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.

Class Environment
You are expected to attend every class and out-of-class event. Come fully caffeinated, prepared to discuss readings and join group discussions. 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, laptops, and all other non-airplane-approved devices must be switched off. You are strictly prohibited from recording any student, faculty, or guest without their consent in our classroom. At the end of this syllabus is an addendum that describes helpful communication tips between professors and students when you have questions outside of class.

During our discussions, set yourself goals to participate in ways that challenge your habits and usual modus operandi. You are encouraged to have an opinion, be audacious, act out, and risk your pride (what you risk shows what you value). Please bring a written question for each class period. We will use those questions as the basis for our discussions in your sections.
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. Requests for extensions beyond the submission date should be made well before the due date. Late work is not accepted. 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Projects</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Evaluation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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</tbody>
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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](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](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/](http://sites.middlebury.edu/soan201/)

Week 1—

2/11:  No Readings


Week 2—


Christoph Hermann. 2015. “Chapter 10: Neoliberalism and the Surge in Work Hours”


[https://strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs/](https://strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs/)

Robert Wuthnow. “Chapter 4.” In *Poor Richard’s Principle*.

Week 3—


Week 4—

3/3: Work Paper Due


Week 5—


3/12: no class

Week 6—

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


Week 7—

3/24: Midterm Due / Spring Recess
3/26: Spring Recess
Week 8—

3/31: No Class


Week 9—


4/9: Meet in Axinn 232

Screening of “Live Nude Girls Unite”

Week 10—


Amrita Pande. 2014. Wombs in Labor: Transnational Commercial Surrogacy in India, pgs 6-15

4/16: Class at 4:30 Axinn 229, public lecture by Steven Greenhouse

Week 11—

4/20: Jane McAlveey talk

4/21: No Class


Week 12—


4/30: Work on Presentations

Week 13—

5/5: Group Presentations

5/7: Group Presentations
GUIDE TO READING ASSIGNED BOOKS AND ARTICLES

1. Summary. What is the summary of the article or book? What’s it about?

2. Thesis. What is the author’s thesis? What does the author argue is the causal mechanism in the piece? How does the author’s argument different from other theories on the same problem?

3. Context of the Problem. What is the history or background of this problem? Why is the author writing about this issue at this moment—time, place, etc? How is the problem framed and who frames it that way?

4. Evidence. What evidence does the author provide to arrive at their answer? What does this type of evidence reveal about the problem? How is it helpful for enhancing our understanding of the issue? Is the evidence adequate to address the questions raised by the author? How might additional information or data affect the author’s thesis?

5. Importance. Why does this matter? Why should the average person care about this particular issue or problem being described by the author? Why should a social scientist care?

6. Addressing the Problem. What conclusions are proposed? How does the author’s work affect our understanding of this issue? Will this book affect the way we think about the problem, how we define the problem, or how we might address the problem? What are the typical solutions proposed for this problem? What, if any, are the solutions offered by the author?

7. Your Personal Position. Do you agree with the author? Why or why not?

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1 Adapted from Janet McCabe, Dartmouth
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.