

POLS3951

INNOVATION
Creativity, Politics, and Social Change

Fall 2025

Instructor: Caterina Chiopris, cc5398@columbia.edu

Time: Tuesday, 2:10 pm – 4 pm

Location: 711 International Affairs Building

OFFICE HOURS: You can sign up for office hours [\[here\]](#). Office hours will be held in 734, International Affairs Building.

Description

This class examines the relationship between innovation and creativity and their relevance for institutional change, cultural evolution, economic growth and inequality. First, we will discuss how innovation occurs at the micro level – what prompts creativity in individuals, artists and scientists, entrepreneurs, cultural leaders, and within firms? How can we define and quantitatively measure what is novelty and innovation?

Next, we will explore similar issues of creativity and innovation within politics and political institutions, as well as broader social patterns: How do leaders introduce novelty in politics? How do institutions change, and how has the state adapted to new technologies? What makes certain societies or political systems more prone to innovate and change? Why are others more resistant to adopt innovation? What causes backlash to novelty?

Students will be encouraged to see the parallels in the catalysts and constraints of innovation in the traditional sense (i.e., technology) and politics (creating new political issues, new parties, new organizations). How does political change resemble and differ from entrepreneurship and organizational creativity? Moreover, the course will show the dual relationship between the state and innovation: how the state can foster innovation, and how technological change has shaped state institutions, especially in the digital era. We will discuss how innovation can be the main driver of economic growth, yet the concentration of innovation can further worsen inequality.

Throughout the class, students will be exposed to both classics and recent work in political economy and other social sciences and adjacent fields, and will cover a range of approaches to theory, of empirical methods, as well as of contexts, covering both democracies and authoritarian regimes, micro-incentives to innovators as well as macro or structural factors. Students will be introduced to cutting-edge methods to study novelty, such as network analysis and text-as-data.

Structure

The weekly seminar will be structured as follows:

- Introduction of the topic by the instructor (30-45 min)
- Student-driven discussion of the required readings (30-45 min)
- Short break
- Student presentation and discussion (20 min)

Evaluation:

The final grade for this class will be based on:

1. Class participation (20%)

Every student is expected to participate actively in class discussion every week. You should come prepared to discuss the strengths, limitations, and broader implications of all required readings. To prepare, you should submit a response and a discussion question that relates to one or more of the readings by the end of the day before each class.

2. Presentation (15%)

After the drop deadline, each week an individual or a small group of students (depending on class enrollment) will give a 15-minutes presentation to the rest of the class. If working in groups, each student should specify what was their contribution to the group project. The goal of the presentation is to either present a paper related to the topic of the class, or a case of innovation – either historical or recent – and consider the factors that allowed its diffusion (or lack thereof), and describe the puzzle around the case. The questions the presentation should raise are, for instance: why did “bad” innovation successfully diffuse? Why did “good” innovation fail to spread? What unexpected consequences did the innovation have? Innovations considered can be technology, but also cultural or political, as long as students make clear why the case in question was (or could have been) a break from the past with effects for society. At the end of presentation, students should be prepared to lead a discussion among the rest of the class.

3. Research proposal (15%)

Deadline: **October 10.** Students should submit a 3-page proposal for their final project. You should describe the motivation for the project, the research question, the data you plan to use (if applicable), and the empirical strategy you plan to follow (if applicable), and how your topic relates to the class content.

4. Final research paper (50%)

Deadline: **December 12.** Students should write an original research paper, 10-15 pages double-spaced, excluding the bibliography. It should be related to the content of the class, and it should provide a contribution in at least one of the following: (1) theory, (2) measurement, (3) empirical analysis. You are strongly encouraged to start working early in the semester on the final project and provide updates throughout to the instructor, and be mindful of the feedback received on the research proposal.

What are the discussion guidelines for the class?

- a) Please whenever possible refer to classmates by name. Be understanding if a colleague tries but mispronounces your name or confuses you with someone else.
- b) Allow everyone the chance to speak. If you already spoke multiple times, please let someone else comment.
- c) If you have a criticism of a colleague's comment, please make sure to construct your comments in terms of ideas/concepts and not the individual.
- d) Please do not interrupt your colleagues.
- e) Please be prepared for possible cold-calling but know that we all understand we are not always equally prepared.

