TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE

OF WORK

**WORKLABR 1D03 - Winter 2023**

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**LECTURE:** Monday 7-9

**LECTURE ROOM** – Hamilton Hall 109

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# Course Description

This course explores technology and the future of work. Since the dawn of industrialization, there have been fears that machines would replace workers – will these fears finally prove justified in the 21st century? This course will explore this question from several angles, starting with the narrow debate about technology replacing workers – and then it will broaden out the discussion. It will interrogate the assumptions that inform much of this debate – assumptions about what kind of technology should be discussed and what kinds of work may be changing. Then the focus widens further, and the course will introduce students to many of the key questions in the field of Labour Studies. It will examine how the impacts of technology vary depending on age, gender, race, and whether workers are recent immigrants or long-time residents. It explores how employers – past and present – have used technology to monitor and control workers. And it assesses workers’ and governments’ responses to technological change.

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# Course Learning Objectives

This course will enhance the students’ depth and breadth of knowledge. There is a rich and diverse literature on the subject of technology and work and this course will help students to understand it.

As with all Labour Studies courses, it takes an interdisciplinary approach, thus allowing students to learn and apply different theoretical frameworks and analytical tools from various fields. This will also enhance the students’ depth and breadth of knowledge.

The course will also enhance students’ application of knowledge, in particular their ability to review interpret and present information. This will be done through the different course assignments. One will be in the style of a professional briefing note; one will be a personal reflection; one will be a short critical essay.

The course will give students greater understanding of the limits of knowledge. This is a subject that inspires many confident predictions and prognostications. This course will raise serious questions about whether all of these predictions are consistent, let alone reliable.

# Required Materials and Texts

* There is a great deal of excellent material on this subject online. All course readings will be available online (open access) or through the course’s Avenue to Learn website.

# Course Evaluation Breakdown

In-class test February 13 15%

Research Essay March 20 30%

Tutorial Participation Through the term 20%

Final Exam Exam Period 35%

# Notes on Evaluations

# Both the In-class test and the Final Exam will be online, on Avenue to Learn. Both will involve a mixture of instant answer-questions (such as multiple-choice, true-false, matching exercises, etc), and written response questions. For all written response questions, you will be given a chance to pick between 2-3 questions to answer. Final exam covers all material *after* the in-class test.

# The essay will be a directed research assignment, that is to say, you will choose from a list of questions, all related to issues covered in class [it won’t be up to you to come up with a topic]. There will also be tutorial time devoted to your research and writing skills, including a session with a research librarian from Mills Library

# Tutorial participation is divided roughly in half between attendance and participation.

# Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

## **NOTE –** this course covers a lot of events that are in the news, therefore a considerable chunk of the readings are media reports, which are (usually) shorter. So don’t be intimidated by the number of readings.

## **Unit 1 – Introduction**

### **Date – January 9**

Readings: None yet!

**The Obsolescence Obsession (& Getting Past It)**

## **Unit 2 – January 16**

### **Topic: Will Humans be Obsolete? The Pessimists’ View**

Readings & Audio:

1. Public Lecture: Daniel Susskind and Richard Susskind, “The Future of Professions.” <https://www.lse.ac.uk/Events/2015/11/20151130t1830vOT/the-future-of-the-professions> (scroll down on this webpage to the links for the podcast)
2. Research Brief: Kristen Broady, “Race and Jobs at High Risk of Automation,” <http://jointcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Race-and-Jobs-at-High-Risk-to-Automation-12-18-17-11_30-am.docx-2_0.pdf>
3. Research Brief: David Autor and Elisabeth Reynolds, “The Nature of Work After the COVID Crisis: Too Few Low-Wage Jobs”

<https://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/files/AutorReynolds_LO_FINAL.pdf>

*More Recommended Content:*

Report Chapters: Frei and Osborne, *Technology at Work*, Parts 1 & 2 (pp.7-22) <https://ir.citi.com/jowGiIw%2FoLrkDA%2BldI1U%2FYUEpWP9ifowg%2F4HmeO9kYfZiN3SeZwWEvPez7gYEZXmxsFM7eq1gc0%3D>

## **Unit 3 – January 23**

### **Topic: Will Humans be Obsolete? The Optimists’ View**

Readings & Audio:

1. Report Chapters: The Roosevelt Institute, “Don’t Fear the Robots: Why Automation Doesn’t Mean the End of Work.” Read: Introduction & Sections 1&2

https://rooseveltinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RI-Don%E2%80%99t-Fear-the-Robots-201806.pdf

