FUTURE OF WORK
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

2025 Future of Work Grant Recipients

Youngjun Lee
Department of Kinesiology

Youngjun Lee, a third-year Ph.D. student in Kinesiology at Michigan State University, investigates the mental health benefits of immersive virtual reality (VR) boxing exercises for young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). His randomized controlled trial examines the effects of VR exercise—with and without a virtual coach—on depressive symptoms, heart rate variability, and physical activity motivation. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory, the study aims to identify scalable, technology-driven interventions that address social and sensory barriers, while improving emotional regulation and motivation in an underserved population.

Wenjia Cao
Department of Economics

Wenjia plans to examine the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption on gender wage gaps in the U.S. If AI has differential effects on tasks requiring different skill sets, the wage impact of AI is likely to be unevenly distributed between women and men, since they tend to be employed in different types of jobs. Wenjia intends to use data on AI adoption in business to construct measures for current, expected, and continuing AI adoption. She also plans to use data on online job postings to capture AI's complementarity to study how it affects gender wage gaps.

Xin Liu
Department of Economics

Xin's current study investigates the narrowing U.S. wage gap between older and younger workers since the mid-2010s, contrasting with historical trends. Using a task-based framework, she finds that experience-augmenting technologies disproportionately affect younger workers by automating junior tasks, while experience-replacing technologies impact older workers by automating senior tasks. Her work highlights how technology contributes to both convergence and divergence in wage inequality across generations. Through her research, Xin seeks to inform policy discussions surrounding labor market adaptation to an aging population, technological advancements, and intergenerational equity.

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Xiaolong Zhang

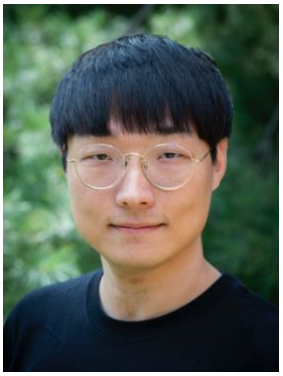
Department of Psychology

Xiaolong Zhang is a PhD student in Organizational Psychology at Michigan State University. He studies how employees engage with short-form digital content during their nonwork time to manage stress and recover from daily work demands. His research highlights the role of everyday media habits in supporting psychological recovery and well-being in an increasingly digital world.

Kexin Cui

School of Criminal Justice

Kexin Cui's research explores how rurality influences cybercrime victimization across Michigan using 2023 incident-level data from the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). The study employs a hurdle model to analyze both the likelihood of reporting any cybercrime and the rate of incidents among agencies that report them. Key measures include geographic rurality and demographic rurality, with plans to incorporate additional contextual factors such as digital infrastructure and socioeconomic conditions. The project also involves spatial analysis to identify regional disparities and inform equitable cybersecurity policy and resource allocation.



Hee Woong Park

Department of Psychology

Hee Woong's study examines how AI-driven changes in the workplace influence undergraduate students' career development. Integrating Social Cognitive Career Theory, the Technology Acceptance Model, and the four sources of self-efficacy, the research aims to clarify how students navigate career planning amid technological disruption. To ensure broader applicability, the study includes participants from diverse academic and institutional backgrounds, including community colleges. Findings are expected to offer empirical insights that inform student career guidance and contribute to the literature on career development in the age of AI.

Mike Frazier

Department of Psychology

Mike Frazier is a third-year PhD student in Educational Psychology and Educational Technology at Michigan State University. His FoW project uses phenomenological inquiry to explore how students experience cognitive work in AI-integrated learning environments–and what that means for the future of work. Drawing on distributed cognition theory, he examines how tools like ChatGPT reshape cognitive processes, professional communication, and digital collaboration, as well as how learners interpret, accept, or resist AI tools. His study aims to reveal the cognitive agency, authorship, and creativity needed for success in AI-driven workplaces.