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Lemonade via robots: UT research project looks into responsible artificial intelligence



JUSTIN HART) — Researchers at the University of Texas at Austin are testing out technology that could change the future of deliveries. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many have taken to delivery service apps such as Favor, Postmates, Amazon and many more to order everything from food to groceries and everyday household items.

This week, at the UT campus, two robots will roam the 40 Acres delivering free lemonade to those with a university email who order via the “Texas Botler” app. It’s part of the university’s [New Autonomous Delivery System or SMADS project](#) through [Good Systems](#).

University researchers are working to develop ethically responsible artificial intelligence (AI) technology.

“AI system is everywhere in our life whether we realize it or not,” Junfeng Jiao, an associate professor at UT School of Architecture and the chair of Good Systems who secured funding for the project. “From dating apps to facial recognition to red-light cameras, so we want to create a group system that can fairly, equitably, accessibility is used by everybody not just certain segments of society. We want the system to be transparent, protect privacy, safe to use without discrimination or inherited by bias.”

They’re also looking at the safest way to integrate the technology into the real world.

“You now have a robot that’s running on the sidewalk right next to people, how do you do that when it’s a crowded sidewalk? How do you do it when there are people and its intentions aren’t clear? How do you do it when it’s no longer cute that there is a robot out there and it’s a spectacle to look at? Will people start to regard it as an inconvenience like the electric scooters?” asked Justin Hart, the assistant professor of practice for the computer science department and assistant director of Texas Robotics.