Algorithms have left the labs of computer scientists and entered all kinds of organizations. Recruiting, controlling, planning, product development: Today, most of the routine work that is done in organizations can be supplemented or replaced by some sort of data-centric automating technology. The proprietary, opaque, and constantly evolving algorithms of Google, Youtube and Twitter increasingly organize our digital public spheres. Recommendation engines shape our cultural tastes and patterns of consumption. In this graduate seminar, we examine the practices, cultures and imaginaries of algorithms in organizations and how they get produced and contested in everyday life. Drawing on case studies from fields such as ride-hailing, music streaming, web journalism or criminal justice, we shall explore how algorithms organize work and what work goes into the organization of algorithms.

Learning objectives

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- **Understand and apply key concepts and methods from the interdisciplinary field of algorithm studies**, including organization and management studies, science & technology studies, economic sociology, and media studies.
- **Challenge and unpack entrenched assumptions about algorithms** with a focus on their use in occupational contexts.
- **Design and conduct innovative and effective programs of research** into algorithmic organizing.
- **Write concise and effective literature reviews and reports** based on original research.

Course requirements

This graduate seminar is all about problematizing algorithms in organizational contexts. The following course requirements will be useful to facilitate our conversations:

- Weekly reading response 30%
- Case study 70%

**Weekly reading response:** You will be expected to produce a 1-2-page response each week that engages key arguments, insights, and findings from the readings. Please bring a printout of the reading notes to the session and hand them over to the instructor at the end of the session.
**Case study:** Starting from week 1, you will be required to identify and study a specific case of algorithmic organization. This can be any organizational setting in which an algorithmic system is salient and consequential. You should decide on your case by week 3 (April 29). You are encouraged to discuss your ideas with classmates and the instructor prior to week 3. You will be required to produce a 10-12 page (double-spaced) final report on your case that engages with theoretical and/or methodological themes from the course. By week 6 (May 20), I would like to see a formal proposal, including a 1-2 paragraph description of the main argument or question, an outline of the anticipated structure of the report, a description of the empirical evidence (if any) you plan to use, and a list of 5-10 published sources you plan to cite or draw on in making your argument. In addition to my comments, you’ll receive feedback from your classmates in a dedicated review session on (July 8). Final reports are due in electronic form on July 22 at 6pm. Per standard university guidelines governing plagiarism and academic honesty, all work for the course is expected to be original or appropriately acknowledged.

**Class participation and workload**

This is a fun but challenging graduate seminar with a significant reading load. If you’re struggling with the course in any way, please come and see me as early as possible and we’ll talk about strategies, workarounds, and possible accommodations to help you.

**Acknowledgments**

This seminar is drawing on other excellent graduate seminars, including Malte Ziewitz’s *Technologies of Valuation* (Cornell University) and David Stark’s *New Directions in Economic Sociology* (Columbia University).
Schedule

* required readings

Session 1: Introduction (April 8)

No readings for today. We’ll familiarize ourselves with the key themes and concerns of the seminar, discuss course mechanics, and start thinking about algorithmic organizing.

Session 2: What is an Algorithm? (April 15)


Session 3: Algorithms in Organizations (April 29)


Session 4: Algorithms and Control (May 6)


Session 5: Automation or Fauxtomanation? (May 13)


Session 6: From Strategic Planning to Algorithmic Prediction? (May 20)


Session 7: Experts and Expertise (May 27)


Session 8: Classification and Bias (June 3)


Session 9: Transparency and Accountability (June 17)


Session 10: Algorithmic Walk (June 24)

This week students will do an algorithmic exercise on campus. There are no readings for this week. If interested, students can have a look at the following paper before or after the activity:


Session 11: Case Study Writing Week (July 1)

There will be no class this week. Students shall use this week to advance their case study project and to be able to present their interim report in the following week.

Session 12: Case Study Clinic (July 8)

In this session, students will present their case study project to each other and receive feedback.