

The Future of Work and Workers

Course Number: 38:578:567

Spring 2021

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Description:

Work systems today are changing rapidly in ways that will have profound effects on careers in the next decades. Technological advances including artificial intelligence, robotics, and online platforms are emerging as powerful disruptive forces. Other driving forces include a long-term shift towards knowledge as the central source of economic value, and increasing inequalities of power and wealth.

Already we are seeing some negative consequences: a bifurcation of the workforce into relatively high- and low-paying work; the disruption of many jobs and professions; reduced employment security in temporary projects ("gigs"); and increasing instability and unpredictability of careers. But opposite trends and potentials are also visible in some areas: increasing skill levels, more collaborative work, more development of human potential, and increased worker freedom to shape their own careers.

This course will take a broad view of these developments, focusing on understanding multiple possibilities for the future of work; exploring how current workers and workforce entrants can prepare themselves and plan for change; and examining how state policies, labor movements, and businesses might help shape these changes in ways that are beneficial for workers and for society. Since attempts to predict the future are generally futile, the focus will be on what *actions* should be taken now.

The course will be taught for the first time in the Spring of 2021, and it is a very fast-moving field. The pandemic of 2020-21 has added new dimensions and accelerated change processes already under way. Thus this syllabus may change considerably during the semester.

Course requirements:

1. The assignment will usually include reading and / or videos, plus a discussion forum.
2. There will be one short paper (about 500 words, or 2 pages) partway through the

course, and a research paper of about 2500 words (10 pages, double spaced), due on the last day of the course. I will ask you to submit an outline a few weeks before.

3. There will *not* be a final exam.

4. Grades will be based 40% on the final paper and 60% on your weekly discussion forums and other assignments. All grades will be on a 4-pt scale (4=A, 3=B, and so on).

Mechanics:

1. The course platform will be Canvas; all assignments will be found there.

2. There is no course text; readings will be posted on Canvas each week.

3. **The weekly deadline for assignments will be Wednesday at midnight.** But note that in most weeks you will have a **discussion forum: the first post will be due on Sunday at midnight**, and the rest of the week will be for interaction with your teammates.

4. All assignments should be done on time, even when you are absent from class. **If you must miss a class, arrive late, or leave early, or if you have trouble completing an assignment, let me know *beforehand* - except in emergencies - at charles.heckscher@rutgers.edu.** I will grant extensions for good cause. I will *not* accept explanations that are not timely.

5. **I strongly encourage you to contact me and to meet with me** for any reason, including help with assignments, questions about this course or other courses, career options, etc. Just arrange meetings in advance by email (charles.heckscher@rutgers.edu)

Schedule of Classes

This schedule may change during the semester.

	End Date	Presenter and topic	Assignments
1	Jan 20	Introduction: a Labor Studies framework for the future of work	Forum
2	Jan 27	History of work and technology	Forum
3	Feb 3	Scenarios for the future	Short paper
4	Feb 10	Technology: robots	Forum
5	Feb 17	Technology: artificial intelligence	Forum
6	Feb 24	Technology: blockchain and big data	Forum
7	Mar 3	Work structures: remote work	Forum
8	Mar 10	Work structures: Gig work and platforms	Forum
<i>SPRING BREAK</i>			
9	Mar 24	Responses: Unions and NGOs	Forum
10	Mar 31	Responses: Business	Final paper outline / draft
11	Apr 7	Responses: Policy	Forum
12	Apr 14	Paper outlines and discussion	Forum
13	Apr 21	Workplaces	Forum

The Fine Print

Learning Objectives:

Students who successfully complete this course will meet the following official learning objectives of SMLR and MLER:

- Communicate effectively at a level and in modes appropriate to an entry level professional. (Goal I)
- Demonstrate an understanding of relevant theories and apply them given the background of a particular work situation (Goal IV)

In addition, successful students will also meet the following course specific goals:

1. Deepen their understanding of key developments in the current workplace;
2. Explore the ethical implications of new technologies and work relations;
3. Develop and improve analytical and writing skills;
4. Create a culture of open discussion, constructive criticism and active collaboration between and among faculty and students.

Commented [1]: review

Students with Disabilities:

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: (See <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

Plagiarism:

Academic integrity is central to University life. Violations will get you in a lot of trouble. There's [a long University document](#) as well as [other resources](#) on academic integrity, but it boils down to these two points:

1. **You must cite all material that is drawn from others**, including other students or professors as well as published sources.
2. **Direct quotations must be identified by quotation marks *even if they're cited***. Don't cut and paste from the Internet without putting it in quotes! This trips up some students, and can be serious.

I am not very concerned with the exact form of your citation, as long as you make clear where a quote or passage came from.

Studying together is encouraged; but if answers from different students are the same or nearly the same it will be considered cheating. You should discuss the issues but not discuss detailed answers with each other.

Exams and papers will be submitted to Turnitin.com for comparison with others in this course, as well as with past exams from this course and with paper-writing services, other publications, and web sources.