Source: CTL website, Columbia University

Enrollment and Prerequisites

Students should have taken a research methods class, at least at the level of "Research Design: Scope and Methods" (POLS UN3720) or "Introduction to Econometrics" (ECON UN3414). It will be assumed that students can read assigned papers using statistical methods, although a refresher on how to read regression equations and tables will be provided.

Disabilities Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability and have a DS-certified 'Accommodation Letter' please come to the instructor's office hours to confirm your accommodation needs. If you believe that you might have a disability that requires accommodation, you should contact Disability Services at 212-854-2388 and disability@columbia.edu (or the equivalent office at your school).

Academic Integrity

From the official Columbia University website page on academic integrity: "The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Students failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave Columbia.

For more information on academic integrity at Columbia, students may refer to the Columbia University Undergraduate Guide to Academic Integrity:
<http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity>.

IN ADDITION: About the use of ChatGPT (or other AI-powered tools), please limit the use of these tools to 1. English-language editing of fully written essays or slides. 2. Minor coding support. The content and ideas of assignments need to be your own.

Overview of Weekly Topics and Readings

Week 1 (Sep 2). Introduction: What are Creativity and Innovation?

No readings required. Topics covered:

- Creative destruction versus imitative variation.
- Forms of innovation: serendipity, recombination of existing ideas, marginal improvements.
- Creativity and divergent thinking; group versus individual creativity.

Additional Readings

Kuhn, Thomas. 1962. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

Hall, Peter A. 1993. "Policy paradigms, Social learning, and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain." *Comparative politics*, pp. 275–296.

----- Part 1: Defining Innovation outside of Politics

Week 2 (Sep 9). Innovation in Arts and Sciences

Kelly, Bryan, et al. 2021. "Measuring technological innovation over the long run." *American Economic Review: Insights* 3.3: 303-320

Bloom, Nicholas, et al. 2025. "The diffusion of new technologies." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

Giorcelli, Michela, and Petra Moser. 2020. "Copyrights and creativity: Evidence from Italian opera in the Napoleonic age." *Journal of Political Economy* 128.11: 4163-4210.

Additional Readings

Azoulay, Pierre, Christian Fons-Rosen, and Joshua S. Graff Zivin. 2019. "Does science advance one funeral at a time?." *American Economic Review* 109.8: 2889-2920.

Akcigit, Ufuk, Salomé Baslandze, and Stefanie Stantcheva. 2016. "Taxation and the international mobility of inventors." *American economic review* 106.10: 2930-2981.

Week 3 (Sep 16). Innovation in Business & Culture: Entrepreneurship; Creativity in Firms; Cultural Entrepreneurship

Amabile, Teresa. 2011. *Componential theory of creativity*. Harvard Business School.

March, James G. 1991. "Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning." *Organization Science* 2(1): 71-87.

Becker, Sascha O., Yuan Hsiao, Steven Pfaff, and Jared Rubin. 2020. "Multiplex Network Ties and the Spatial Diffusion of Radical Innovations: Martin Luther's Leadership in the Early Reformation." *American Sociological Review* 85(5): 857-894.

Additional Readings.

Webster, Elizabeth, Alfons Palangkaraya and Tom Spurling. 2021. "What drives firm innovation? A review of the economics literature."

Bisin, Alberto, and Thierry Verdier. 2011. "The Economics of Cultural Transmission and Socialization."

Week 4 (Sep 23). What is Novelty and how to Measure it?

Fortunato, Santo, et al. 2018. "Science of science." *Science* 359.6379

Uzzi, Brian, et al. 2013. "Atypical combinations and scientific impact." *Science* 342.6157: 468-472.

Zhao, Y., Zhang, C. 2025. "A review on the novelty measurements of academic papers." *Scientometrics* 130, 727–753.

----- Part 2: Innovation in Politics and Institutions

Week 5 (Sep 30). Innovation in Politics: Issue Entrepreneurship

Hobolt, Sara B., and Catherine E. De Vries. 2015. "Issue entrepreneurship and multiparty competition." *Comparative Political Studies* 48.9: 1159-1185.

Shepsle, Kenneth. 2017. *Rule breaking and political imagination*. University of Chicago Press. [selected chapter]

Savin, Nikita, and Daniel Treisman. 2024. "Donald Trump's words". National Bureau of Economic Research, No. w32665.