1. TED Talk, David Autor, “Will Automation take away all our jobs?” <https://www.ted.com/talks/david_autor_why_are_there_still_so_many_jobs/discussion?CMP>

*Recommended Further Reading:*

Article: David Autor – Why Are There Still So Many Jobs? <https://economics.mit.edu/files/11563>

Public Lecture: Lacity and Wilcocks – Service Automation and the Future of Work, LSE Presentation

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/videoAndAudio/channels/publicLecturesAndEvents/player.aspx?id=3492>

## **Technology & The New World of Work**

## **Unit 4 – January 30**

**Topic: Employer Control, Worker Insecurity**

1. New Feature: Jodi Kantor and Arya Sundaram, “This Rise of the Worker Productivity Score.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/08/14/business/worker-productivity-tracking.html?action=click&module=card&pageType=theWeekenderLink>

1. News Feature: Noam Scheiber, “How Uber Uses Psychological Tricks to Push Its Drivers’ Buttons”

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/04/02/technology/uber-drivers-psychological-tricks.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=photo-spot-region&region=top-news&WT.nav=top-news>

1. Magazine Article: Freddie Stuart, “My Life as an Amazon Warehouse Worker,” *Jacobin Magazine*

Pdf on Avenue to Learn, content section

More Recommended Content:

Article: Valerio De Stefano, “‘Negotiating the Algorithm’: Automation, Artificial Intelligence, and Labour Protection,” <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3178233>

News Feature: Bloomberg News, “Fired By Bot at Amazon: ‘It’s You Against the Machine”

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-06-28/fired-by-bot-amazon-turns-to-machine-managers-and-workers-are-losing-out> OR (just text), <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/fired-by-bot-at-amazon-it-s-you-against-the-machine-1.1622625>

Online Calculator: SimpleTextin, “How Long Does it Take Tech CEO’s to Earn Your Salary?” <https://simpletexting.com/tech-ceo-salary/>

**Unit 5 – February 6**

### **Topic: New Work Structure & Platform Capitalism**

Readings:

1. Book Chapter: Jamie Woodcock, *The Fight Against Platform Capitalism*, Pdf posted on Avenue to Learn. Chapter 1, Introduction.
2. Media Report: Caroline O’Donovan and Ken Bensiger, “Amazon’s Next-Day Delivery Has Brought Chaos and Carnage To America’s Streets” <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/carolineodonovan/amazon-next-day-delivery-deaths?utm_source=pocket-newtab>
3. Media Report: Terry L. Esper, “Let’s Talk About Race and the Danger Faced By Black Delivery Drivers,” <https://www.supplychainquarterly.com/articles/3505-lets-talk-about-race-and-the-danger-faced-by-black-delivery-drivers>

*Recommended Further Reading:*

Short Article: Nick Srnicek, “The Challenges of Platform Capitalism,” <https://www.ippr.org/juncture-item/the-challenges-of-platform-capitalism>

News Feature: David Streitfeld, “Activists Build a Grass Roots Alliance Against Amazon,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/26/technology/amazon-grass-roots-activists.html>

**Mid Term Test – February 13 (online)**

**Mid-Term Recess – February 20**

## **Unit 6 – February 27**

### **Topic: The Hidden Work Behind Technology**

Readings & Video (all news features this week):

1. News Feature: Brian Merchant, “Life and Death in Apple’s Forbidden City” <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jun/18/foxconn-life-death-forbidden-city-longhua-suicide-apple-iphone-brian-merchant-one-device-extract>
2. News Feature: Nicholas Niarchos, “The Dark Side of Congo’s Cobalt Rush,” <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/05/31/the-dark-side-of-congos-cobalt-rush>
3. News Story: “‘A white-collar sweatshop’: Google Assistant contractors allege wage theft,” *The Guardian* [*https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/may/28/a-white-collar-sweatshop-google-assistant-contractors-allege-wage-theft*](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/may/28/a-white-collar-sweatshop-google-assistant-contractors-allege-wage-theft)
4. Interview (Transcript): Isaac Chotiner, “The Underworld of Online Content Moderation (CCM),” (interview with Sarah Roberts, expert on CCM) <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/the-underworld-of-online-content-moderation>
5. News Video: *Vice International*: “The Shipbreakers of Bangladesh,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JU0DXdAhdsA>

More Recommended Content:

Documentary Film: “Shipbreakers” National Film Board of Canada <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jdEG_ACXLw>

