



uOttawa

Faculty of Law  
**Common Law**  
Section

## The Laws of Robotics

CML 4137 JB

**INSTRUCTOR:**

Ian Kerr [iankerr@uottawa.ca](mailto:iankerr@uottawa.ca)

**THE LAWS OF  
ROBOTICS:**

An inquiry  
concerning the  
nature of law,  
technology and  
values

**COURSE DATES AND HOURS:**

January 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> in Ottawa 4-7pm in ftx 102  
January 11<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> in Puerto Rico 4-7pm in L9

**PROFESSOR'S OFFICE HOURS AND OUT OF CLASS AVAILABILITY:**

After class or by appointment

January 2016

**SENATE APPROVED COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This is a January exchange course, taught one week in Ottawa, two weeks in Puerto Rico. The class is shared equally by uOttawa and UPR students. Students will have the opportunity to register in one of the following topics: Feminist Legal Issues, Arte-Rico or Techno-Rico.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

*Context:*

We are entering an age of advanced robotics and automation. By the time that students enrolled in this course become established in their legal careers, it is anticipated that robots will be our surgeons and our domestic servants. Other complex services once offered by humans will be completely automated; these automated systems will become the proxy for human decision-making.

How do law and technology structure and constrain our possible future worlds? What laws or ethical rules ought to govern a society enmeshed in human-computer interaction? And how will these various codes enable and disable the possibility of achieving what is good, what is right and what is just?

*Objectives:*

The aim of this course is to interrogate the above questions through an exploration of the state of the art of robot and automation technologies and their introduction into society. Robots allow us to explore questions of legal ontology and epistemology, including what it means to know or enforce the law, the nature of rules and rule-following, what

makes laws and their interpretation legitimate, the nature of just code, etc. We will also consider, more generally, the ethical and legal significance of populating robots in the workplace, market and home. Through a critique of existing and soon to be proposed ethical and legislative frameworks, we will contemplate the interrelationship between ethics, law and technology by thinking about the general goals of artificial intelligence, whether and how robots ought to be programmed, how automated systems ought to resolve conflicting rules and norms, and about the broader social implications of boarding this strange Mothership.

Through this interrogation, students will consider core ethical and legal concepts including questions about sentience and personhood, legal and moral agency, servitude and slavery, criminal and civil liability, safety, privacy, and security. Students will also have the opportunity to further refine their skills in public speaking and oral argumentation, and to renew their abilities in legal research and writing.

#### **METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:**

*Pedagogy:*

This course does not assume previous training in technology or ethics. All that is required is intrigue and an open mind. It will operate as a typical graduate seminar. Participants should therefore expect to engage in a variety of learning methodologies other than the traditional lecture format, including analysis of sci-fi literature, films, music, and other digital media. In addition to always completing daily readings, attending the seminar on a regular basis and enthusiastically participating in class, seminar participants are expected to blog and podcast.

#### **MATERIALS:**

*The Laws of Robotics: An inquiry concerning the nature of law, technology and values.*  
Eds. Ian Kerr, Jason Millar, Devon Robertson, Laura Freitag, and Reem Zaia (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 2016). Available via dropbox

(Although all course materials will be available in electronic format, students are strongly encouraged to buy their own copy of *I, Robot*, which is easily obtained at most bookstores. amazon.ca [advertises a number of used copies](#), dirt cheap.)

#### **EVALUATION:**

The course will be evaluated on a pass/fail basis. The components of evaluation are:

- (i) a **MCQ Quiz** (worth 25% of course grade) on Wednesday January 20, 2016
- (ii) a **Team Project** (worth 75% of course grade) due Sunday January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

The team project must be mailed to [iankerr@uottawa.ca](mailto:iankerr@uottawa.ca) on Sunday, January 24, no later than one minute before midnight. The details for the projects will be disclosed in class on Wednesday January 20<sup>th</sup> and students will not have any readings or classes on January 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> in order to complete their projects. It is the responsibility of team to accommodate

unforeseen technological glitches by ensuring adequate time when emailing the team project in accord with the deadline.

