The Future of Work and Workers

Course Number: 38:578:567

Spring 2022

Instructor: Charles Heckscher (*vita and information*)

Please use the Canvas Inbox to message me

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:

These requirements may change somewhat as we go through this first iteration of the course.

1. The typical assignment will include reading and / or videos, plus a discussion forum.

2. You will write 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.

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. I would not pay much attention to Canvas' running report on your overall grade; it has often been very inaccurate. If you have questions about your grade status, ask me.

5. 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 - through [the Canvas Inbox](#)**. I will grant extensions for good cause. I will *not* accept explanations that are not timely.

6. **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 sending me a message in [the Canvas Inbox](#).

Schedule of Classes

This schedule may change during the semester. Always refer to [the Canvas assignments](#) for the latest information.

	End Date	Presenter and topic	Assignments
1	Jan 19	Introduction: a Labor Studies framework for the future of work	
2	Jan 26	History of work and technology	Forum
3	Feb 2	Scenarios for the future	Short paper
4	Feb 9	Technology: robots	Forum
5	Feb 16	Technology: artificial intelligence	Forum
6	Feb 23	Technology: blockchain and big data	Forum
7	Mar 2	Work structures: remote work	Forum
8	Mar 9	Work structures: Gig work and platforms	Forum
	SPRING BREAK		
9	Mar 23	Responses: Unions and NGOs	Forum
10	Mar 30	Responses: Business	Final paper outline / draft
11	Apr 6	Responses: Policy	Forum
12	Apr 13	Paper outlines and discussion	Forum
13	Apr 20	Preparing yourself for the future of work	Forum
14	May 1	Close	Final paper due

The Fine Print

<u>*Learning Objectives:*</u>

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.

<u>*Students with Disabilities:*</u>

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.