

WILL ROBOTS TAKE ALL OUR JOBS?

Fall 2018

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LECTURE: Wednesdays 7-10pm, Wilson Hall 1055

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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 about what kind of technology should be discussed and what kinds of work may be changing. It will also examine how the impacts of technology vary depending on age, gender, race, and whether workers are recent immigrants or long-time residents. And it takes a historical approach that explores just how technology has reshaped work in the past.

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

Briefing Note Assignment	October 3	10%
Reflection Paper	October 24	15%
Short Essay	November 21	25%
Group Work & Participation	Through the term	15%
Final Exam	Exam Period	35%

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 – Introduction

Date – September 5

Readings: None yet!

Week 2 – September 12

Topic: The Replacement Debate I: The Pessimists

Readings & Audio:

1. Frei and Osborne, *Technology at Work*, Parts 1 & 2 (pp.7-22)
<https://ir.citi.com/jowGilw%2FoLrkDA%2Bldl1U%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)

Week 3 – September 19

Topic: The Replacement Debate II: The Optimists

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
3. David Autor – Why are the Still So Many Jobs?
<https://economics.mit.edu/files/11563>

Week 4 – September 26

Topic: The Changing Nature of Work I – Employer Control, Worker Insecurity

Readings:

1. Annie Lowrey, “The Uber Economy Requires a New Category of Worker” <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/07/uber-economy-requires-a-new-category-of-worker.html>
2. Jody Kantor and David Streitfeld, “Inside Amazon: Wrestling Big Ideas in a Bruising Workplace” https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/16/technology/inside-amazon-wrestling-big-ideas-in-a-bruising-workplace.html?_r=0
3. 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>

Week 5 – October 3

Topic: The Changing Nature of Work II – Transforming Economic Systems

Readings:

1. Nick Dyer-Witheford, “Cybernetics and the Making of a Global Proletariat,” <http://www.polecom.org/index.php/polecom/article/view/63/253>
2. Nick Srnicek, “Challenges of Platform Capitalism” <https://www.ippr.org/juncture-item/the-challenges-of-platform-capitalism>

Notes: Briefing Note Assignment Due

Week 6 – October 10 – Mid-Term Recess – No Classes

Week 7 – October 17

Topic: The Sceptics I: Is Technology Actually Hurting Human Productivity?

Readings:

1. Nicholas Carr, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/>

2. Simon Head, "Innovation and its Potential to Damage Society,"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSZ2s6STXU&t=621s>

Week 8 – October 24

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: Reflection Paper Due

Week 9 – October 31

Topic: The Political Response I: Worker & Popular Responses

Readings:

1. Thomas Edsall, "Robots Can't Vote but They Helped Elect Trump"
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/11/opinion/trump-robots-electoral-college.html>
2. 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>
3. Accelerationist Manifesto <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/>

Week 10 – November 7

Topic: The Political Response II: UBI & Beyond

Readings & Audio:

1. "What is the UBI?" Andrew Yang 2020 <https://www.yang2020.com/blog/wonp-introduction-great-displacement/>
2. Guy Standing, "Time for a Basic Income?"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDF8o9e1QVc>
3. "The Future of Work Isn't Robots. It's Caring Humans," Ezra Klein Show Podcast <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/vox/the-ezra-klein-show/e/52206155>
4. "Core Support for the New Economy," pp.1-17
http://www.ase.tufts.edu/gdae/Pubs/wp/16-02GoodwinCoreSupport_Draft.pdf

Week 11 – November 14

Topic: Widening the Perspective I: 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>

Week 12 – November 21

Topic: Widening the Perspective II – Rethinking the Social Impacts of Tech Change

Readings:

1. Lorenzo Pellegrini and Luca Tasciotti, "Rural Electrification Now and Then" <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/90dc/fd7b46c00c48739ab0b18f1208a6a26b9eaa.pdf>
2. Dorotea Gucciardo, "The Powered Generation: Canadians, Electricity and Everyday Life"
3. David Goutor, "Constructing the Great Menace" (LS 1A03 coursepack)

Notes: Short Essay Due

Week 13 – November 28

Topic: Widening the Perspective III: Whose Innovation Is It? The Role of the State

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>

Week 14 – December 5

Topics: Closing Discussion & Exam Prep

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

- In this class, the professor and Teaching Assistants only mark paper copies of assignments.

- You can submit your paper electronically to stop the clock regarding lateness, but you must also submit a paper copy for the grading.
- It is your responsibility to make sure we get a paper copy at the deadline, or make arrangements to get us a paper copy a few days after the deadline.

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:

<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.

In this course, we will be using a software package designed to reveal plagiarism. Students will be required to submit their work electronically and in hard copy for this purpose.

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:

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>, 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