Fall 2012

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Course Description:

During the past 100 years, the United States has undergone a tremendous economic transformation: 90% of Americans went from working for themselves to working for someone else. During that time, work itself has changed dramatically. Americans once counted on lifetime jobs. Now, careers have become splintered and unstable. Our parents had stable career trajectories. Most of us will work in multiple companies, positions, and even careers before retiring. There are many forces responsible for these changes; one of the most powerful is technology.

This course examines the role of technology—particularly information technology—in changing the nature of work. Throughout history, technology has dramatically changed how people work and what they do for work. The technologies of the industrial revolution, e.g., machines and the assembly line, moved workers from the farm to the factory and from the country to the city. The last several decades have witnessed a second industrial revolution. Instead of the machine, work is being transformed by information technology. The manufacturing economy that dominated 20th century industry in the U.S. has given way to a service economy. Instead of making material objects, we synthesize, manipulate, and analyze data, turning it into information.

To understand these transformations, we will begin by studying some of the classic literature on work. As we progress, we will test the lessons of early theorists against the technologies of our day: What do the old theories still explain? What are their weaknesses? We will then turn toward more recent theorizing on work and the new economy, asking questions such as: How do these new theories build on or critique earlier ones? What is new about the “new” economy? How does the information technology revolution compare to the industrial revolution? What can we expect of work in the years to come?

Course Objectives:

This course is designed to help students make sense of work in the contemporary economy by examining the changes wrought by the introduction of information technology into the workplace. Since we all have some experience of work (and hope to find more gainful employment upon graduation), the challenge in this class will be to adopt a sociological approach to the study of work, rendering the familiar unfamiliar as we gain purchase on what it means to work. In this course, we will address the following questions: What is work? What does it mean to work? What counts as work? Whose work counts? Who controls work? What does work mean for society?
To answer these questions, the course is divided into thirds. The first section of the course is dedicated to understanding some of the classic theories and problems in the social study of work. The second section is concerned with more recent theorizing about work, specifically addressing questions about work in the new economy and the transformative effects of information technologies on work. In the final section of the course, we will do a close reading of an ethnography of work in the new economy.

**Course Requirements:**

*Reading:* I have assigned several readings for each week, as noted on the syllabus. Most come from the textbooks; others are available on Blackboard as links to websites or PDF documents. I expect students to complete the assigned weekly readings before the day we are scheduled to discuss them. Students should set aside sufficient time to read the material and take reading notes. Reading notes can be as simple as underlining key concepts and making marginal comments or as elaborate as typed summaries and reflections. Your reading notes will come in handy during class discussions and serve as content for your cumulative final exam. If you have questions about reading or note-taking strategies, feel free to talk to me during my office hours, or speak to the Teaching Assistant.

*Exams:* There are three exams in this course: one after each of the first two sections of the course and a final. I will inform you well in advance of scheduling an exam. Make every effort to attend the exams on the day scheduled. I cannot accommodate missed exams. The exams will be given in class and will be worth 60% of your grade (30% each). In-class exams will consist of short answer questions and essays. A cumulative final exam (30% of your grade) will be held on the date of the scheduled final.

*Attendance:* This course relies on student participation. Aside from being prepared, I expect students to attend classes. It will be exceedingly difficult for students to do well in this course without coming to class. I want students to actively engage with the texts assigned each week. Your participation helps other students get a handle on texts and helps me figure out the class’s level of comprehension. Participation does not mean that I expect a spontaneous exegesis of a particular reading. Thoughtful questions, reflections, applying theory to contemporary examples, and connections to other ideas constitute good participation. The official UIC calendar of holidays and deadlines can be found here:

http://www.uic.edu/ucat/catalog/CA.shtml

*Grading:* Students will be graded on the following:

- Two in-class exams worth 30% each for 60% of the final grade
- Final exam worth 30% of the final grade
- Class participation is worth the remaining 10%

*Help:* Your teaching assistant will provide any help you might need in the course. Feel free to contact her via email or visit her during her office hours with questions or concerns about substantive topics in the course or about the course itself. If you prefer to speak directly with me, visit me during my office hours or email me to make an appointment.
Distractions: Students face many distractions that compete for their attention in the classroom. To ensure the best possible learning environment for everyone, I expect students to refrain from checking their email, Facebook accounts, websites, etc. in class. Students should also shut off their cellphones before class starts. Errant ringtones and students texting their friends annoy and distract your colleagues.

