

WILL ROBOTS TAKE ALL OUR JOBS?

Fall 2020

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LECTURE: Wednesday & Friday 3:30

LECTURE ROOM – Virtual

OFFICE: KTH 723

OFFICE HOURS: by appointment (email)

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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.

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	October 7	10%
Reflection Paper	October 23	15%
Research Essay	November 20	25%
Tutorial Participation	Through the term	20%
Final Exam	Exam Period	30%

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Unit 1 – Introduction

Date – September 9

Readings: None yet!

Unit 2 – September 11 & 16

Topic: Will Humans be Obsolete? The Pessimists' View

Readings & Audio:

1. Frei and Osborne, *Technology at Work*, Parts 1 & 2 (pp.7-22)
<https://ir.citi.com/jowGilw%2FoLrkDA%2BldI1U%2FYUEpWP9ifowg%2F4HmeO9kYfZiN3SeZwWEvPez7gYEZXmxsFM7eq1gc0%3D>
2. Daniel Susskind and Richard Susskind, “The Future of Professions.”
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/videoAndAudio/channels/publicLecturesAndEvents/player.aspx?id=3302> (also available at I-tunes)
3. 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

Unit 3 – September 18, 23 & 25

Topic: Will Humans be Obsolete? The Optimists' View

Readings & Audio:

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

Recommended Further Reading:

David Autor – Why are the Still So Many Jobs?

<https://economics.mit.edu/files/11563>

Unit 4 – September 30 & October 2

Topic: Technology & The New World of Work I – Employer Control, Worker Insecurity

1. Valerio De Stefano, “‘Negotiating the Algorithm’: Automation, Artificial Intelligence, and Labour Protection,”
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3178233
2. 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®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news>
3. SimpleTextin, “How Long Does it Take Tech CEO’s to Earn Your Salary?”
<https://simpletexting.com/tech-ceo-salary/>

Unit 5 – October 7 & 9

Topic: Technology & The New World of Work II - Changing Work Structure

1. David Streitfeld, “The Long, Unhappy History of Working From Home,”
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/29/technology/working-from-home-failure.html>
2. Nelson Lichtenstein, “In the Age of Wal-Mart: precarious work and authoritarian management in the global supply chain,” in *Globalization and Precarious Forms of Production and Employment*.
 - a. Available at the Library online – Challenge of the week: find & access it

Recommender Further Reading:

3. Nick Dyer-Witheford, “Cybernetics and the Making of a Global Proletariat,”
<http://www.polecom.org/index.php/polecom/article/view/63/253>

Notes: Mid-Term Test, October 7

Mid-Term Recess – No Classes October 14 & 16

Unit 6 – October 21 & 23

Topic: Technology & The New World of Work III - Rise of Platform Capitalism

Readings:

1. Andrea Fumagalli et al., “Digital Labour in the Platform Economy: The Case of Facebook,” <https://doaj.org/article/f378f251fea044098aeb5b0cb26e8fab> (click the full-text link)
2. 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. 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:

David Streitfeld, "Activists Build a Grass Roots Alliance Against Amazon,"

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/26/technology/amazon-grass-roots-activists.html>

Notes: Reflection Paper Due October 23

Unit 7 – October 28 & 30

Topic: The Politics of Work & Tech I: The State & Innovation

Readings & Audio:

1. Mariana Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State* (pamphlet), Ch.4, "The U.S. Entrepreneurial State," pp. 75-90.
https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Entrepreneurial_State_-_web.pdf
2. Mariana Mazzucato, "How the State Drives Innovation," New Economic Thinking interview, You Tube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPvG_fGPvQo
3. "The DARPA Grand Challenge, Ten Years Later" <https://www.darpa.mil/news-events/2014-03-13>

Unit 8 – November 4 & 6

Topic: Politics of Work and Tech II: Policy Responses & the UBI

Readings & Audio:

1. 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>
2. "What is the UBI?" Andrew Yang 2020 <https://www.yang2020.com/blog/wonp-introduction-great-displacement/>
3. 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

Recommended Further Reading:

"Core Support for the New Economy," pp.1-17

http://www.ase.tufts.edu/gdae/Pubs/wp/16-02GoodwinCoreSupport_Draft.pdf

Unit 9 – November 11 & 13

Topic: The Sceptics I: The Costs of Depending on Technology

Readings:

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

Recommended Further Reading:

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 – November 18 & 20

Topic: The Sceptics II: Is the Pace of Change Actually Slowing?

Readings & Audio:

1. Robert Gordon, “The Rise and Fall of American Growth”
<https://assets1b.milkeninstitute.org/assets/Publication/MIRReview/PDF/75-94MR69.pdf>
2. Tyler Cowan, “The Complacent Class” Podcast Interview
http://www.econtalk.org/archives/2017/05/tyler_cowen_on_1.html

Notes: Research Essay Due November 20

Unit 11 – November 25 & 27

Topic: Widening the Perspective I: Emotional Labour, Care Work, and the Real Future of Jobs?

Readings:

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

Unit 12 – December 2 & 4

Topic: Widening the Perspective II: Rethinking the History

Reading:

Jeff Horn, “Understanding Crowd Action: Machine Breaking in England and France”

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/understanding-crowd-action-machine-breaking-in-england.pdf?c=wsfh;idno=0642292.0031.009>

Unit 13 – December 9

Topics: Closing Discussion & Exam Prep

Weekly Tutorial Plan

- 1 – Week of September 21-25: Introduction
- 2 – Week of September 28 – October 2: Will Humans Be Obsolete?
- 3 - Week of October 5-9: Employer Surveillance & Control
- 4 - Week of October 12-16: Reading Week, No tutorials**
- 5 - Week of October 19-23: Research & Writing
- 6 - Week of October 26-30: Platform Capitalism
- 7 - Week of November 2-6: The State & Innovation
- 8 - Week of November 9-13: Time for the UBI?
- 9 - Week of November 16-20: Downsides of Tech Dependence
- 9 - Week of November 23-27: Is Technological Advance Slowing?
- 10 - Week of November 30-December 4: Wrap Up and Exam Preparation

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

- Since this class is entirely online, 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:** 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.

Academic Dishonesty:

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour 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. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

In this course, we will be using a software package designed to reveal plagiarism.

Authenticity/ Plagiarism Detection:

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software.

All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Courses with an On-Line Element:

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, 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 a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring:

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Conduct Expectations:

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of

maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO):

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

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.

Copyright and Recording:

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, including lectures by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

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.

Extreme Circumstances:

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

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>, 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