Critical Perspectives on Work in the 21st Century

Most of us spend a large proportion of our lives working or searching for work. The jobs we hold shape almost every aspect of our lives, from our daily activities and social interactions to our personal identities. In the past few decades, however, there have been massive shifts in the employment landscape that require us to rethink what work is and how we should manage it. In this course, we specifically explore how social statuses such as race, class, gender, age, and disability impact different groups of workers who find themselves also challenged by work overload, new technologies, downsizing, and an unstable economy that mandates a reconsideration of retirement goals.

This course is designed with several goals in mind. First, by studying the sociology of work, you’ll learn about sociology in general. Specifically, you’ll become more familiar with the critical mindset that sociologists adopt, the types of questions sociologists ask, some of the research methods they use, and the evidence that informs sociological arguments. Additionally, by studying some insights sociological investigations of work uncover, you’ll become better equipped to interpret your previous, current, and future employment experiences while also becoming more familiar with a career path that interests you.

Critical Perspectives on Work in the 21st Century is a course that satisfies several graduation requirements: Social Inquiry, Intercultural Domestic Studies, and Writing Rich 2. The course is also tagged as American Studies and Public Policy. As a SOAN course, we will aim to achieve the following learning outcomes:

- Articulate the complexity of contemporary socio-cultural phenomena in their many dimensions
- Formulate appropriate sociological research questions about socio-cultural phenomena
- Apply sociological theory to analyze socio-cultural phenomena

OFFICE HOURS

I love seeing students during my office hours. A one-on-one visit can clarify course material; provide answers to questions students may have; and assist with understanding, on a deeper level, my expectations for the work students complete in this course.

Please visit this link to schedule an appointment on one of the following days and times:

- Tuesdays 3:00-4:15pm
• Wednesdays 3:30-4:30pm

• Thursdays 3:45-4:45pm
Additional times are available by appointment so please do not hesitate to contact me. I will look forward to hearing from you.

COURSE MATERIAL

We’ll be reading the following 4 books this term. Links to additional readings are provided on our course Moodle:

• *Dying to Work: Death and Injury in the American Workplace* by Jonathan D. Karmel (available on JSTOR)

• *Dirty Work: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America* by Eyal Press (available in the Carleton College bookstore)

• *Making Motherhood Work: How Women Manage Careers and Caregiving* by Caitlyn Collins (available on JSTOR)

• *Down and Out in the New Economy* by Ilana Gershon (available in the Carleton College bookstore)

You will also be tasked with presenting one of the following books:

• *Does Skill Make Us Human? Migrant Workers in 21st-Century Qatar and Beyond* by Natasha Iskander (available on JSTOR)

• *Flatlining: Race, Work, and Health Care in the New Economy* by Adia Harvey Wingfield (available on JSTOR)

• *Semi Queer: Inside the World of Gay, Trans, and Black Truck Drivers* by Anne Balay (available on JSTOR)

READING REQUIREMENTS

To perform well in this course and to create a rewarding class discussion, you must commit to several hours of active, focused reading prior to each class meeting. The readings represent a mix of classic and contemporary books and journal articles, reports, and news articles. Please give this material your undivided attention.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your grade in this course will be determined by your performance on several small assignments and class participation. When completing this work, you are required to abide by Carleton’s standards for academic integrity. Please click on this link to learn more about these standards, particularly as they relate to
plagiarism. This course requires you to complete lots of writing and thus, it is essential that you know what plagiarism is and the different forms it can take.

A table titled “course assignments” is placed at the end of this syllabus. This table briefly describes each assignment, its distribution and submission date, and the number of points awarded.

Finally, up to 10 points will be awarded for class participation. You will determine which class participation goals you want to accomplish this term and you will play a role in assessing how you met these goals.

E-MAIL AND MOBILE DEVICE POLICIES

Please use your Carleton account to send e-mail to me at anierobisz@carleton.edu. You can call me Dr. Nierobisz, Professor Nierobisz, or Annette – which is what I prefer. I will make every effort to respond to e-mail in a timely manner: within 24 hours on weekdays. If you have not heard back from me within a couple of business days, please feel welcome to resend your message. To facilitate your attention and engagement, keep electronic devices that are not necessary for class participation on silent mode and out of sight.

RECORDING AND DISSEMINATION OF COURSE MATERIAL

The materials developed for this course, including, but not limited to, lecture notes and slides, handout, assignments, and emails are my intellectual property. These materials have been developed for student use only and they are not intended for wider dissemination and/or communication outside of this course. Posting or providing unauthorized audio, video, textual material of lecture content, and emails to third-party websites violates faculty intellectual property rights.