**The Politics of Work & Tech**

## **Unit 7 – March 6**

### **Topic: Workers’ Resistance and State Regulation**

Readings & Audio:

1. Scholarly Review: Bethany Hastie, “Platform Workers and Collecting Labour Action in the Modern Economy,” *Allard Research Commons* [*https://commons.allard.ubc.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1619&context=fac\_pubs*](https://commons.allard.ubc.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1619&context=fac_pubs)
2. Feature Article: Peter Guest, “We’re all fighting the giant”: Gig workers around the world are finally organizing,” *Rest of World.org.* [*https://restofworld.org/2021/gig-workers-around-the-world-are-finally-organizing/*](https://restofworld.org/2021/gig-workers-around-the-world-are-finally-organizing/)

## **Unit 8 – March 13**

**Topic: Policy Responses & the UBI**

Readings & Audio:

1. Research Article: Jhumpa Bhattacharya, “Exploring Guaranteed Income through a Racial and Gender Justice Lens” <https://insightcced.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/RI_UBI-Racial-Gender-Justice-brief-201906.pdf>
2. Advocacy Group’s Case for UBI: UBI Works, “Why We Need UBI” <https://www.ubiworks.ca/whynow>
3. Short Primer on Flexicurity: “BNP Paribas, Eco Flash: Ins-and-Outs of the Danish Flexicurity Model” <https://economic-research.bnpparibas.com/Views/DisplayPublication.aspx?type=document&IdPdf=30102>
4. News Feature: Peter Goodman, “The Robots are Coming and Sweden is Fine” <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/27/business/the-robots-are-coming-and-sweden-is-fine.html>

*Recommended Further Reading:*

Book Chapter: *Back To Work: Denmark*, (OECD Report), Chapter 2, “The Danish Flexicurity Model and Institutional Set-Up,” <https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/back-to-work-denmark/the-danish-flexicurity-model-and-institutional-setup_9789264267503-6-en#page1>

**The Sceptics About Tech & Work**

## **Unit 9 – March 20**

**Topic: The Costs of Depending on Technology**

Readings:

1. Magazine Feature: Nicholas Carr, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/>
2. Article: Manish Raghavan et al., “Mitigating Bias in Algorithmic Hiring: Evaluating Claims and Practices,” <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1906.09208.pdf>

*Recommended Further Reading:*

News Article: Nicholas T. Young, “I Know Some Algorithms Are Biased—because I Created One” <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/i-know-some-algorithms-are-biased-because-i-created-one/>

## **Unit 10 – March 27**

## **Topic: Is the Pace of Change Actually Slowing?**

### Readings & Audio:

### Article: Robert Gordon, “The Rise and Fall of American Growth” <https://assets1b.milkeninstitute.org/assets/Publication/MIReview/PDF/75-94MR69.pdf>

### Podcast Interview: Tyler Cowan, “The Complacent Class” <http://www.econtalk.org/archives/2017/05/tyler_cowen_on_1.html>

## **Unit 11 – April 3**

### **Topic: Emotional Labour, Care Work, and the Real Future of Jobs?**

Readings:

1. Magazine Article: Premilla Nadasen, “The Care Deficit” <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/care-deficit-hta-domestic-worker-organizing-history>
2. Podcast Interview: “The Future of Work Isn’t Robots. It’s Caring Humans,” <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/vox/the-ezra-klein-show/e/52206155>

*Recommended Further Reading:*

Advocacy Group’s Report: “Core Support for the New Economy,” pp.1-17 <http://www.ase.tufts.edu/gdae/Pubs/wp/16-02GoodwinCoreSupport_Draft.pdf>

## **Unit 12 – April 10**

### **Topics:**

### **Where Does Technology Come From?**

### **Closing Discussion & Exam Prep**

Readings:

1. Book Chapter: Mariana Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State,* Ch.4, “The U.S. Entrepreneurial State,” pp. 75-90. <https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Entrepreneurial_State_-_web.pdf>
2. Newspaper Article: Gina Kolata, ‘Kati Kariko Helped Shield the World from the Coronavirus,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/08/health/coronavirus-mrna-kariko.html>

# Weekly Tutorial Plan

1 – January 9 & 16: **No Tutorials (Sorry ☹)**

2 – January 23: Introduction; Humans Will Be Obsolete?

3 – January 30: Relax, There Will be Lots of Jobs?

