

Law and Artificial Intelligence

7345-19335 Syllabus – Fall 2026

Professor Peter N. Salib

psalib@central.uh.edu

Office: 430D

Meetings: Tuesday and Thursday, 10:30-12:00pm

Readings and Materials: The only book you need to buy for this class is not a casebook. Rather, it is Janelle Shane's *You Look Like a Thing and I Love You: How Artificial Intelligence Works and Why It's Making the World A Weirder Place* (2019). It can be bought on Amazon in physical or electronic form (or from the campus bookstore, or another bookseller of your choosing).

Other readings are linked below

Learning Objectives: Understand contemporary issues relating to the governance of machine learning and artificial intelligence.

Class Preparation: Our class meetings this semester will take the form of seminar-style discussions. The reading load is not especially heavy, but I do expect everyone to have read the assignments carefully and to come ready to discuss. Lively class discussions are what make courses like this enjoyable, and I hope that we can learn a great deal from one another.

Grading: Grades will be based on three things: engaged class participation (5%), a final paper (80%), and an in-class presentation of your paper idea (15%).

The [UHLC Honor Code](#) applies to all aspects of my class.

AI Use: Students may use AI however they like in this course, with one exception: 100% of the words in the initial draft of the final paper must be human-produced. Brainstorming, researching, and outlining with AI help are fine, and indeed encouraged. Once the paper is initially drafted, students are also welcome to use AI to refine language, format footnotes, and the like. But no substantive section may be written by AI, in the first instance. Students will be asked to write and submit their papers via Google Docs, or another platform with similar version history, so that the instructor can inspect the version history for compliance with this policy.

Class presentations will occupy our final four meetings. Presentations ought to be 10-15 minutes long, and we'll have about 30 minutes of class discussion following each. In preparation of your presentation, you should submit a proposed outline of the paper's sections and arguments. Ideally, the outline will include proposed primary and secondary sources. You may also submit longer abstracts, draft sections, etc. for feedback. Grades for presentations will account for completion and effort, not the absolute quality of your work-in-progress or your presentation thereof.

SAMPLE SYLLABUS - MEETING DATES AND ASSIGNMENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Papers must be at least 10,000 (and no more than 12,000) words in length.

Engagement in class discussion is, as noted above, a vital part of this course's design. Thus, consistent failures to prepare for or engage in our meetings will be detrimental to your participation score.

Classroom Confidentiality: I find that class discussion is most productive when students feel free to try out positions with which they (or others) may not agree and to test the assumptions underlying their own (or others') views. In fact, I will often ask students to argue positions with which they may disagree. Proficiently deploying such arguments for clients' benefit is literally a lawyer's job! For these reasons, class discussion is strictly "off the record." Outside of the classroom, you may not attribute any statements made in class to any of your classmates. And any audio or visual recording of class is prohibited.

Office Hours: My office hours will be Mondays from noon to 1:30 p.m. I am also happy to correspond by email, as well as to set up alternative meeting times, should they be necessary.

Syllabus: This is a preliminary syllabus, arranged by topic. An updated syllabus with reading assignments for individual meetings will be distributed before the beginning of the semester. That updated syllabus, too, should be treated as preliminary. I may update, add, or remove readings over the course of the semester to fit our evolving topics of conversation.

This class will meet 23 times during the Spring Term (plus one additional half-hour workshop session).

Course Modules

A. What do we want from AI?

1. Class 1 -- Aug. 25 [Watch: *The Minority Report*, Spielberg (2002). Available on various streaming platforms.]
 - a. Utopia and Dystopia
 - b. Beyond good and evil

B. What is AI? How does it work? What can it do?

1. Class 2 -- Aug. 27 [Read: Shane Ch. 1-2]
 - a. "Artificial Intelligence," "Algorithms," or "Statistics"?
 - b. What could AI do well (circa 2019)?
2. Class 3 -- Sep. 3 [Read: Shane Ch. 3, Ch. 9; Henshall, [4 Charts That Show Why AI Progress Is Unlikely to Slow Down](#) Try: [ChatGPT](#); [Claude](#)]
 - a. How does AI learn?
 - b. AIs as inferential "black boxes."
 - c. How well did predictions of AI capabilities hold up?
3. Class 4 -- Sep. 8 [Read: Burtell & Toner, [The Surprising Power of Next Word Prediction \(LLMs Explained\)](#); Henshall, [4 Charts That Show Why AI Progress Is Unlikely to Slow Down](#); Grimmelmann, [Words of Wisdom](#) Watch: OpenAI [o3 Announcement](#) (first 10 min.) Try: [ChatGPT](#); [Claude](#)]
 - a. AI progress
 - b. Predict the next word, predict the whole world?
 - c. AGI? ASI?