*The etymology of the word “deadline” traces back to a line drawn around a prison beyond which prisoners were liable to be shot. A modern understanding of the term is “the latest time/date by which an assignment or task must be completed.” Deadlines are for real. Courts and other regulatory structures will impose them and your clients’ liberty and property will be subject to your ability to meet them. Never miss a deadline without prior permission. Extensions based on medical or compassionate grounds are available the Faculty’s Office of Academic Affairs.*

#### **READINGS:**

Please see the “Reading List” document for further information.

#### **ACADEMIC FRAUD:**

Students are reminded of the rules on academic fraud. All instances of fraud will be reported for investigation and sanction. Assignments submitted must be your own work. Please familiarize yourself with the University Academic Fraud Regulations, <http://www.uottawa.ca/governance/regulations.html#r72>. You should also familiarize yourself with the University Policy on Plagiarism, which is available at the Academic Office and at <http://www.uottawa.ca/plagiarism.pdf> and the University of Ottawa academic integrity website which can be found at: <http://web5.uottawa.ca/mcs-smc/academicintegrity/home.php>.

The University disciplinary process for academic fraud can result in penalties ranging from loss of credits for the course to expulsion. Academic fraud must also be reported to the Law Society of Upper Canada, which in turn may refuse you admission to practice law in the province.

#### **ACCOMMODATION:**

##### **Disability Accommodation:**

Students who require accommodations or academic support because of a physical or learning disability, or any condition that affects their ability to learn, are invited to register with ACCESS SERVICE:

Office: UCU 339  
Telephone: 613.562.5976  
TTY: 613.562.5214  
E-mail: [adapt@uottawa.ca](mailto:adapt@uottawa.ca)  
Web: [www.sass.uottawa.ca/access/](http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/access/)

Students can meet with an Access Service specialist to identify their individual needs and to discuss appropriate strategies. All information provided to Access Services and all accommodations received remain strictly confidential.

Deadlines to request accommodations for final exams:

Fall Semester: before 15 November

Winter Semester: before 15 March

For additional information about Access Services you may contact Jessica Simon in Student Services at [jsimon@uottawa.ca](mailto:jsimon@uottawa.ca) or at 613.562.5800 x 8891.

***Religious Accommodation:***

Accommodations will be made to allow students to observe their religious obligations. Students should contact the Manager, Equity and Academic Success no later than three weeks before the religious holiday in question, unless otherwise instructed by their professor. The University of Ottawa is committed to respecting the religious beliefs and practices of all members of the community, and making accommodations for observances of special significance to adherents. Should any of the dates relating to assignments for this course pose such a conflict for you, please let the professor know within the first three weeks of class.

***Sexual Violence: Prevention and Support***

The University of Ottawa will not tolerate any act of sexual violence. This includes acts such as rape and sexual harassment, as well as misconduct that take place without consent, which includes cyberbullying. The University, as well as various employee and student groups, offers a variety of services and resources to ensure that all uOttawa community members have access to confidential support and information, and to procedures for reporting an incident or filing a complaint. For more information, please visit <http://www.uOttawa.ca/sexual-violence-support-and-prevention/>.

**CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE**

- Laptops are to be used in class only for note taking, searching course related materials, or accessing the virtual campus. It is easy for your laptop to become a distraction to you and to those around you, and therefore you are asked to avoid using computers for entertainment during class. If you fail to honour this request, you will be asked to leave the classroom. Repeated or particularly egregious disregard of this laptop etiquette request will result in a referral of the matter to the Vice Dean for appropriate sanction.
- The instructor will occasionally call for “laptops down” and conduct a brief discussion or exercise with all laptop screens down.
- Students are asked to avoid tardiness. If it is absolutely necessary for you to enter or leave the classroom while class is in session, please do not disrupt the class upon entering or exiting the classroom.
- Finally, please turn off cellphones when you are in the classroom.