

CS400FA: Surveillance, Education, AI

Monday 2:30-5:20pm

Fall 2025

Lecture and location

Monday 2:30pm - 5:20pm in BA307.

Instructor: Dr. Alex Levant

Office hours: Monday 1:30pm – 2:20pm in DAWB 3-127 or by appointment via Zoom.

Email: alevant@wlu.ca

- Start the subject line of your email with “CS400”
- From Monday to Friday, expect a reply to your email within 48 hours.
- Emails sent from an account other than your @mylaurier account will get no response.

Course description

AI-driven surveillance technologies have significantly transformed the student experience at North American universities, impacting everything from learning materials to assignments and exams. This seminar examines the rapid integration of artificial intelligence into higher education through the critical lens of surveillance capitalism and platform studies. As universities increasingly adopt commercial AI tools, they face fundamental questions about technological sovereignty, academic freedom, and the future of public education. The course challenges prevailing narratives about AI's inevitability in education, examining how current adoption patterns reinforce Big Tech dominance while presenting opportunities for resistance and alternative development. Students will analyze how AI platforms extract value from educational interactions, explore the tension between corporate control and institutional autonomy, and develop tools for understanding and potentially transforming the relationship between higher education and corporate technology platforms.

Required Texts:

All other readings available online and/or through the Laurier Library at no cost to students.

Course Requirements:

- 1) Reading Report – 20%
- 2) Project and Presentation – 30%

- 3) Seminar Participation – 20%
- 4) Personal Journal of Reflections – 30%

Reading Report (20%):

The assigned readings for each class will constitute the basis for that week's discussion. While all students are expected to have done the readings, and to participate in the discussion, one (or two or three) student(s) will start off the discussion on that text by presenting a Reading Report of 15-20 minutes in length. The Reading Report will include the following: a) Summary of main point of text, b) Secondary points, c) Key theorists/sources used, d) Relationship to course themes, and e) Key passages. There is no written component to this assignment, but you are free to provide a handout to the class if you want. The Reading Reports will be done in pairs.

Next steps: Sign up early to get the text and date you want!

Project and Presentation (30%):

This course offers students an opportunity to do an in-depth study of a specific aspect or illustration of some of our course themes. Possible areas of research may include (but are not limited to) the following:

- A survey of Canadian approaches to the use of AI in higher education. How have Canadian universities implemented AI technologies. What patterns or trends emerge? Analyse in relation to course themes.
- A survey of approaches to the use of AI in higher education globally. How have universities around the world implemented AI technologies. What patterns or trends emerge? Analyse in relation to course themes.
- A case study of a specific university's approach to AI. Consider if they have their own AI system or if they partner with tech companies. Examine the policies governing its use. (e.g. consider Laurier's approach to AI).
- An analysis of the legal framework governing the use of AI technologies in relation to privacy and surveillance in Canadian higher ed. Consider federal and provincial legislation, as well as other policies that inform its use. Examine in the context of governance frameworks used in higher education beyond Canada, and in relation to course themes.
- A case study focusing on a specific tech company (e.g. Google or Open AI) or a specific product (e.g. Respondus Lockdown Browser or Microsoft Copilot) in relation to the course themes.
- A deep dive into the theoretical frameworks.

Students will work in pairs and will formulate their research topic in consultation with Dr. Levant, and they will present their research findings and conclusions to the class.

Next steps: Connect with me if you have a specific idea in mind or if you want feedback on an idea. If you don't have one in mind already, consider the above issues and give it some thought.

Seminar Participation (20%):

This course is structured as a combination of large class discussions, small group work, and individual participation. As this is a fourth-year seminar, a heavy emphasis is placed on rigorous engagement with the course materials. It is expected that you will have done the required readings and will be prepared to participate thoughtfully and respectfully.

Next steps: do the readings, make notes, write questions, identify key passages...

Personal Journal of Reflections (30%):

Using no more than 250 words for each assigned reading, identify the following: 1) key point, 2) its connection to the course, and 3) your personal reflections on the text. Try to reflect on how your understanding of the topics has changed during the experience of the course.

Next steps: Add to your document as we proceed through the readings and submit one complete document by email to alevant@wlu.ca by **Oct 27** for all the readings up to and including Oct. 27. Please submit your remaining responses on **Dec. 1**.

Late Penalty:

Assignments will not be accepted after the due date. Exceptions to the lateness penalty for valid reasons such as illness, compassionate grounds, etc. will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Course Instructor when supported by written documentation (e.g., a doctor's letter). No assignments will be accepted after the last class (December 1).

