LER 590: Technology, Innovation, and the Future of Work, Spring 2021

Thursdays, 11 am to 1:50 pm, Online
Syllabus Version: 1/21/2021 (check Compass for latest version)

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Course website: https://compass2g.illinois.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Will your job be replaced by a robot? Will technological change lead to mass unemployment and civil unrest? How can employers, policy makers, and workers adapt to the changing landscape of employment in the 21st century? In this course, we will study a wide variety of trends in modern employment, including automation, the gig economy, offshoring, and algorithmic hiring and staffing. We will approach these developments from diverse disciplinary perspectives in order to understand the economic, sociological, and technological antecedents and consequences of innovation and technological change. In addition, implications for public policy and human resource management will be emphasized.

This course is intended for students who want to deeply engage with the issues surrounding technological change and employment. My role as instructor will be to facilitate this process as we learn together about these developing topics. To this end, the class format will be primarily seminar style, with the expectation that all students will closely read each week’s readings and actively participate in class discussions. This class is reading intensive, and may require more weekly reading and writing than other LER classes.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The primary course requirement will be weekly reading response essays. Each week I will post reading questions that you will respond to in a draft response essay (two double-spaced pages). This will be due the Tuesday before class by 9 pm. This gives me a chance to review your responses before the class meets. After each class, you will be required to deepen your analysis and extend the response by an additional page (three pages total), building on what you learned from the class discussion. This is due by the following class meeting (e.g. 1 week after the class). All essays will be submitted via the course website. Responses should reference the reading from the current week, however you may also draw on previous readings or other outside resources. All response essays must include appropriate in text citations as well as a reference list. There will be 12 total weekly responses, and I will drop the two lowest grades. (60% of final grade.)

In addition, there will be a group term project. This will involve researching a topic that we did not cover in class, writing a 10 page paper, and presenting your findings to the class. More details will be provided. (20% of final grade.)

Finally, this class is a discussion-based class and will rely heavily on your active participation. (20% of final grade.)
COURSE READINGS

There is no required textbook for this class. Most course readings will be available via the course website. You will be required to purchase a digital coursepack from Harvard Business School Publishing for a few of the readings. The link will be available on the course website. Readings will draw from academic articles, popular press articles, business cases and excerpts from the following books:


COURSE SCHEDULE

Class 1: January 28th. Introduction, Course Overview.

**Module 1: Technological Change**

Class 2: February 4th. Historical Case Study: The Industrial Revolution (Part 1)

Reading:

Class 3: February 11th. Historical Case Study: The Industrial Revolution (Part II)

Reading:
2. Kenneth L. Sokoloff “Was the Transition from the Artisanal Shop to the Nonmechanized Factory Associated with Gains in Efficiency?: Evidence from the U.S. Manufacturing Censuses of 1820 and 1850” (1984) *Explorations in Economic History* (sections 1,2, and 5)

Class 4: February 18th. Task-based View of Technological Change

Reading:
Class 5: February 25th. Technological Change and Education

Reading:

Class 6: March 4th. Managing Technological Change

Reading:

Class 7: March 11th. Societal Impacts of Technological Change

Reading:
2. Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee (2014) *The Second Machine Age* Chapter 11: Implications of the Bounty and the Spread

No Class March 18th

Module 2: The Changing Structure of Employment

Class 8: March 25th. Topic Overview

Reading:

Class 9: April 1st. Gig Economy

Reading:
Class 10: April 8th. Temporary Help

*Reading:*

Class 11: April 15th. Off-Shoring

*Reading:*

**Module 3: Automating Human Resources**

Class 12: April 22nd. Algorithmic Hiring and Staffing

*Reading:*

Class 13: April 29th. Presentations and Class Wrap-up

*No reading response due this week.*