Course Description

Work is a fundamental part of everyday life. Work not only ensures our collective survival, but also helps us define who we are as individuals and societies. Understanding the organization and effects of work is central to the study of sociology, from foundational theories to contemporary examinations of labor market transformation, social inequality, and social change.

While not exhaustive, this course will introduce students to central debates in the sociology of work, including those that address alienation and deskilling, precarity and polarization, culture and change, the production and reduction of social inequality, and unemployment and technology. We will ask: What counts as work? What are the effects of work under capitalism? And how work has changed over time?

Throughout the course, we will read classic and more recent ethnographic studies to understand how work has been theorized, to consider how these theories have been applied in social science research, and to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. The course is intended for graduate students and assumes a graduate-level understanding of sociological theory and methods.

Course Requirements for SOCI 5260

Course grades will be based on participation, in-class presentations, and two take-home exams.

Participation (20%): Measured through attendance, preparation, and engagement in class. All students will write and share 1 to 3 questions about the readings (theoretical, empirical, and/or methodological) and post them on the Canvas discussion board by Wednesday at midnight. Students are allowed one absence during the semester. This absence is intended to cover unexpected events such as illnesses or family emergencies. If students miss more than one class, participation grades will be reduced accordingly.

Class presentations (10%): Students are responsible for presenting on the readings and facilitating discussion for at least one class during the semester. This schedule will be set on the first day of class.

Exams (70%): There will be two take-home essay exams—a midterm (30%) and final (40%)—which will require students to reflect on and analyze the readings and class discussions. They do not require outside reading or original empirical data. For the midterm exam, all students
will engage in a peer review process before submitting their essays for a grade. Evidence of participation in the peer review process will count for 10% of the final midterm grade. Questions will be provided by the instructor in advance and responses must be approximately 3,500 words long.

Course Requirements for SOCI 6500

Course grades will be based on participation, in-class presentations, a mid-term exam, and a final paper.

Participation (20%): Measured through attendance, preparation, and engagement in class. Each week, all students will write share 1 to 3 questions about the readings (theoretical, empirical, and/or methodological) and post them on Canvas discussion board by Wednesday at midnight. Students are allowed one absence during the semester. This absence is intended to cover unexpected events such as illnesses or family emergencies. If students miss more than one class, the participation grade will be reduced accordingly.

Class presentations (10%): Students are responsible for presenting on the readings and facilitating discussion for at least one class during the semester. This schedule will be set on the first day of class.

Midterm exam (30%): This written exam will require students to reflect on and analyze the readings and class discussions. They do not require outside reading or original empirical data. Students will engage in a peer review process before submitting their essays for a grade. Evidence of participation in the peer review process will count for 10% of the total midterm grade. This exam must be approximately 3,500 works and questions will be provided by the instructor in advance.

Final paper (40%): Doctoral-level students will write a final paper of approximately 5,000 words on a topic of their choice that relates to both the content of this course and, ideally, their dissertation. Students must receive prior instructor approval for their topic.

Required Readings

We will read both books and articles. Please access articles through the UNT library website. Books can be purchased online or can be found on hold in the library. I will post all other materials on Canvas. We will review these collectively on the first day of class to finalize our reading list.


Policy for Graded Materials

No makeup exams will be given and no late work will be accepted. The dates for take-home exams listed here will not change. Students requiring accommodations should speak with me after obtaining an accommodation form from the Office of Disability Access. You earn the grade you receive in this class. I do not curve or scale exams or final grades. If you become concerned about your grades, meet with me immediately.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint

I invite suggestions and feedback on my courses. If students would like to share a suggestion or express a complaint, they should first visit the instructor and then the departmental chair. Complaints must be made within six months of an incident.

Accommodations

Students with Disabilities: It is my goal to foster an inclusive learning environment in this class. If you require accommodations, please notify me during the first week of classes, or as soon as possible, by presenting a letter from Office of Disability Access. If you need more information about accommodations, please review the UNT Policy 16.001 or contact Office of Disability Access at 940-565-4323 (voice) or http://disability.unt.edu.