Class Schedule

September 8: Introduction

September 15: Surveillance Capitalism and Platform Capitalism

Readings:

1. Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. PublicAffairs. [Chapter 3, The Discovery of Behavioural Surplus].
2. Srnicek, N. (2017). *Platform capitalism*. Polity Press. [Chapter 2, Platform Capitalism]

Reading Reports:

1. _____ and _____
2. _____ and _____

September 22: Surveillance Studies Concepts: surveillance culture

Readings:

1. Lyon, D. (1994). *The Electronic Eye*. University of Minnesota Press. [Chapter 1, pp. 1-20]
2. Lyon, D. (2018). *The Culture of Surveillance: Watching as a Way of Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press. [Introduction]

Reading Reports:

1. _____ and _____

September 29: Surveillance in Education: the academicon

Readings:

1. Swartz, M., & McElroy, K. (2023). The “academicon”: AI and surveillance in higher education. *Surveillance & Society*, 21(3), 276-281.
2. Shepherd, Tamara. 2024. The Canadian Clearview AI Investigation as a Call for Digital Policy Literacy. *Surveillance & Society* 22 (2): 179-191.

Reading Reports:

1. _____ and _____

October 6: Surveillance Studies Concepts: the new surveillance

Readings:

1. Marx, G. T. (2016). *Windows into the soul: Surveillance and society in an age of high technology*. University of Chicago Press. [Introduction and Chapter 1, pp. 1-39]
2. Castets-Renard, Céline and Robichaud-Durand, Simon (2022). Online Test Proctoring Software and Social Control: Is the Legal Framework for Personal Information and AI Protective Enough in Canada? https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4205940

Reading Reports:

1. _____ and _____
2. _____ and _____

October 13: NO CLASS

October 20: Platforms and Higher Ed: the social factory

Readings:

1. Terranova, T. (2000). Free labor: Producing culture for the digital economy. *Social Text*, 18(2), 33-58. <https://web.mit.edu/schock/www/docs/18.2terranova.pdf>
- Williamson, B. (2024). Re-infrastructuring higher education. *Dialogues on Digital Society*, 1(1), 41-46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/29768640241251666>

Reading Reports:

1. _____ and _____

October 27: Algorithms of oppression, algorithms of resistance

Readings:

1. Noble, Safiya Umoja (2018). *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York University Press. Introduction (pp. 1-14)
- Bonini, Tiziano and Emiliano Treré (2024). *Algorithms of resistance: the everyday fight against platform power*. Cambridge, Massachusetts : The MIT Press. Chapter 1, Living with Algorithms: Power, Agency, Resistance. (pp. 13-28).

Reading Reports:

1. _____ and _____

November 3: Critical AI Studies

Readings:

1. Pasquinelli, M. (2023). *The eye of the master: A social history of artificial intelligence*. Verso. [Introduction and Chapter 1, pp. 1-48.]

Reading Reports:

1. _____ and _____

November 10: Academic Integrity and CanGPT

Readings:

1. Marks, D. (2024, Nov 8). AI Spy: Universities struggle to catch AI generated work. *The Eyeopener*.

McKelvey, F. (Interviewee), & Starnino, C. (Interviewer). (2024, Aug 31). *Forget ChatGPT—Canada can cook up its own AI*. *The Walrus*.

Reading Reports:

1. _____ and _____

Presentation:

1. _____ and _____

November 17: Presentations

1. _____ and _____

2. _____ and _____

3. _____ and _____

November 24: Presentations

1. _____ and _____

2. _____ and _____

3. _____ and _____

December 1: Presentations

1. _____ and _____

2. _____ and _____

3. _____ and _____

Letter grades defined

A+ 100 – 90 Outstanding

Demonstrates thorough knowledge of content and/or techniques and exceptional skill or great originality in the use of content or techniques to satisfy requirements of the assignment or course.

A 89 – 85 Excellent

Demonstrates thorough knowledge of content and/or techniques with a high degree of skill and/or some elements of originality in satisfying requirements of the assignment or course.

A- 84 – 80 Excellent, but not original

Demonstrates thorough knowledge of content and/or techniques with a high degree of skill in satisfying requirements of the assignment or course.

B+ 79 – 77 Very Good

Demonstrates very good knowledge of content and/or techniques with a fairly high degree of skill in satisfying requirements of the assignment or course.

B 76 – 73 Good

Demonstrates good level of knowledge of content and/or techniques with considerable skill in using these to satisfy requirements of the assignment or course.

B- 72 – 70 Fair

Demonstrates fair level of knowledge of content and/or techniques together with considerable skill in using these to satisfy requirements of the assignment or course.

C+ 69 – 67 Competent

Demonstrates acceptable knowledge of content and/or techniques together with considerable skill in using these to satisfy requirements of the assignment or course.

C 66 – 63 Fairly Competent

Demonstrates acceptable knowledge of content and/or techniques together with some skill in using these to satisfy requirements of the assignment or course.