Additional Readings

Kitschelt, Herbert. 1989. *The Logics of Party Formation: Ecological Politics in Belgium and West Germany*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. [selected chapter]

Week 6 (Oct 7). Innovation in the State and the Bureaucracy

Wang, Shaoda, and David Yang. 2021. "Policy experimentation in China: The political economy of policy learning."

Gray, Virginia. 1973. "Innovation in the states: A diffusion study." *American political science review* 67.4: 1174-1185.

Shipan, Charles R., and Craig Volden. 2008. "The Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion." *American Journal of Political Science* 52(4): 840-857.

Week 7 (Oct 14). The State's Role in Innovation

Johnson, Chalmers. 1982. *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925-1975*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. pp. 3-34.

Kohli, Atul. 2004. *State-Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery*. New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1-26 and 367-426

Mazzucato, Mariana. 2013. *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Sector Myths*. London: Anthem Press. [selected chapter]

Beraja, Martin, David Y. Yang, and Noam Yuchtman. 2023. "Data-intensive innovation and the state: Evidence from AI firms in China." *The Review of Economic Studies* 90.4: 1701-1723.

----- Part 3. Dynamics: Drivers and Constraints to the Diffusion of Innovation

Week 8 (Oct 21). What Helps the Adoption of Innovation?

Mokyr, Joel. 2016. *A culture of growth: The origins of the modern economy*. Princeton University Press. [selected chapter]

Almelhem, Ali, et al. 2023. "Enlightenment ideals and belief in progress in the run-up to the industrial revolution: A textual analysis."

Puett, Michael J. 2002. *The ambivalence of creation: Debates concerning innovation and artifice in early China*. Stanford University Press. [selected chapter]

Chiopris, Caterina. 2025. "The Diffusion of Ideas."

Week 9 (Oct 28). What Stops the Adoption of Innovation?

Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. 2006. "Economic backwardness in political perspective." *American political science review* 100.1: 115-131.

Frieden, Jeffry, and Arthur Silve. 2023. "The political reception of innovations." *Economics & Politics* 35.2: 595-628.

Stephan, Paula E., Reinhilde Veugelers, and Jian Wang. 2016. "Bias against novelty in science".

Week 10 (Nov 11). Democratizing Talent

Hofstra, Bas, et al. 2020. "The diversity–innovation paradox in science." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117.17: 9284-9291.

Andrews, Michael and Rothwell, Jonathan T., 2023. "Reassessing the Contributions of African American Inventors to the Golden Age of Innovation".

Hsieh, Chang-Tai, et al. 2019. "The allocation of talent and US economic growth." *Econometrica* 87.5: 1439-1474.

----- Part 4. Consequences of Innovation

Week 11 (Nov 18). The Effect of Technology on Institutions; Digital Governance

Mastrorocco, Nicola, and Edoardo Teso. 2023. State capacity as an organizational problem. Evidence from the growth of the US state over 100 years. *National Bureau of Economic Research*, No. w31591.

Baldwin, Richard. 2016. *The Great Convergence: Information Technology and the New Globalization*. Harvard University Press. [selected chapter]

Klonick, Kate. 2017. "The new governors: The people, rules, and processes governing online speech." *Harv. L. Rev.* 131: 1598.

Week 12 (Nov 25). Innovation, Economic Growth, and Inequality

Romer, Paul M. 1990. "Endogenous Technological Change." *Journal of Political Economy* 98(5): S71-S102.

Aghion, Philippe, et al. 2019. "Innovation and top income inequality." *The Review of Economic Studies* 86.1:1-45.

Chiopris, Caterina, Torben Iversen and David Soskice. 2025. "Technological change and spatial inequality."

Additional readings

Gingrich, Jane. 2024. "Regional Inequality in Europe and North America."

Aghion, Philippe, and Peter Howitt. 1990. "A model of growth through creative destruction."

Acemoglu, Daron, Philippe Aghion, and Fabrizio Zilibotti. 2006. "Distance to frontier, selection, and economic growth." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 4.1: 37-74.

Weitzman, Martin L. 1998. "Recombinant Growth." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 113(2): 331-360.

Bloom, Nicholas, Charles I. Jones, John Van Reenen, and Michael Webb. 2020. "Are Ideas Getting Harder to Find?" *American Economic Review* 110(4): 1104-1144.

Week 13 (Dec 2). Recap and Open Questions