Religious Holy Days: UNT policy states that you must notify the instructor to the date(s) you will be absent to observe a religious holiday with as much advanced notice as possible. If, with proper notice, you miss a class, exam, or quiz to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence. For more information: https://edo.unt.edu/religious-observances

Understanding Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UNT community have a responsibility to uphold this mission of the university and contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. For more information, see the policy: https://policy.unt.edu/policy/16-005. Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, please refer to the appropriate resources: http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/sexual-misconduct
Class Environment

Please do your part to facilitate a stimulating and rewarding learning environment. This involves being respectful of one another, having an open mind, and being willing to have your ideas challenged. Demonstrate respect by listening to others, refraining from interrupting, and giving your undivided attention. Harmful words and actions will not be tolerated: This includes racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, or ableist language.

Research suggests that students retain information better by taking notes by hand. I encourage you all to do this. Please do not let technology distract you from class. Do not use your cell phones or the Internet during class. If laptops become a major issue, I will ban them. In the event of a distraction, I have the authority to change a student’s seat or request a student to exit the classroom. One-day suspensions will be reported to appropriate departmental and collegiate personnel.

Academic Honesty

All students are expected to abide by the UNT Code of Student Conduct: “As a student-centered public research university, the University of North Texas has established standards of conduct to foster a safe environment conducive to learning and development. Students and university student groups are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that demonstrates respect for the rights and property of others and upholds the integrity of the university community.” You are responsible for understanding UNT Policy 06.003, which can be found here: http://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-012

All work you produce on assignments, papers, and exams must be your own work. If you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must cite your sources otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. If you are not familiar with a citation method, seek assistance from the instructor or the free University writing lab: http://www.unt.edu/writinglab/

Please maintain a high standard of individual honor and integrity. Collaboration of any kind on exams will result in a failing grade for the exam. Cheating of any kind of assignments (obtaining old exam copies, bringing unauthorized materials to exams, plagiarizing from sources, the web, or fellow students, etc.) will also result in a failing grade. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on an exam or assignment, and submitting a written assignment from a previous course without prior permission of both instructors. All instances of scholastic dishonesty will be reported to the appropriate authorities in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences.
COURSE SCHEDULE*
*This is subject to change. All changes will be announced with advanced notice.

Week 1: What is work? An introduction

August 29

Required readings:


Week 2: Foundational concepts in the study of work

September 5

Required readings:

Marx, Karl. “Alienated Labour”


Durkheim, Emile. “The Division of Labor in Society.” (Selections)

Week 3: Labor process theory

September 12

Required readings:


*Further readings:*


**Week 4: Shop floor ethnography**

**September 19**

*Required readings:*


**Week 5: Service work and emotional labor**

**September 26**

*Required reading:*


*Further reading:*


**Week 6: Transnational labor**

**October 3**

*Required readings:*


*Further readings:*


**Week 7: Midterm peer review**

**October 10**

Peer review workshop [No class]

**Week 8: Job polarization and precarious work**

**October 17**

**Midterm due**

**Required readings:**


**Further reading:**

Viscelli, Steve. *The Big Rig: Trucking and the Decline of the American Dream*.

**Week 9: Occupational transformation**

**October 24**

**Required readings:**


**Week 10: Gender and the social construction of skill**

**October 31**
Required readings:

Steinberg, Ronnie. 1990 “Social construction of skill: Gender, power, and comparable worth.” Work and Occupations 17: 449-482


Further readings:


Week 11: Organizational inequality

November 7

**Paper topics due for SOCI 6500 students**

Required readings:


Further readings:


Week 12: Unemployment

November 14
Upgraded: August 20, 2019

Required readings:


Further reading:


Week 13: Technology and new forms of work

November 21

Required readings:


Week 14: Thanksgiving

November 28

No class.

Week 15: Final class

December 5

**Final papers due**
The sociology of work goes back to the classic sociological theorists: Marx, Durkheim and Weber. Each considered the analysis of modern work to be central to the incipient field of sociology. Sociology is a fundamentally historical discipline. Whereas economists have theorized an ahistorical market society—a so-called pure and free market that only exists in The paper focuses on alienated work, a classical sociological concept which attracted a lot of attention. It discusses its roots in Marx’s works, its more. Alienated Work: A Legacy of Classical Concept and Possibilities for its Revitalization. The paper focuses on alienated work, a classical sociological concept which attracted a lot of attention. It discusses its roots in Marx’s works, its dimensions, and issues of essentialism and human nature.