4 – February 6: Tech & Employer Control

5 – February 13: Mid-Term Test – No Tutorials

**6 - Week of February 20: Reading Week, No tutorials**

7 - February 28: Library Research Session

8 - March 6: Hidden Work Behind Tech; Research & Writing

9 - March 13: Workers’ Resistance & State Regulation

10 - March 20: Time for the UBI?

11 - March 27: Downsides of Tech Dependence

12 - April 3: Is Technological Advance Slowing?

13 – April 10: Wrap Up and Exam Preparation

# Course Policies

## **Submission of Assignments**

* Submission of assignments and other work will be done electronically.

## **Grades**

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

| **MARK** | **GRADE** |
| --- | --- |
| 90-100 | A+ |
| 85-90 | A |
| 80-84 | A- |
| 77-79 | B+ |
| 73-76 | B |
| 70-72 | B- |
| 67-69 | C+ |
| 63-66 | C |
| 60-62 | C- |
| 57-59 | D+ |
| 53-56 | D |
| 50-52 | D- |
| 0-49 | F |

## **Late Assignments**

* **Late Penalties:**
  + **First 3 days:** 1% per working day. (This means 1% out of 100 on that assignment, not 1% from the final course grade.)
  + **After first 3 days:** 2% per working day. (This means 2% out of 100 on that assignment, not 2% from the final course grade.)
* **Grade Adjustments:** redistributions of grade values (for example, moving the weight for an assignment to the final exam) are extremely rare and given only in truly extraordinary circumstances.

## **Avenue to Learn**

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

## **Turnitin.com**

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please to go [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

# Academic Dishonesty:

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity/students/index.html>

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicIntegrity.pdf

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.

2. Improper collaboration in group work.

3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

# Department/University Policies:

Labour Studies staff does not date-stamp assignments, nor do they monitor the submission or return of student papers. All papers should be submitted/returned in-class, in tutorials or during Professor/TA office hours. Instructors who utilize Avenue to Learn will provide instructions on that preference.

## **Absence Reporting:**

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/> On-line self-reporting tool – illness lasting less than 3 days. Can only be used once per term. Instructors are not allowed to accept medical notes! These must be submitted to your Faculty office. In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”. Please also communicate with the course instructor.

## **Code of Conduct:**

<http://studentaffairs.mcmaster.ca>

“McMaster University is a community dedicated to furthering learning, intellectual inquiry, the dissemination of knowledge and personal and professional development. Membership in this community implies acceptance of the principle of mutual respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study work and live within it.”

## **Computer Use:**

(In-person sessions) Computer use in the classroom is intended to facilitate learning in that particular lecture or tutorial. At the discretion of the instructor, students using a computer for any other purpose may be required to turn the computer off for the remainder of the lecture or tutorial.

## **Course Modifications:**

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and Avenue to Learn (if used by instructor) *regularly during the term* to note any changes.

## **Email Communication Policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences:**

All e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor/TA receives a communication from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion. **Please always include student name, ID, course # and TA name in messages.**

## **Evaluations (Online):**

[http://evals.mcmaster.ca](http://evals.mcmaster.ca/), and log in via MACID.These help faculty and the School of Labour Studies to meet our goal of continually improving teaching effectiveness. All students in the course are invited and encouraged to complete the evaluation.

## **Student Accessibility Services:**

<http://sas.mcmaster.ca/>

### Location: MUSC – B107

### Contact:905-525-9140 x 28652

*NOTE: Disclosure of disability-related information is personal and confidential.*

Student Accessibility Services offers various supports for students with disabilities. We work with full time and part time students. SAS provides or assists students with their academic and disability-related needs, including: Learning Strategies, Assistive Technologies, Test & Exam Administration, Note-Taking Programs, and Classroom Accommodations. **\***Please inform the instructor if there are disability needs that are not being met.

## **McMaster University Policy on Academic Accommodation**

Please find the McMaster University policy on academic accommodation of Students with Disabilities & McMaster University Anti-Discrimination Policy at the following link:

* <http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicAccommodation-StudentsWithDisabilities.pdf>

### **Student Success Centre:**

Email Address: <http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/>

Location: GH-110

Contact: 905-525-9140 x 24254

Some services include: student orientation, academic skills, volunteerism, educational planning, employment and career transition. Writing Support: <http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/students/academic-skills/writing-support-services.html>

### **Student Wellness Centre:**

Email Address: <http://wellness.mcmaster.ca/>

Location: MUSC-B10

Contact: 905-525-9140 x 27700

Provides services in: Personal and Psychological Counselling, Mental Health Support, Medical and Health Services