Disability Statement: To obtain academic accommodations for this course, students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services (1-312-413-2183 (voice) or 1-312-413-0123 (TY)) and the professor (or TA) as soon as possible.

Religious Observances: Students who wish to observe their religious holidays should notify the instructor at least five days in advance of the date when they will be absent in order to arrange for an alternative assignment if necessary. The UIC policy on Observance of Religious Holidays is at www.uic.edu/depts/oae/.

Academic Integrity: I expect students to adhere to the most stringent definition of academic integrity. I will not tolerate plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty in my courses. The UIC Guidelines Regarding Academic Integrity define cheating as “(1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials or information in any academic exercise; (2) extending or receiving unauthorized assistance on any examination or assignment.” The Guidelines define plagiarism as “intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one’s own in any academic exercise.” Students with questions should consult www.uic.edu/ucat/catalog/GR.shtml. Any act of dishonesty will result in failure of the course and a letter to your dean. University policies regarding student conduct can be found here: http://www.uic.edu/depts/dos/studentconduct.html.

Required Texts:

The following texts, available from the UIC Bookstore, are required for this course:


Additional readings available on Blackboard as noted [BB]
Course Schedule:

Week One:
Tuesday: Introduction and distribute syllabus
Thursday: Lecture: What is work?

Reading: Crittenden, A. “How Mothers’ Work was ‘Disappeared’: The Invention of the Unproductive Housewife” [Wharton, Ch. 2, pp. 18-30][Also: BB]

Section 1: Preliminaries: We will begin by understanding some of the key texts and problems in the sociological study of work. This will provide us with the theoretical and empirical contexts necessary to understand the nature of work.

Week Two: Classical Sociological Perspectives on Work 1: Marx
Reading:
Marx, K. “Alienated Labor” [Wharton, Ch. 4, pp. 44-50]
Marx, K. “The Manifesto of the Communist Party” [Excerpts] [BB]

Week Three: Classical Sociological Perspectives on Work 2: Weber
Reading:
Weber, M. “Bureacracy” [Wharton, Ch. 5, pp. 51-56]
Weber, M. “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” [Excerpts] [BB]
Hays, S. “Flat Broke with Children: Enforcing the Work Ethic” [Wharton, Ch. 36, pp. 466-482]

Week Four: Labor Process Theory
Reading:
Taylor, F.W., “Fundamentals of Scientific Management” [Wharton, Ch. 6, pp. 57-64]
Braverman, H., “The Division of Labor” [Wharton, Ch. 7, pp. 65-68]
Meyer III, Stephen, “The Evolution of the New Industrial Technology” [Wharton, Ch. 3, pp. 31-43]

Week Five: Exam One
Tuesday: Review
Thursday: Exam One
Section 2: The New Economy and Information Technology in the Workplace: We turn our attention to more recent theorizing in the sociology of work. In this part of the course, we will address the transformation of work following what Piore and Sabel (1984) call the “second industrial divide.”

Week Six: From Skill to Knowledge
Reading:

Week Seven: Functional Flexibility: Technology and the Transformation of the Workplace
Reading:
  Zuboff, S. “In the Age of the Smart Machine” [Wharton, Ch. 11, pp. 113-124]
  Vallas, S. P. and Beck, J. P. “The Transformation of Work Revisited” [Wharton, Ch. 13, pp. 136-154]

Week Eight: Numerical Flexibility: Temporary and Contingent Work
Reading:
  Rogers, J. K. “Are We Not Temps?” [Wharton, Ch. 33, pp. 434-446]
  Evans, J. A., Kunda, G., and Barley, S. R. “Beach Time, Bridge Time, and Billable Hours: The Temporal Structure of Technical Contracting.” [Wharton, Ch. 43, pp. 564-589]

Week Nine: Inside the New Economy Workplace
Reading:

Week Ten: Second Exam
  Tuesday: Review
  Thursday: Exam Two
Section 3: Working in the New Economy: In the final section, we will apply what we have learned in the first 2/3rds of the course to a close reading of Venture Labor. Our task will be to understand work in the new economy, as Neff explains it and through the critical lenses we have developed throughout the semester.

Week Eleven: Introduction to Venture Labor
Reading:

Week Twelve: The New Networked Labor Process
Reading:
   Neff, Chapters 3 “Being Venture Labor,” and 4 “Why Networks Failed”

Week Thirteen: Whither the Worker?
Reading:
   Neff, Chapters 5 “The Crash of Venture Labor,” and 6 “Conclusion”

Week Fourteen: Wrap up and Review