SOC 116a Work, Employment and Unemployment: Sociological Approaches
Brandeis University
Spring 2015
T, Th 3:30-4:60pm
[Room]

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This course introduces students to sociological approaches to understanding work, employment and unemployment in the US. The course will offer a broad overview of the role work has played in society historically, and how work has been studied from a sociological perspective. We will cover sociological analyses of work and employment grounded in classical and contemporary social theories. And we will consider how the nature of work has changed in the twenty-first century, the impact of employment policy on work, and the implications of these forces for society as a whole.

Students will be expected to keep up with the readings and demonstrate understanding of the concepts through regular class participation and posts to the course forum.

Learning Objectives: Students in the course will gain an understanding of the changing nature of work throughout time, considering both sociological interpretations and implications of these changes. And students will have the opportunity to analyze and critique current employment-related policies, and to propose policy solutions that they think will effectively address some of the issues in the labor market, such as unemployment and discrimination. By the end of the course, students should have an in-depth understanding of the central importance of work in society both currently and historically, of how we think about ourselves and others in relation to work, and of how work can impact every part of our individual and social lives.

Course Requirements:

- Readings listed for each class are due that day. Keeping up with the readings is very important.
- Class participation: Regular class participation is expected. Students should come to class prepared to make thoughtful comments on the readings voluntarily, engage deeply with the week’s key concepts in discussion, and participate actively in small-group activities. (15%)
- Forum posts: Questions on the readings are listed for each class. You will answer ten questions total throughout the semester before the class in which we discuss these readings, and post your answer to the course forum. Other students’ responses will not be visible until you post your response. You are responsible for distributing these as you wish throughout the twelve weeks, but may do no more than two in one week. For each question, write a response of no more than 200 words that engages at least one of the readings for the week. Posts are due by 10am the day of class (we will use the forum responses in class discussion that day.) No late submissions will be accepted. (10%)
Essays: The course will require three 5-6 page essays, each of which must make use of at least three course readings plus an additional two or more external sources. Essay questions for the first two essays will be distributed two weeks before the due dates. The third essay is on a topic of your choosing and will be explained in class. (75% total, or 25% each)

Opportunities for experiential learning and extra credit will be discussed in class.

Required Books:


Academic integrity: You may only submit your own original work in this course. Please be careful to cite precisely and properly the sources of all authors and persons you have drawn upon in your written work. Please take special care to indicate the precise source of all materials found on the web, indicating the correct URL address of any material you have quoted or in any way drawn upon. Plagiarism (from published or internet sources, or from another student) is a serious violation of academic integrity. Remember, you must indicate through quotations and citation when quoting from any outside source (internet or print).


Accommodations: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please contact me as soon as possible.
Week 1: Introduction & Historical Context
Tuesday January 13: Introduction to the Course

Readings:

2. OPTIONAL: Barry, Bruce. (2007). Situation Comity: The Office. Contexts, 6(4), 75-77. [We will be watching an episode of The Office in class.]

Thursday January 15: Pre-Industrial Work

Readings:

1. Volti Ch 1: Work Before Industrialization
2. Volti Ch 2: The Organization of Work in Pre-Industrial Times (skip pp. 23-29)

Week 1 Key Concepts:
- Hunting & gathering
- Agriculture
- Protestant revolution
- Time
- Guilds
- Ascriptive status

Week 1 Key Questions (choose one for a forum post):
1. What is work and why do we work?
2. What are the benefits of work? What are the costs?
3. What are some key differences between pre-industrial work and work today?
4. What is the significance of time in the organization of work?
5. What is the significance of the Protestant Revolution to work?

Week 2: Industrialization

Tuesday January 20: The Industrial Revolution

Readings:

1. Volti Ch 3: Industrialization and its Consequences

Thursday January 22: Scientific Management and Assembly Lines

Readings:


Week 2 Key Concepts:

- Market economy
- Industrial revolution
- Division of labor
- Scientific management

Week 2 Key Questions (choose one per forum post):

1. What were some of the benefits of industrialization, and who benefitted? What were some of the downsides, and who suffered?
2. What is the “postindustrial revolution”? What are some challenges in a service economy that may not have occurred in a manufacturing economy?

Weeks 3 & 4: Marxist and Weberian Analysis

Tuesday January 27: Marx & Alienated Labor

Readings:


Thursday January 29: Labor Process Theory

Readings:
2. Volti pp. 83-86 “Technology and Managerial Authority”

**Week 3 Key Concepts:**

- Labor, capital, capitalist
- Political economy
- Bourgeoisie & proletariat
- Alienation
- Ideology
- Labor process

**Week 3 Key Questions:**

1. What is “alienated labor”? Do you agree that all industrial work leads to alienation?
2. Why is it important to study the labor process?

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**Week 4: Organizations & Bureaucracy**

**Tuesday February 3: Manufacturing Consent**


**Thursday February 5: Bureaucracy**

Readings:

1. Volti Ch 4: Bureaucratic Organization
4. OPTIONAL: Seidman, Steven. Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today Ch 4 “The Ironic Social Theory of Max Weber” esp. pp. 49-51

**Week 4 Key Concepts:**

- Shop floor, shop culture
- Bureaucracy
• Management
• Flexibility

Week 4 Key Questions:

1. What does Burawoy mean by “making out”?
2. Briefly describe an experience you have had with a bureaucratic organization. Did it feel efficient? Were there any negative aspects?
3. What does Ritzer mean by “The McDonaldization of Society?”
4. What is another example of a bureaucratic organization (besides the ones discussed in the readings), according to Weber’s definition of bureaucracy? Why would Weber consider it a bureaucracy?

