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Jindal School of International Affairs
India's First Global Policy School

M.A. (DLB)0725 – Algorithms and AI: Critical Perspectives

JSIA – Fall 2026



Course Information

Course Duration: 15 weeks

Credit Hours: 60

Meetings: Sure

Location: FOB ground floor

Prerequisites: Ideally, Critical Political Economy and/or Political Philosophy

Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Oleksandr Svitych

Biography: We are not stories

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Office Hours: by appointment at FOB ground floor or online

Course Description

The world is increasingly relying on algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) systems as tools of governance and control. These technologies have been used for surveillance and border enforcement, biometrics and immigration processing, lie detection and emotion recognition, risk assessment and profiling (including data-sharing databases), and more complex predictive analytics. The use of algorithms and AI has sparked heated debates among academics, civil activists, and regulators regarding their potential impact on human, administrative, and procedural rights.

As human lives are increasingly enmeshed with big data, algorithms, and AI technologies, several key questions emerge: What is the nature of algorithmic governance? Is there space for resistance against the growing influence of algorithms in regulating and controlling humans? Are algorithmic infrastructures inherently oppressive, or do they harbour emancipatory potentials?

In contrast to the mainstream techno-functionalist approach, which views algorithms and AI as merely software and hardware systems, this course adopts the perspective that algorithms are socio-technical assemblages, deeply intertwined with social, political, and economic factors. In other words, they are not neutral tools but are shaped by existing power structures. To fully understand these power dynamics at the intersection of technology, state, capital, and society, we need critical perspectives. Critical theory is well-suited for this task.

Course Objectives

For every course that I offer, I want you to become lifelong learners and critical thinkers. In line with Alfie Kohn (2006, p. 79–81), a key prerequisite for that is to **stop thinking about grades**. More broadly, I want you to become ethical decision-makers and caring members of your communities.

Course Outcomes	Activities	Assessment
<i>Be a lifelong learner</i> Cultivate interest in learning itself. Unleash your natural curiosity. Remember that (excitement about) learning is more important than the product (grade).	Readings, class discussions	Internal and external
<i>Avoid what is easy and safe</i> Choose challenging tasks. Stretch yourself. Try something interesting and new.	Readings, class discussions, class presentations	Internal and external
<i>Become a sophisticated thinker</i> Think deeply and critically. Come up with inventive ways of solving problems. Ask	Readings, class discussions, group tasks	Internal and external

thoughtful questions. Think critically about what is said in the readings. Make connections between diverse ideas. Look at a topic from different angles.		
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Scheme of Evaluation and Grading

Internal breakup

Class participation 10%

Active participation is required for this class. You are expected to actively engage in class discussions.

Mid-term assessment 30%

You will be required to write a 1000-word response essay to a one or several *Black Mirror* episodes that we will have watched in class. The essay must incorporate the critical theoretical concepts covered in the course. Essay deadline: end of week 8.

Presentation OR essay 30%

This is a group exercise (3 people) to present readings for weeks 9-14 of the course. The task is three-fold: 1) briefly summarize the reading; 2) provide critical reflection; 3) assess the proposed solution or offer your own. Alternatively, you can write individually a 1000-word essay on an aspect of algorithmic governance from a critical perspective. Essay deadline: end of week 13.

External breakup

Final exam 30%

Q&A paper for the duration of two hours. Detailed instructions will be announced later.

Grade Definition

Grading and Comments			
Letter Grade	Percentage of Marks	Grade Points	Comments
O	80 and above	8	Outstanding: Exceptional knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and extraordinary critical and analytical ability.
A+	75 - 79	7.5	Excellent: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and critical and analytical ability.
A	70 - 74	7	Very Good: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, excellent organizational capacity, ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles, critically analyse existing material and originality in thinking and presentation.
A-	65 -69	6	Good: Good understanding of the subject matter, ability to identify issues and provide balanced

			solutions to problems and good critical and analytical skills.
B+	60 - 64	5	Fair: Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B	55 - 59	4	Acceptable: Adequate knowledge of the subject matter to go to the next level of the study and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B-	50 - 54	3	Marginal: Limited knowledge of the subject matter and irrelevant use of materials, and poor critical and analytical skills.
P1	45 - 49	2	Pass 1: Pass with Basic understanding of the subject matter.
P2	40 - 44	1	Pass 2: Pass with Rudimentary understanding of the subject matter.
F	Below 40	0	Fail: Poor comprehension of the subject matter; poor critical and analytical skills and marginal use of the relevant materials. Will require repeating the course.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, including the use of ChatGPT, is strictly prohibited and will be penalized. Late submission of assignments will lead to a lower grade. Use of a phone in class is prohibited unless there's an emergency. You must stay focused during the class. To understand why, please read the book *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention* by Johann Hari. The standard university attendance policy applies.