C- 62 – 60 Marginally Competent

Demonstrates acceptable knowledge of content and/or techniques to satisfy requirements of the assignment or course.

D+ 59 – 57 Pass

Demonstrates slightly better than minimal knowledge of content and/or techniques together with some ability to use these to satisfy requirements of the assignment or course.

D 56 – 53 Pass with difficulty

Demonstrates minimum knowledge of content and/or techniques needed to satisfy requirements of the assignment or course.

D- 52 – 50 Marginal pass

Demonstrates enough knowledge of content or techniques to pass, but demonstrates minimal understanding of requirements of the assignment or course.

F 49 – 0 Unsatisfactory

Few requirements of the assignment or course were met.

XF Did not write the final exam but fulfilled all other requirements of the course.

1. **Accessibility:** Contact [Accessible Learning](#) if you require academic accommodations because of a disability. Review the [Registration](#) page for information about intake and documentation requirements. Deadlines: Students are responsible for meeting posted deadlines for registering with Accessible Learning and booking accommodated exams. Accessible Learning cannot guarantee accommodations for requests received after posted deadlines.
2. **Plagiarism:** The University has a defined policy with respect to academic misconduct. As a Laurier student you are responsible for familiarizing yourself with this policy and the accompanying penalty guidelines, some of which may appear on your transcript if there is a finding of misconduct. The relevant policy can be found at Laurier's [academic integrity](#) website along with resources to educate and support you in upholding a culture of integrity. Ignorance is not a defense. Wilfrid Laurier University uses software that can check for plagiarism. If requested to do so by course instructors, students are required to submit their written work in electronic form and have it checked for plagiarism.
3. **Late Assignment Policy:** Assignments will not be accepted after the due date. Exceptions to the lateness penalty for valid reasons such as illness, compassionate grounds, etc. will be considered on a case-by-case basis by Dr. Levant when supported by written documentation (e.g., a doctor's letter). No assignments will be accepted after the last class (December 3).
4. **Final Examinations:** Students are strongly urged not to make any commitments (e.g., vacation) during the examination period. Students are required to be available for examinations during the examination periods of all terms in which they register.
5. **Extra-Curricular Activities:** Involvement in extra-curricular activities (such as sports practices or games, Fashion N Motion, etc.) does not exempt students in any way from their academic responsibilities in classes.
6. **Intellectual Property:** The educational materials developed for this course, including, but not limited to, lecture notes and slides, handout materials, examinations and assignments, and any materials posted to MyLearningSpace, are the intellectual property of the course instructors. These materials have been developed for student use only and they are not intended for wider dissemination and/or communication outside of a given course. Posting or providing unauthorized audio, video, or textual material of course content to third-party websites violates instructors' intellectual property rights, and the Canadian Copyright Act. Recording lectures in any way is prohibited in this course unless specific permission has been granted by instructors. Failure to follow these instructions may be in contravention of the university's Student Non-Academic Code of Conduct and/or Code of Academic Conduct, and will result in appropriate penalties. Participation in this course constitutes an agreement by all parties to abide by the relevant University Policies, and to respect the intellectual property of others during and after their association with Wilfrid Laurier University.
7. **Use of Zoom for Instructional Purposes:** Wilfrid Laurier University uses a range of technologies to facilitate in-person and remote instruction. Zoom is currently used for remote course delivery, including lectures, seminars, and group office hours, which may be recorded, stored and shared through MyLearningSpace for access by students in the course. For these course activities, students are permitted to turn off their cameras or use an alternative name to maintain their privacy after they have confirmed this with their course instructors. Student personal information is collected and used in the course in

accordance with University policies and the [Notice of Collection, Use or Disclosure of Personal Information](#). All exams and mid-terms in the course that are conducted online will be proctored using only technologies approved for assessment at Laurier as outlined [on this page](#).