C. A case study -- Algorithmic policing

1. Class 5 -- Sep. 10 [Read: Joh, *The New Surveillance Discretion*, pp. 22-27; Rich, *Machine Learning, Automated Suspicion Algorithms, and the Fourth Amendment*, pp. 872-79, 893-901]
 - a. Type-1 and Type 2 errors
 - b. Understanding our policy goals, understanding AI's.
2. Class 6 -- Sep. 15 [Read: Doleac & LaForest, *Community Supervision & Public Safety*, p. 5 (on electronic monitoring); Agan, Doleac, and Harvey, *Misdemeanor Prosecution* Pp. 1-8); Doleac, *Encouraging Desistance from Crime*, pp. 47-51]
 - a. The detection/sanctions distinction
 - b. Detection without sanction
 - c. Paying for peace?

D. Algorithmic discrimination

1. Class 7 -- Sep. 17 [Read: Shane, Ch. 7; Angwin, et al., *Machine Bias*; Northpointe, *COMPAS Risk Scales* (response) (read Executive Summary, Intro., Conclusion)]; Kleinberg, Ludwig, Mullainathan, and Sunstein, *Discrimination in the Age of Algorithms* 138-51]
 - a. What does it mean for an algorithm to discriminate?
 - b. Why do algorithms discriminate?
 - c. Human v. robot discrimination: levels
 - d. Human v. robot discrimination: transparency
2. Class 8 -- Sep. 22 [Read: Gillis & Spiess, *Big Data and Discrimination*, pp. 467-70; (revisit) Kleinberg, et al. *Discrimination in the Age of Algorithms* pp. 152-60, Yang & Dobbie, *Equal Protection Under Algorithms*, pp. 346-48; *City of Richmond v. Croson*, pp. 498-504; Salib, *Abolition by Algorithm*, pp. 49-54]
 - a. Technical hurdles for technical fixes
 - b. Legal hurdles for technical fixes
 - c. Equal data, equal treatment, or equal outcomes
 - d. Automatically reducing discrimination by reducing harm

E. AI as content creator

1. Class 9 -- Sep. 24 [Read: *NYT v. OpenAI complaint*, paragraphs 82-107; US Copyright Office, *AI Policy Guidance*, pp. 2-4; Savage, *Tapping Into the Drug Discovery Potential of AI* Try: *Flux, Stable Diffusion*]
 - a. IP for AI generated works?
 - b. Copyright when training AI?
 - c. What's the point of IP?
2. Class 10 -- Sep. 29 [View: *Tom Cruise(?) Play: Real or Fake?* Read: Hao, *Deepfake Porn is Ruining Women's Lives. Now the Law May Finally Ban It*; Sunstein, *Falsehoods and the First Amendment*, pp. 390-96, 418-24, Guggenberger and Salib, *From Fake News to Fake Views*]
 - a. AI to lie?
 - b. Truth, lies and the First Amendment?
 - c. What's a lie, anyway?

F. AI at work

1. Class 11 -- Oct. 1 [Read: Lin, *Robot Cars and Fake Ethical Dilemmas* ; Shavell, *Strict Liability Versus Negligence*, pp. 1-9, Diamantis, *Employed Algorithms*, pp. 797, 840-49]
 - a. Robo-trolley problems
 - b. If a robot runs you over, who should pay?
 - c. Negligent AI?

SAMPLE SYLLABUS - MEETING DATES AND ASSIGNMENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

2. Class 12 -- Oct. 6 [OpenAI, [o1 Technical Report](#); AI Impacts, *Thousands of AI Authors on the Future of AI*, pp. 3-7; Erdil & Besiroglu, *Explosive Growth from AI*, pp. 2-3; Bernhardt, *Beyond Basic Income: Claiming our Right to Govern Technology*]
 - a. Will AI take our jobs?
 - b. Should we let it?

