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**SOCIOLOGY OF WORK**  
SOCI 5260 / 6500 | Fall 2019  
Thursdays, 2:00 p.m. – 4:50 p.m.  
Wooten Hall 314

Instructor: Katherine Sobering, PhD  
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Office Hours: Thursdays, 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.

### **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

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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 words 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.

Burawoy, Michael. 1979. *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ocejo, Richard E. 2017. *Masters of Craft: Old Jobs in the New Urban Economy*. New York: Princeton University Press.

Ofer, Sharone. 2013. *Flawed System/Flawed Self*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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Rosenblat, Alex. 2018. *Uberland: How Algorithms Are Rewriting the Rules of Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wright, Melissa W. 2006. *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*. New York: Routledge.

### **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>

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## **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.

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## **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:*

Kalleberg, Arne L. 2009. "Rethinking the Sociology of Work, Workers and the Workplace." *Labour & Industry: A Journal of the Social and Economic Relations of Work* 19(3):29–48.

Hodson, Randy. 2001. *Dignity at Work*. New York: Cambridge University Press. (Selections)

Weeks, Kathi. 2011. *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press. (Selections)

Whetten, David A. 1989. "What Constitutes a Theoretical Contribution?" *Academy of Management Review* 14: 490-495

### **Week 2: Foundational concepts in the study of work**

***September 5***

*Required readings:*

Marx, Karl. "Alienated Labour"

Weber, Max. "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (Selections), "Bureaucracy"

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

### **Week 3: Labor process theory**

***September 12***

*Required readings:*

Braverman, Harry. 1975. *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press. (Selections)

Vicki Smith, "Braverman's Legacy: The Labor Process Tradition at 20." *Work and Occupations* 21 (1994): 403-421.

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Tope, Daniel, Lindsey Joyce Chamberlain, Martha Crowley, and Randy Hodson. 2005. "The Benefits of Being There: Evidence from the Literature on Work." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 34(4):470–93.

*Further readings:*

Desmond, Matthew. 2014. "Relational Ethnography." *Theory and Society* 43(5):547–79.

Hodson, Randy. 2004. "A Meta-Analysis of Workplace Ethnographies: Race, Gender, and Employee Attitudes and Behaviors." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 33(1):4–38.

#### **Week 4: Shop floor ethnography**

***September 19***

*Required readings:*

Burawoy, Michael. 1979. *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

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

***September 26***

*Required reading:*

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2012. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

*Further reading:*

Williams, Christine L. and Catherine Connell. 2010. "'Looking Good and Sounding Right': Aesthetic Labor and Social Inequality in the Retail Industry" *Work and Occupations* 37(3):349–77.

#### **Week 6: Transnational labor**

***October 3***

*Required readings:*

Wright, Melissa W. 2006. *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*. New York: Routledge.

*Further readings:*

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Rudrappa, Sharmila. 2015. *Discounted Life: The Price of Global Surrogacy in India*. New York ; London: NYU Press.

Salzinger, Leslie. 2004. "From Gender as Object to Gender as Verb: Rethinking How Global Restructuring Happens." *Critical Sociology* 30(1):43–62.

### **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:*

Kalleberg, Arne. 2009. "Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition." *American Sociological Review* 74: 1-22

Williams, Christine and Megan Tobias Neely. 2015. "Gender and Work: Precariousness and Inequality." *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Edited by Robert Scott and Stephen Kosslyn. New York: Sage.

Vallas, Steven and Christopher Prener. 2012. "Dualism, Job Polarization, and the Social Construction of Precarious Work." *Work and Occupations* 39(4):331–53.

*Further reading:*

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

### **Week 9: Occupational transformation**

*October 24*

*Required readings:*

Ocejo, Richard E. 2017. *Masters of Craft: Old Jobs in the New Urban Economy*. New York: Princeton University Press.

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

*October 31*

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*Required readings:*

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

Skuratowicz, Eva and Larry W. Hunter. 2004. "Where Do Women's Jobs Come From? Job Resegregation in an American Bank." *Work and Occupations* 31: 73-110.

Tomaskovic-Devey, Don and Sheryl Skaggs. 2002. "Sex Segregation, Labor Process Organization, and Gender Earnings Inequality." *American Journal of Sociology* 108(1):102–28.

*Further readings:*

Williams, Christine L. 1995. *Still a Man's World: Men Who Do Women's Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

**Week 11: Organizational inequality**

*November 7*

**\*\*Paper topics due for SOCI 6500 students\*\***

*Required readings:*

Acker, Joan. 1990. "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations." *Gender & Society* 4(2):139–58.

Ray, Victor. 2019. "A Theory of Racialized Organizations." *American Sociological Review* 84(1):26–53.

Tomaskovic-Devey, Donald and Dustin Avent-Holt. 2019. *Relational Inequalities: An Organizational Approach*. Oxford University Press. (Selections)

*Further readings:*

Sobering, Katherine. 2019. "The Relational Production of Workplace Equality: The Case of Worker-Recuperated Businesses in Argentina." *Qualitative Sociology*. Online First.

Wingfield, Adia Harvey and Renée Skeete Alston. 2014. "Maintaining Hierarchies in Predominantly White Organizations: A Theory of Racial Tasks." *American Behavioral Scientist* 58(2):274–87.

**Week 12: Unemployment**

*November 14*



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*Required readings:*

Ofer, Sharone. 2013. *Flawed System/Flawed Self*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

*Further reading:*

Rao, Aliya Hamid. 2017. "Stand by your man: wives' emotion work during men's unemployment." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 79(3): 636-656.

**Week 13: Technology and new forms of work**

***November 21***

*Required readings:*

Rosenblat, Alex. 2018. *Uberland: How Algorithms Are Rewriting the Rules of Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (Selections)

Shetakofsky, Benjamin. 2017. "Working Algorithms: Software Automation and the Future of Work." *Work and Occupations* 44(4):376–423.

**Week 14: Thanksgiving**

***November 28***

No class.

**Week 15: Final class**

***December 5***

**\*\*Final papers due\*\***