIT Bulletin, Courses and Degree Programs Issue, contains further information on the Institute, including all graduate and undergraduate courses and programs. For details on ordering the course catalogue, please visit the MIT Press Bookstore website at

<http://mitpress.mit.edu/bookstore/bulletin.html>.

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