Keyword Syllabus

Introduction

Understanding algorithmic governance

- Key concepts: algorithms, AI, algorithmic governance
- Approaches: techno-functional vs. socio-political
- Syllabus overview

Section I. Ethics

AI and philosophy

- AI and technological change
- Responsibility and bias
- The nature of the human

Section II. Critical theory

Marxism

- Digital capitalism
- Digital ideology

- Surveillance capitalism

The Frankfurt School

- False needs
- Technological rationality
- One-dimensionality

Critical epistemology

- Algorithmic knowledge
- Subjectivity and epistemology
- Interface algorithms

Infrapolitics

- Algorithmic agency
- Algorithmic resistance
- Disidentification

Alternatives

- The inevitability narrative
- Co-agency and co-shaping
- Taming, smashing, eroding, escaping AI

Mid-term assignment (Essay 1)

Section III. Practical issues

Poverty

Gender Inequality

Migration

Surveillance

Social media

AI regulation

End-term assignment (Essay 2)

Final exam

Course Materials

1) Readings

There will be readings assigned for each session/week. Please check UMS to access them in e-format.

2) Lecture notes

I will upload PPT slides after each lecture to UMS. Feel free to consult them to revise the course material.

3) Movies

We will also watch (excerpts from) movies to illustrate and think further through the main concepts of the course, with a special focus on the *Black Mirror* series, including episodes such as "Nosedive," "San Junipero," "Joan is Awful," and "Hotel Reverie."

Session Plan

<i>Session</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>	<i>Approach/Pedagogy</i>
Week 1	Introduction	No readings are required.	Radical and engaged
Week 2	Ethics	Mark Coeckelbergh, <i>AI Ethics</i> , pp. 1–10; Hannah Arendt, <i>The Human Condition</i> , pp. 7–11.	Radical and engaged
Week 3	Karl Marx	Black Mirror, <i>Nosedive</i> ; Christian Fuchs, <i>Digital Capitalism</i> , pp. 25–33, 311–317.	Radical and engaged
Week 4	The Frankfurt School	Black Mirror, <i>San Junipero</i> ; Herbert Marcuse, <i>One-Dimensional Man</i> , pp. 3–20.	Radical and engaged
Week 5	Critical epistemology	Black Mirror, <i>Joan is Awful</i> ; Eran Fisher, <i>Algorithms and Subjectivity</i> , pp. 8–24.	Radical and engaged
Week 6	Infrapolitics	Black Mirror, <i>Hotel Reverie</i> ; Tiziano Bonini and Emiliano Treré, <i>Algorithms of Resistance: The Everyday Fight Against Platform Power</i> , pp. 25–39; Mendonça et al., <i>The Infrapolitics of Algorithmic Resistance</i> .	Radical and engaged
Week 7	Alternatives	Masoumeh Mansouri and David Bailey, <i>How to be 'anti-AI' in the 21st century: overcoming the inevitability narrative</i> .	Radical and engaged
Week 8	<i>Mid-term essay</i>	Due by the end of week 8.	
Week 9	Poverty	Virginia Eubanks, <i>Automating Inequality</i> , pp. 17–35; Shivangi Narayan, <i>Guilty Until Proven Guilty</i> .	Radical and engaged
Week 10	Gender inequality	Safiya U. Noble, <i>Algorithms of Oppression</i> , pp. 1–14; Rina Chandran, <i>Racist, sexist, casteist: Is AI bad news for India?</i> Netflix, <i>Humans in the Loop</i> .	Radical and engaged
Week 11	Migration	Sandra Ponzanesi, <i>Digital Cosmopolitanism: Notes from the Underground</i>	Radical and engaged
Week 12	Surveillance	Shoshana Zuboff, <i>The Age of Surveillance Capitalism</i> , pp. 242–255;	Radical and engaged

		Shivangi Narayan, <i>CCTVs and the Criminal City</i> .	
Week 13	Social media	Netflix, <i>The Social Dilemma</i> . Essay 2 is due by the end of week 13.	Radical and engaged
Week 14	AI regulation	Eugenia Stamboliev and Tim Christiaens, <i>How empty is Trustworthy AI? A discourse analysis of the Ethics Guidelines of Trustworthy AI</i> .	Radical and engaged
Week 15	<i>Final exam</i>	This is the end. Congratulations!	

Useful resources on AI risks and resistance

Time Artificial Intelligence series:

<https://time.com/tag/artificial-intelligence/>, <https://time.com/collection/life-reinvented/>

New York Times On Tech series:

<https://www.nytimes.com/column/on-tech>

Common ethical challenges in AI | *Council of Europe*

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-and-biomedicine/common-ethical-challenges-in-ai>

Artificial Intelligence: examples of ethical dilemmas | *UNESCO*

<https://www.unesco.org/en/artificial-intelligence/recommendation-ethics/cases>

The MIT AI Risk Repository

<https://airisk.mit.edu/>

Universal Guidelines for AI

<https://www.caidp.org/universal-guidelines-for-ai/>

Pause AI

<https://pauseai.info/learn>

Privacy International guides

<https://privacyinternational.org/guides>

Surveillance Self-Defense

<https://ssd.eff.org/>