G. AI catastrophe

1. Class 13 -- Oct. 8 [Read: Urbina et al., *Dual Use of Artificial Intelligence-powered Drug Discovery*; Soice et al., [Can Large Language Models Democratize Access to Dual-use Biotechnology?](#), pp. 1-3; *Augmenting Large Language Models with Chemistry Tools*, pp. 1, 10-11; Fang, et. al, *LLM Agents Can Autonomously Hack Websites*, pp. 1-2, 5-7]
 - a. Biorisk
 - b. Chemical risk
 - c. Cyber risk
2. Class 14 -- Oct. 13 [Watch: DeepMind, [PaLM-E gets the chips](#); Read: Hoffman and Kim, *Reducing the Risks of AI for Military Decision Advantage*, pp. 7, 12-21; Hernandez, *A Military Drone With a Mind of its Own was Used in Combat*]
 - a. Embodied AI
 - b. Murderbots
 - c. AI arms races and the full automation imperative
3. Class 15 -- Oct. 15 [Watch: Terminator II, [Skynet Destroys the World](#); Dunham, *The Awareness* (for another optional, but excellent, treatment of related themes, see: Garland, *Ex Machina*, available on various streaming services) Read: Bostrom, *The Superintelligent Will*; AI Impacts, *Thousands of AI Authors on the Future of AI*, pp. 12-14); Karger et al., *Forecasting Existential Risks*, pp. 4, 53-55]
 - a. Highly capable, highly autonomous systems
 - b. The alignment problem
 - c. Misaligned transformative AI
4. Class 16 -- Oct. 20 [Read: Cotra on [AI Takeover by Default](#) (start at beginning, stop at "Premises of the Hypothetical Situation"); Arbel, et. al, *Open Questions in Law and AI Safety*, Salib, *AI Outputs Are Not Protected Speech*, pp. 1-9]
 - a. Negligence versus strict liability, redux
 - b. Can familiar laws help to make AI safe?
 - c. Will familiar laws harm the project of making AI safe?
5. Class 17 -- Oct. 27 [Kolt, *Algorithmic Black Swans*, pp. 1184-86, 1225; Matthews, *Can the Courts Save us from Dangerous AI?*; Weil, [The Pros and Cons of SB 1047](#); Salib & Goldstein, *AI Rights for Human Safety*, pp. 3-10.]
6. Class 18 -- Oct. 29 [Read: Ho, et al., *International Institutions for Advanced AI*, pp. 1-3; Kirby, *The treaties that make the world safer are struggling*; CSIS, *Choking off China's Access to the Future of AI*]
 - a. What new regulations are needed?
 - b. What new regulations can work?

H. Class Presentations

1. Classes 19-23 -- Nov. 3, Nov. 5, Nov. 10, Nov. 12, Nov. 17, Nov. 19 (short).

SAMPLE SYLLABUS - MEETING DATES AND ASSIGNMENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

In addition to the above information and class policies, here is some information that the University would like you to have:

Excused Absence Policy

Regular class attendance, participation, and engagement in coursework are important contributors to student success. Absences may be excused as provided in the University of Houston Undergraduate Excused Absence Policy and Graduate Excused Absence Policy for reasons including: medical illness of student or close relative, death of a close family member, legal or government proceeding that a student is obligated to attend, recognized professional and educational activities where the student is presenting, and University-sponsored activity or athletic competition. Under these policies, students with excused absences will be provided with an opportunity to make up any quiz, exam or other work that contributes to the course grade or a satisfactory alternative. Please read the full policy for details regarding reasons for excused absences, the approval process, and extended absences. Additional policies address absences related to military service, religious holy days, pregnancy and related conditions, and disability.

Recording of Class

Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the Center for Students with DisABILITIES. If you have an accommodation to record class-related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Classes may be recorded by the instructor. Students may use instructor's recordings for their own studying and notetaking. Instructor's recordings are not authorized to be shared with anyone without the prior written approval of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action.

Syllabus Changes

Due to the changing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, please note that the instructor may need to make modifications to the course syllabus and may do so at any time. Notice of such changes will be announced as quickly as possible through email.

In addition to the above information and class policies, here is some information that the University would like you to have:

- A. The University of Houston has a number of resources to support students' mental health and overall wellness, including CoogsCARE and the UH Go App. UH Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers 24/7 mental health support for all students, addressing various concerns like stress, college adjustment and sadness. CAPS provides individual and couples counseling, group therapy, workshops and connections to other support services on and off-campus. For assistance visit uh.edu/caps, call 713-743-5454, or visit a Let's Talk location in-person or virtually. Let's Talk are daily, informal confidential consultations with CAPS therapists where no appointment or paperwork is needed.

SAMPLE SYLLABUS - MEETING DATES AND ASSIGNMENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

The Student Health Center offers a Psychiatry Clinic for enrolled UH students. Call 713-743-5149 during clinic hours, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. to schedule an appointment.

The A.D. Bruce Religion Center offers spiritual support and a variety of programs centered on well-being.

Need Support Now? - If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call CAPS crisis support 24/7 at 713-743-5454, or the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988, or chat 988lifeline.org.

B. Title IX/Sexual Misconduct

Per the UHS Sexual Misconduct Policy, your instructor is a “responsible employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and state law and must report incidents of sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, intimate partner violence, or stalking) about which they become aware to the Title IX office. Please know there are places on campus where you can make a report in confidence. You can find more information about resources on the Title IX website at <https://uh.edu/equal-opportunity/title-ix-sexual-misconduct/resources/>.

C. Reasonable Academic Adjustments/Auxiliary Aids

The University of Houston is committed to providing an academic environment and educational programs that are accessible for its students. Any student with a disability who is experiencing barriers to learning, assessment or participation is encouraged to contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center (Dart Center) to learn more about academic accommodations and support that may be available to them. Students seeking academic accommodations will need to register with the Dart Center as soon as possible to ensure timely implementation of approved accommodations. Please contact the Dart Center by visiting the website: <https://uh.edu/accessibility/> calling (713) 743-5400, or emailing jdcenter@Central.UH.EDU.