

Essay on Algorithms and Social Inequality

Individual Assignment SSH

Students are asked to explore an issue of their choosing in which algorithmic decision-making has substantial impact on social inequality.

In Part A, you will first argue for an existing theoretical framework that justifies the current status quo in algorithmic decision-making. For instance, you may consider the Rational Actor Theory or similar frameworks. This part should take the form of an annotated bibliography that traces the origins and development of the current system or status quo.

In Part B, you will critique the theoretical framework from a critical theory perspective, such as feminist theory, critical economics, or post-colonialism. The critique should assess how algorithmic decision-making reproduces ideational and material structures and how stakeholders may confront these dynamics. Students may draw on concepts from lectures and workshops but are expected to conduct substantial independent literature reviews.

Students may choose to focus on any topic that is of significant societal concern. Students are encouraged to choose the same topic for as for the RE assignment. However, they are may not choose a topic that is closely related to their Group Project. Every student must choose a distinct societal issue as the topic for their essay.

Deadlines

Wednesday, March 26, 2025 (5 p.m.)	Progress Check 1 <i>Feedback in Check-In Tuesday, April 01</i>
Wednesday, May 14, 2025 (5 p.m.)	Progress Check 2 <i>Feedback in Check-In Tuesday, May 20</i>
Wednesday, May 28, 2025 (5 p.m.)	Final Submission Final submission of PDF file via Canvas

Assessment Criteria:

- Clearly stated and appropriately scoped thesis statement.
- Presents non-trivial arguments to support the thesis statement.
- Selection and utilization of appropriate academic texts.
- Provides theoretical and empirical evidence for arguments.
- Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of relevant concepts and theories from an established theoretical framework justifying the status quo.
- Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of relevant concepts and theories from one of the “critical” theories: feminist theory, critical economics, or post-colonialism.
- Meets basic academic requirements, including:
 - Well-written and edited, with a logical structure.
 - Relevant academic sources are adequately utilised and correctly referenced.
 - Word count: 1,600 maximum (strict word maximum), excluding references.

Learning Objectives:

- Use relevant theories to recognize and explain structural inequality, bias, and stratification.
- Use relevant theories to identify potential sources of bias, power relations, and values to contribute to the development of socially responsible AI solutions.
- Discuss how design choices in AI reproduce ideational and material structures and how stakeholders may confront this.
- Analyse the ethical, legal, and societal impact of AI/algorithms.

Version History:

Jan. 20, 2025: V1.0