

AI and Work in the 21st Century

Course Syllabus

| Instructor | Email | Class Days/Time |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Milan Kovačević | m.kovacevic@maastrichtuniversity.nl | Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10:40 – 12:10 |

Course Description

Work is, and always has been, one of the most defining aspects of our lives. Work matters—to us as individuals, as well as the communities and societies in which we live. Driven by globalization and technological change, much of what we have taken for granted about work and employment is undergoing major transformations. As the certainties of the past are being replaced by ambiguity and concern, practitioners, academics, and policy-makers are coming up with diverse predictions about what the future of work might look like and how different actors can shape it.

In this interdisciplinary course, students will critically examine the changing nature of work and employment from a range of perspectives including economics, history, sociology, and philosophy. Students will be immersed in the debate about the future of work, critically evaluate a range of views on this topic, and gain insight into theoretical and practical frameworks that will help them understand and engage with the changing world of work in the 21st century. Focusing on the impact of two major forces that are shaping the future of work—globalization and technology—the course traces the history of work and employment, and considers the contemporary challenges facing workers in the context of labour market and wider social changes. It examines how work is shaped in the era of globalization, the emergence of new forms of work in the digital economy, the transformations brought about by automation and AI, fears of technological unemployment, increasing job insecurity and precariousness, developments in working hours and the organization of working time, the phenomenon of ‘bullshit’ jobs, the impact of COVID-19, and universal basic income.

Teaching

Each class lasts for 1.5 hours and will predominantly consist of seminar discussions. A seminar is defined as ‘a small group of students, as in a university, engaged in advanced study and original research under a member of the faculty and meeting regularly to exchange information and hold discussions’. This course will aspire to satisfy this definition by operating in a student-driven, inquiry-based style. The focus will be on discussion, the exchange of knowledge and ideas and the intersection between theoretical understanding and historical and current events. Students are expected to complete the required readings before each class and arrive prepared to raise questions and engage in discussion. The course instructor will lead and support these discussions, providing guidance and clarifications.

Course Structure and Readings

| Week | Topic | Required Readings |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week 1 (Jan 11 & 13) | Course Introduction: The Past and Future of Work | Skidelsky, R. J. A., & Craig, N. (Eds.). (2020). <i>Work in the future: The automation revolution</i> . Palgrave Macmillan. <i>Chapter 2: The Future of Work</i> (pp. 9-21). |
| Week 2 (Jan 18 & 20) | Globalization and Labour | Munck, R. (2018). <i>Rethinking global labour: After neoliberalism</i> . Agenda Publishing Limited. <i>Chapter 3: The era of globalization</i> (pp. 55-81). |
| Week 3 (Jan 25 & 27) | The Precariat | Standing, G. (2014). <i>The precariat: The new dangerous class</i> . Bloomsbury. <i>Chapter 1: The Precariat</i> (pp. 1-25). |
| Week 4 (Feb 1 & 3) | Technological Change and the Future of Work | Schwab, K. (2016). <i>The Fourth Industrial Revolution: What it means and how to respond</i> . World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/ Petropoulos, G. (2018). The impact of artificial intelligence on employment. In Neufeind, M., J. O'Reilly and F. Ranft (Eds.), <i>Work in the Digital Age: Challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution</i> (pp. 119-132). Rowman and Littlefield. |
| Week 5 (Feb 8 & 10) | Dying Professions and a Changing Landscape of Work | Autor, D. H. (2015). Why are there still so many jobs? The history and future of workplace automation. <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i> , 29(3), 3–30. |
| Week 6 (Feb 15 & 17) | New Forms of Work in the Digital Economy | Valenduc, G. (2019). New forms of work and employment in the digital economy. In A. Serrano-Pascual & M. Jepsen (Eds.), <i>The Deconstruction of Employment as a Political Question</i> (pp. 63–80). Springer International Publishing. |

| Week | Topic | Required Readings |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week 7 (Feb 22 & 24) | The Gig Economy I: Concept and Implications | De Stefano, V. (2015). The rise of the “just-in-time workforce”: On-demand work, crowd work and labour protection in the “gig-economy.” <i>Pages 1-9 (Sections 1, 2, and 3)</i> . International Labour Organization. Schor, J. (2018). The platform economy: Consequences for labour, inequality and the environment. In Neufeind, M., J. O’Reilly and F. Ranft (Eds.), <i>Work in the Digital Age: Challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution</i> (pp. 163-174). |
| Week 8 | Reading Week (no classes) | |
| Week 9 (Mar 8 & 10) | The Gig Economy II: Broken Promises? | Popiel, P. (2017). “Boundaryless” in the creative economy: Assessing freelancing on Upwork. <i>Critical Studies in Media Communication</i> , 34(3), 220–233. |
| Week 10 (Mar 15 & 17) | Student Presentations | |
| Week 11 (Mar 22 & 24) | ‘Bullshit’ Jobs | Graeber, D. (2013). On the phenomenon of bullshit jobs. <i>Strike! Magazine</i> . https://economics.com/why-capitalism-creates-pointless-jobs-david-graeber/ |
| Week 12 (Mar 29 & 31) | Work Hours | Messenger, J. (2018). Working time and the future of work. ILO future of work research paper series. |
| Week 13 (Apr 5 & 7) | COVID-19 and the Future of Work | Lund, S. et al. (2021). The future of work after COVID-19. McKinsey Global Institute. <i>Executive summary (pp. 1-21)</i> . |
| Week 14 (Apr 12 & 14) | Universal Basic Income | Standing, G. (2017). <i>Basic income: A guide for the open-minded</i> . Yale University Press. <i>Chapters 1 and 8</i> . |
| Week 15 (Apr 19 & 21) | The End of Work? | Svendsen, L. (2014). <i>Work</i> . Routledge. <i>Chapters 8 and 9 (pp. 111-127)</i> . |

Assessment and Grade Composition

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| Active participation, class preparation | 40% |
| Short papers/written assignments (~500 words) | 30% |
| Multiple choice/short answer reading quizzes | 15% |
| Group presentation (gig economy case study) | 15% |