8. **Statement on Generative AI: The use of generative AI is permitted in this course.** In all submissions in which you use generative AI, you must [cite its usage](#). Failing to cite the use of generative AI is a form of academic misconduct and Senate Policy 12.2 Student Code of Conduct: Academic Misconduct will be applied.
9. **Academic Integrity:** Laurier is committed to a culture of integrity within and beyond the classroom. This culture values trustworthiness (e.g., honesty, integrity, reliability), fairness, caring, respect, responsibility and citizenship. Together, we have a shared responsibility to uphold this culture in our academic and nonacademic behaviour. The University has a defined policy with respect to academic misconduct. As a Laurier student you are responsible for familiarizing yourself with this policy and the accompanying penalty guidelines, some of which may appear on your transcript if there is a finding of misconduct. The relevant policy can be found at Laurier's [academic integrity](#) website along with resources to educate and support you in upholding a culture of integrity. Ignorance is not a defense.
10. **Gender Inclusivity:** This course will be conducted in an affirming and mutually respectful atmosphere for people of all gender expressions and identities. I was provided with a class roster with your name as it appears on the official enrollment information. If you use a name different from the roster, please let me know at your earliest convenience. You can also share your gender pronouns with me if you like. Members of the class are expected to refer to one another by the name and pronouns identified by each student. If you are comfortable, you can also let your classmates know about your name and pronouns. The Centre for Student Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (CSEDI) has developed a website [outlining how to request a different name to appear on some university records and systems](#) such as Zoom, MyLS and email. The website also provides information about Laurier's Inclusive Washroom Initiative, support resources at Laurier, and more.
11. **Student Resources:**
 - [Centre for Off-Campus Initiatives](#): The Centre advocates for the off-campus student while being mindful of your unique experience at Laurier and addresses the needs of Laurier's off-campus students.
 - [Student Rights Advisory Committee \(studentsrights@wlu.ca\)](#): The Student Rights Advisory Committee exists to provide you with information about your rights when it comes to landlord-tenant issues or academic appeals. While in no way legal representation, it can help to inform you about your options to make difficult situations easier to navigate.
 - [Empower Me - Mental Health Resources provided by Dialogue](#): Empower Me is a mental health and wellness service that seeks to contribute to a resilient student community by supporting existing on-campus and community mental health resources. Empower Me has a number of professionals with various domains of expertise, including psychology, psychotherapy, social work, nutrition, etc., to support you and respond effectively to diverse needs. You can access services via telephone, videoconference, or in-person. Empower Me is: available 24/7, 365 days a year, confidential, multilingual, culturally sensitive, gender-inclusive, and faith inclusive.
 - [The Essentials - Legal Care Program](#): The Essentials, Legal Care Program allows students to access a legal consultation service. Students are free to consult a duly certified lawyer regarding any legal questions. Upon filling out the Support Form, students can expect a response from legal counsel within approximately 48 hours (business days) about next steps and assistance that is required to navigate

- housing disputes, employment disputes, disputes with an academic institution, and public notaries. Students can also seek legal representation when their case qualifies for further counsel.
- **Good2Talk** is a postsecondary school helpline that provides free, professional and confidential counselling support for students in Ontario. Call 1-866-925-5454 or through 2-1-1. Available 24-7.
 - **International Student Support**: Offers a variety of services for international graduate students including wellness support, transition advising, academic advising, career advising, permanent residency support, and more.
 - **Indigenous Students Services**: The Indigenous Student Centres in Waterloo and Brantford are committed to fostering a positive student experience for Indigenous students: First Nation (status and non-status), Inuit and Métis persons. Whether you need academic or personal support, financial assistance or career advice, they are here to help. Their office provides indigenous graduate students with access to traditional medicines and welcomes them to join in at regularly held gatherings, feasts and traditional ceremonies. They are here for students in all areas of student life to ensure you have the best student experience.
 - **Centre for Student Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**: Works to cultivate a culture on campus that respects and promotes equity, diversity, inclusion (EDI) and social justice in all aspects of Laurier. They provide support for students seeking support for after an experience of harm (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, or colonial violence), community connections to CSEDI student-run services that provide peer support, educational and social opportunities, support in advocacy, systems navigation, or support with internal or external institutional processes, education and resources related to student equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and more.
 - **Writing Services** - helps students develop the writing skills needed to succeed in their academic studies. They provide an accessible, supportive, student-centred environment where ideas can take shape and students can develop their writing through critical thinking.

Kitchener/Waterloo Resources:

- **Emergency Response Team** | ert@wlu.ca: The Emergency Response Team provides medical assistance to students on campus. ERT can be booked for on-site event support by filling out the online booking request form on their website.
- **Hawk Walk** | 519.886.3668 | walkwdispatch@wlu.ca: Hawk Walk is a volunteer operated safe walk-home service, available daily during evening hours. Teams of two radio-dispatched volunteers are available on request to escort students to and from campus as well as to off-campus destinations. Hawk Walk can be found on the 2nd floor of the Fred Nichols Campus Centre next to the Dean of Students Office.
- **Food Bank** | foodbank@wlu.ca: Food Bank provides food parcels to cater to the nutritional and dietary needs of students. All students are eligible to use this service, regardless of circumstance or financial situation. Request a package at <https://www.yourstudentsunion.ca/food-bank>
- **Waterloo Student Wellness Centre**: 548.889.3239. The Centre supports the physical, emotional, and mental health needs of students. Located on the 2nd floor of the Student Services Building, booked and same-day appointments are available Mondays and Wednesdays from 8:30 am to 7:30 pm, and Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 8:30 am to 4:15 pm. Contact the Centre at x3146, wellness@wlu.ca or @LaurierWellness. After hours crisis support available 24/7. Call 1-844-437-3247 (HERE247).