--- ESSAY 1 ON INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION & MARX DUE MONDAY MAY 9, 5PM ---

Week 5: SI and Interactionist Analysis

Tuesday February 10: Symbolic Interactionism

Readings:

1. Inglis, David. An Invitation to Social Theory Ch 5 “The Symbolic Interactionist Paradigm.”
2. Hochschild, Arlie. The Managed Heart pp. 1-34

Thursday February 12: Emotional Labor

Readings:

1. Hochschild, Arlie. The Managed Heart pp. 35-86

Week 5 Key Concepts:

• Symbolic interactionism
• Emotional labor
• Emotional proletariat

Week 5 Key Questions:

1. What is “emotional labor”? When have you performed emotional labor in your life?
2. What is the “emotional proletariat”? How does it relate to Marx’s concept of the proletariat?
3. What does Hochschild mean by “transmutation”?
4. What are some gendered and/or raced forms of emotional labor?

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**MIDTERM RECESS FEBRUARY 16-20**

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**Week 6: Professions, Occupations, Occupational Segregation**

**Tuesday February 24: Professions**

Readings:

1. Volti Ch 9: Professions and Professionalization
3. US Census Industry and [http://www.census.gov/people/io/](http://www.census.gov/people/io/) (click through to all links in this section)

**Thursday February 26: Occupational Segregation**

Readings:


**Week 6 Key Concepts:**

- Professions, Occupations
- Industry categories
- Occupational Segregation

**Week 6 Key Questions:**

1. What are some of the ways that professionals create and/or maintain the status of their profession?
2. What is the difference between professions, paraprofessions, and occupations? Do you think that this distinction is still relevant today?
3. What is occupational segregation? How is it related to the gender pay gap or the racial pay gap?

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**Week 7: Work & Culture**

**Tuesday March 3: Workplace Culture**

Readings:

1. Volti Ch 8: Workplace Culture and Socialization

**Thursday March 5: Culture and Control**

Readings:

1. Inglis, David. *An Invitation to Social Theory* Ch 3 “Marxist and Critical Theory Paradigms”

**Week 7 Key Concepts:**

- Culture, organizational culture
- Subculture
- Critical theory
- Ideology
- Cultural hegemony

**Week 7 Key Questions:**

1. Have you ever experienced or noticed an organizational culture? Please describe it.
2. What does Fine mean by the term “idioculture”?
3. What are potential benefits of organizational culture?
4. What are potential drawbacks of organizational culture?

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**Week 8: Work & Inequality I**

**Tuesday March 10: Getting a Job**
Readings:

1. Volti Ch 7: Getting a Job

Thursday March 12: Gender Discrimination

Readings:

1. Volti Ch 13 Diversity in the Workplace

Week 8 Key Concepts:

- Labor market
- Human capital
- Social networks
- Valuative discrimination

Week 8 Key Questions:

1. What is human capital?
2. What are weak ties? Why are they more useful than strong ties?
3. (If you did not answer this question in Week 6,) what is the relationship between occupational segregation and the gender pay gap?
4. What is Title VII?
5. What is comparable worth?
6. How can public policy address occupational gender discrimination?

Week 9: Work & Inequality II

Tuesday March 17: Racial Discrimination

Readings:


Thursday March 19: Intersections of Race and Gender

Readings:


Week 9 Key Concepts:

- Race
- Human capital
- Skill
- Intersectionality

Week 9 Key Questions:

1. What is the relationship between human capital theory (see Volti Ch 7) and the Moss & Tilly reading?
2. What are soft skills? Why are they important? (Note: There is not one clear definition of soft skills, so use what is available in the readings for your definition)
3. What is intersectionality, or an intersectional lens? (Note: Again, there is not one clear definition of intersectionality, so use what is available in the readings for your definition)
4. Bertrand & Mullanaithan and Pager show clear evidence of racial discrimination in hiring. How can public policy address this practice?

--- ESSAY 2 ON INEQUALITY DUE MONDAY MARCH 23, 5PM ---

Week 10: Work in a Postindustrial Economy/Twenty-First Century Work

Tuesday March 24: The Service Sector

Readings:


Thursday March 26: Flexibility and Precarity

Readings:

1. Choose one of the following:


Week 10 Key Concepts:

- De-industrialization
- Service Sector
- Flexibility
- Precarity

Week 10 Key Questions:

1. According to Levy & Murnane, how does the 21st century labor market differ from what we have seen before?
2. What is precarity/precarious work?
3. According to Leidner, is working at McDonald’s precarious work? Why or why not?
4. Is working at McDonald’s skilled work? Why or why not?
Week 11: Unemployment and Workforce Development Policy

Tuesday March 31: Unemployment

Readings:


Thursday April 2: Workforce Development Policy

Readings:

2. Choose one of the following:

Week 11 Key Concepts:

- Unemployment
- Labor market
- Employment policy
- Skills and skills gap

Week 11 Key Questions:

1. What is unemployment? Are there people who are not unemployed but not working? Please give examples.
2. Why is work disappearing more rapidly in inner-city neighborhoods?
3. What is the skills gap?
4. Do you think that current and past workforce development policies are effective? Why or why not? If not, please propose a better alternative.
Week 12 Globalization and the Future of Work

Tuesday April 14: Globalization

Readings:

1. Volti Ch 6: Globalization

Thursday April 16: Immigration and Work

Readings:

1. Choose one of the following:

Week 12 Key Concepts:

- Globalization, Global corporation
- Immigration
- Inequality

Week 12 Questions

- TBA

Week 13

Tuesday April 21: Wrap Up

Readings:

1. Volti Ch 15: Conclusion: Work Today and Tomorrow
Thursday April 23: Makeup Day

[No Weekly Questions this week]

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TUESDAY APRIL 28: BRANDEIS FRIDAY

--- ESSAY 3 ON TOPIC OF YOUR CHOOSING DUE FRIDAY MAY 1 BY 11:59PM ---