



CSLS SPEAKER SERIES

Monday, April 8, 2019

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“Kidney Allocation as Algorithmic Governance”

This lecture explores a real-world example of collaborative algorithmic governance: The allocation of deceased-donor kidneys for transplant in the United States. Although popular sources often speak of a “waiting list,” there is not a first-come, first-served queue for these organs. Instead, whenever a kidney becomes available, an algorithm managed by a nonprofit in Richmond, Virginia conducts a “match run,” to suggest a recipient for that organ. The algorithm reflects a complex blend of medical, logistical and moral factors.

On December 4, 2014, a substantially redesigned version of the algorithm was introduced, in an effort to make the system both more efficient and more equitable. This new algorithm reflects a decade-long, consultative and transparent process that may be a model for other instances of high stakes algorithmic governance.

But the voluminous official record of this algorithm’s development, together with the published final formula and its accompanying explanatory materials, remain remarkably inscrutable when considered in isolation from other sources, for three reasons: First, the effective exercise of power over the algorithm (and the alternatives to using it) are offstage when the algorithm itself is centered. Second, even when an algorithm is transparent, the reasons behind decisions to include or exclude certain factors, and the effects of those decisions, may remain opaque. Third, the numbers that are used as inputs to the algorithm or as indicia of its performance are altered by the very fact that they are so used. These observations may be salient for other high stakes algorithms in the public sector and beyond.

PLACE Selznick Seminar Room, 2240 Piedmont Avenue
TIME 12:45 – 2:00pm. Coffee and water provided. Bag lunches welcome.
INFO <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/centers/center-for-the-study-of-law-society/>
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