ACCESSIBILITY

Please note that I am striving to make sure that this course is accessible to all students in a variety of living situations and with various abilities. If you have any concerns about or difficulties with course materials or requirements, please let me know as soon as possible so that I can work with you to rectify the situation.

COURSE OUTLINE

1. THE SOCIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF OUR COURSE

3/28 Introducing Work in the 21st century

2. GENERATIONAL INTERACTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

4/6 What Happens When Generations Work Together?


4/8 Older Workers


4/11 The Oldest of Older Workers


3. RACE, CLASS, AND CITIZENSHIP AT WORK

4/13 Occupational Health and Safety


4/15 Dying to Work by Jonathan Karmel

Karmel, Jonathan. 2017. Dying to Work: Death and Injury in the American Workplace. Just read Chapter 4 plus the one story you’ve been assigned from Chapter 5.
- On 4/13, students will be assigned one story from Chapter 5 to discuss with classmates on 4/15. These conversations are brief and somewhat informal; PowerPoint slides are not necessary.

4/18 Dying to Work by Jonathan Karmel


4/20 Karl Marx and the Alienated Worker


4/22 Dirty Work by Eyal Press

Read Part I (chapters 1-3)

4/25 Dirty Work by Eyal Press

Read Part II (chapters 4 & 5)

4/27 Dirty Work by Eyal Press

Read Part III (chapters 6 and 7) OR Part IV (chapters 8 and 9). Also read the Epilogue

- On 4/22, students will be assigned two chapters (6 and 7 OR 8 and 9) to discuss with classmates on 4/27. These conversations are brief and informal; PowerPoint slides are not required.

4/29 Book Presentation

*Does Skill Make Us Human?*

4. COMBINING WORK AND FAMILIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

5/6 Working Mothers


Making Motherhood Work by Caitlynn Collins: Read Chapter 1 and Appendix A: Notes on Methods

5/9 An International Comparison

Making Motherhood Work by Caitlynn Collins: Chapters 2, 3, 4, OR 5

- On 5/6, students will be assigned one chapters (2, 3, 4, OR 5) discuss with classmates on 5/9. These conversations are brief and informal; PowerPoint slides are not required.

5/11 Back in the United States

Making Motherhood Work by Caitlynn Collins: Chapters 6 and 7

5. SEARCHING FOR WORK

5/13 Sociological Perspectives on the Job Search


5/16 Book Presentation

Semi Queer: Inside the World of Gay, Trans, and Black Truck Drivers


5/18 Down and Out in the New Economy by Ilana Gershon

Just read Preface, Introduction and Chapter 1


  - Class visit from Rachel Leatham and Chad Ellsworth of the Carleton College Career Center

5/20 Down and Out in the New Economy by Ilana Gershon

Just read chapters 2 and 3


5/23 Down and Out in the New Economy by Ilana Gershon

Just read chapters 4 and 5


Carleton College Career Center. 2020. LinkedIn Lesson. (please watch all five videos)

5/25 Down and Out in the New Economy by Ilana Gershon

Just read chapter 6


5/27 Down and Out in the New Economy by Ilana Gershon

Just read chapter 7 and conclusion
6. IDEAS FOR TRANSFORMING THE WORKPLACE

5/30 Creating Sane and Sustainable Jobs


6/1 Continuing the Discussion

Readings to be announced

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Table 1. Course Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Distribution date</th>
<th>Submission date</th>
<th># of points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A study of two career paths</td>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>April 12 (non-class day)</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book presentation</td>
<td>April 6</td>
<td>April 29, May 4, May 16</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class conversation: <em>Dying to Work</em></td>
<td>April 13</td>
<td>April 15</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>A study of occupational injuries and fatalities</td>
<td>April 13</td>
<td>April 25</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class conversation: <em>Dirty Work</em></td>
<td>April 22</td>
<td>April 27</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class conversation: <em>Making Motherhood Work</em></td>
<td>May 6</td>
<td>May 9</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview with a working mom</td>
<td>May 6</td>
<td>May 18 &amp; 24</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Strong Inventory Assessment</td>
<td>April 27</td>
<td>May 31 (non-class day)</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>June 1</td>
<td>10</td>
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Grade range: “A” = 90-100%; “B” = 80-89%; “C” = 70-79%; “D” = 60-69%; “F” <= 59%