Sociology of Labor

SOAN 201 / Spring 2019 / AXN 104 / MW 7:30pm - 8:45pm
COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class examines the past, present and future lives of working people. It takes a panoramic view of the sociological literature on work, labor, and labor movements. As a survey course, it will introduce important themes and concepts, and raise more questions than it answers. Our readings will cover four general themes in order. The first centers on the nature of work and the labor process; the second on an analysis of social class and class formation. The third theme focuses on the labor movement and other modes of class-based organization. Finally, we go back to the future and examine technology and the future of work, building on material from the entire semester. It is designed as an introduction to the field that will inspire deeper curiosity and more rigorous analysis. The course builds on key debates raised in classical and contemporary social theory—the point of work, the nature of class, the organization of work lives, the division of labor, inequality, collective action, etc. However, there are more particular questions raised within Labor Sociology that are also of concern here: Why is the US working class so weak? Where do social classes come from? How have workers’ lives changed over the past two centuries? Are unions obsolete? (Spoiler: no.) Why work?

Class Participation
You are expected to attend every class and out-of-class event. Come fully caffeinated, prepared to discuss readings and join group discussions. You are encouraged to have an opinion, be audacious, and risk your pride. Class participation means you regularly attend class and take part in meaningful ways. Since critical dialogue is probably where most learning happens anyway, this should be in our mutual interests. Learning is a conspiracy, a group activity where we work, play, plot, and debate together. Students should be prepared to take notes without laptops. Cell phones and all other non-airplane-approved devices must be switched off.

Assignments
You will write short papers in response to particular readings and themes. Your mid-term exam will ask you to apply concepts in the class to real-life, including popular culture, current events, other classes, etc. At the end of the semester you will complete a group project that allows you to come up with solutions to the crises of the working life. For your final, you will create your own exam. I will give you more specific information on the details of each of these assignments when the time comes. More information on all assignments will be covered throughout the semester.
Grades
Your grades come from the assignments stated above, plus class participation. Class participation is derived from a combination of attendance, frequency and quality of participation in class discussions, the competency of your five minute introduction, and observed struggle to engage the material. Late work is lowered half a grade for the first week late, and is not accepted thereafter. The course emphasizes writing as the primary mechanism to determine grades and outcomes. My overall philosophy on grading emphasizes struggle, not mastery. In other words, as befits a course on “labor,” hard work pays off. You may choose to do an alternative project in place of the standard assignment. talk to me well in advance to discuss your proposal. The grade breakdown is as follows:

A - Outstanding: Expectations exceeded.
B - Excellent: All expectations met with excellence.
C - Good: All expectations met with moderate success.
D - Poor: Expectations inconsistently met.
F - Failure: Work incomplete by culmination of the course.

Response papers 20%
Class participation 15%
Midterm 25%
Group Projects 25%
Final 15%

If you object to a grade you receive in class, email me a detailed explanation as to why you think the grade should be changed. In that email, also include a few suggested times when you can meet me in person as soon as possible to discuss the matter further.

Honor Code and Academic Integrity
The Middlebury Honor Code forbids cheating and plagiarism. For details on what constitutes these breaches of conduct, please see Middlebury policy here: http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/administration/newfaculty/handbook/honorcode
Failure to abide such regulations will result in my notifying the proper college authorities. The academy is not known for its sense of humor, but plagiarism is truly no joke. For information on how to avoid plagiarizing, see Earl Babbie’s article: http://www.csub.edu/ssric-trd/howto/plagiarism.htm
COURSE CONTENT

Note: The course schedule that follows may be revised as the course progresses


All other texts are available through the course website: http://sites.middlebury.edu/soan201/

Week 1—


2/13: Karl Marx. 1848. *The Communist Manifesto.* (Preamble, Bourgeois and Proletarians)


Week 2—


Week 3—


2/27: Work Paper Due


Week 4—


Week 5—


Week 6—

3/18: Lichtenstein: Chapters 6&8 (Last names A-L read 6, M-Z read 8)


Week 7— Midterm Due Monday March 25

3/25: Spring Recess
3/27: Spring Recess

Week 8—

4/1: Guest Lecture by professor Matthew Lawrence

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4/3:  “Live Nude Girls Unite” (Documentary film on worker organizing at the Lusty Lady in San Francisco)
Wendy Chapkis. Ch 3: The Emotional Labor of Sex. pgs 69-97

Week 9—


Week 10—


in Logic: https://logicmag.io/05-the-automation-charade/

Week 11—


4/24:  Guest Lecture by Professor Annelise Orleck
We’re All Fast Food Workers Now.
Week 12—


5/1:  Work on Presentations

Week 13—

5/6:  Group Presentations

5/8:  Group Presentations

Week 14—

5/13:  Course in Review

Benjamin Kline Hunnicut. 2013. Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream
THINKING ABOUT TALKING: NOTES ON CLASS DISCUSSION

This class depends on us having open, honest, and critical conversations. How can we do that? I’d like to suggest you consider a few tips that I think will improve our chances. Think about what makes you feel encouraged to join a conversation with a group of people you don’t know. Assuming that some of those things might be true for other people, try to participate in ways that expand them. Here are a few ways that I think can enhance our conversations. Feel free to add to this list.

1. **Learn people’s names and use them.** When you speak in class, especially for the first few weeks, say your name so that others can remember it. When you refer to someone’s point, either to agree or disagree, use their name. “As Janice said a minute ago…”

2. **Look at each other.** Since this is a conversation among all of us, it makes sense to look at more than just the front of the room. Eye contact can help bring people into a conversation.

3. **Be critical and respectful.** “Calling people out,” denouncing them, is a quick way to shut down a conversation. It generally leads to one person feeling cut off without understanding why, and others feeling less confident to speak up. Critique ideas, not individuals.

4. **Affirm others.** Say “thank you” when people clarify your question, and speak up when others share your question or concern to support them asserting something they don’t know.

5. **Step up, step back.** If you find yourself talking a lot, try to be quiet for a bit and focus on listening. If you find yourself not speaking up, challenge yourself to weigh in.

6. **Ground rules.** Together we will set ground rules for our discussions, but my suggestion is that we err on the side of openness. A safe space—one in which all points of view are welcome and open to critical evaluation by all others—should be a goal. A space in which some people aren’t offended by some points of view is unlikely and undesirable in a classroom environment.