Work—both paid and unpaid—defines key elements of social life. A person’s occupation contributes to income, social standing, and life course options. The social organization of work, in turn, creates conflicts, risks, and opportunities, which change with new technologies, global markets, and shifts employment relations. As economic conditions affect paid employment, the organization of work produces new structural inequalities and contributes to social divisions based on race, gender, and class. Cultural norms and expectations further shape the experience of work and affect social relations among workers and employers.

This course explores the organization and meaning of work in modern industrial society and in the “new economy” of the twenty-first century. We will consider the implications of a large-scale shifting of risk from institutions to individuals. We will consider processes—deindustrialization, deskilling, globalization—that are restructuring workplaces and labor markets. We will chart changes in the employment relationship, together with the effects on workers’ organizations and collective representation. In choosing a topic to investigate in depth, students can choose from a range of related areas of inquiry.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to read each week’s reading before class, attend class, and engage in discussion. Each student will also take responsibility for summarizing main points and identifying key questions for one week’s readings. Lectures and discussion will form the basis for three take-home essays during the semester, each of which will cover a portion of the course readings and related class sessions. The course also requires a final paper, based on library research, further reading, and analysis of a chosen topic related to the course and approved by the instructor. This course therefore meets the capstone requirements for the sociology major.

Note: because this is a capstone seminar, students will, ideally, have taken at least one of the following sociology courses: Class, Status, and Power; Social Policy; or Sociology of Organizations. Anyone without this background should consult the instructor.

Grades will be based on the final paper (35 percent), each of three take-home essays (15 percent each, or 45 percent), and class attendance and participation (20 percent). Any extensions for late papers require documentation and clearance before the deadline.
Course Reading

The following books are required and available in the bookstore:


Additional readings posted on Blackboard

Handouts distributed throughout the semester.

This book is *highly recommended* (you’ll find it useful for your final paper):


Course Outline

Week 1, January 15  Course Introduction

Week 2, January 22  Social Organization of Work: A Legacy of Inequality, A Shifting of Risk


Ann Crittenden, “How Mothers’ WorkWas ‘Disappeared,’” pp. 18-31 in Wharton

Karl Marx, “Alienated Labor,” pp. 44-51 in Wharton

(Nota: You may have encountered Marx and Weber in a theory course, but review anyway for the concepts they explain.)

Week 3, January 29  **Labor Process and Control: Industrial Work**

Frederick Winslow Taylor, “Fundamentals of Scientific Management,” pp. 57-65 in Wharton
Harry Braverman, “The Division of Labor,” pp. 65-69 in Wharton
Michael Burawoy, “Thirty Years of Making Out,” pp. 318-324 in Wharton

Week 4, February 5  **Unions and Collective Bargaining**

Milkman, pp. 1-92

Week 5, February 12  **Deindustrialization, and Its Consequences**

Milkman, pp. 93-180
Steven P. Vallas and John P. Beck, “The Transformation of Work Revisited: The Limits of Flexibility in American Manufacturing,” pp. 129-147 in Wharton
Robert Ross, “New Orleans as Rust Belt City” (Blackboard)

Week 6, February 19  **Final assignment planning session**
First Essay Due

Class session in the library, overview of final paper assignment

Week 7, February 26  
**Labor Process and Control: Service Work**

Arlie Russell Hochschild, “The Managed Heart,” pp. 69-78 in Wharton
Robin Leidner, “Over the Counter: McDonald’s,” pp. 302-322 in Wharton
Sherman, pp. 1-62, 110-153

**Proposal for final paper due**

Mid-term break

Week 8, March 11  
**Service Work as Interactive Labor**

Sherman, pp. 184-270
Williams, pp. 1-47

Week 9, March 18  
**Service and Consumption**

Williams, pp. 48-212

Week 10, March 25  
**Nonstandard, Contingent Work: Workforce Restructuring and Labor Market Mediation**

Rogers, pp. 1-109, 151-174

Week 11, April 1  
**Inequality and Social Difference**
Second essay due


Film: “Secrets of Silicon Valley”

Week 12, April 8 Care Work, Domestic Work


Week 13, April 15 Unemployment, Informal Work, and Social Welfare


Sharon Hayes, “Flat Broke with Children: Enforcing the Work Ethic,” pp. 466-482 in Wharton


Week 14, April 22  **Global Restructuring and Technological Change**


Shoshana Zuboff, “In the Age of the Smart Machine,” pp. 113-125 in Wharton


Film: “Is Wal-Mart Good for America?”

**Third essay due April 28, last day of classes**

**Final paper due during exam week**

**Questions for In-Class Presentations**

The purpose of in-class presentations is to identify key themes in a week’s readings and some related questions that the readings raise. The goal is *not* to summarize the reading. In your presentation, you should assume that class members have also read the week’s assignment. You task is rather to take additional responsibility, during one week, to consider themes for class discussion. Your presentation need not take more than five minutes or so. Consider the following:

1. What seems most significant about each of the readings for the week?

2. How do the readings contribute to an understanding of inequality in the workforce?

3. What questions do you have? (Consider, for example, what further research the readings suggest or what you might want to challenge or confirm.)