

AMST 425: Americans at Work

“Work makes life sweet.”

--Yiddish saying

“Take this job and shove it.”

--David Allan Coe (popularized by Johnny Paycheck)

Instructor: Dr. Carrie Lane
Class Meetings: MW 10:00am-11:15pm in H-126
Office Location: 410 University Hall
Office Hours: MW 1:00-2:00pm; W 9:00-10:00am; & by appointment
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Course Description: Explores a range of occupations, from factory worker to investment banker, bike messenger to flight attendant, mortician to sex worker. Considers the meaning work holds for those who perform it and the structures, cultures, and histories of particular occupations.

Prerequisites: Completion of General Education category D.3.

Course Objective: This interdisciplinary course surveys a range of American occupations and the people who inhabit them. In doing so, it is intended to teach students both about the variety of jobs that make up the American labor force and about how work intersects with other aspects of American life and culture. Students will learn how the structure and culture of a particular job or organization can shape the experiences of those who work within it, as well as how workers' own actions and beliefs shape the work they do and the meanings it holds for them.

Student Learning Goals:

- Students will come to understand the different ways work has been conceptualized over the course of American history and how those ideas and ideals continue to shape the structure and experience of work today.
- Students will learn how scholars have approached the study of work using different theoretical frameworks and research methods, including ethnography, cultural history, photography, and memoir.
- Students will analyze how the structure, status, and occupational cultures of particular jobs and industries shape the experiences of workers within those fields, and how those factors vary by historical context and with regard to the work being performed and the social status of the people who perform it.

- Students will use the study of specific occupations as a lens through which to examine broader aspects of American history and culture, such as the work ethic, notions of service and value, race, gender, and class relations, hierarchy and discrimination, social stigma, the American Dream, work-life integration, and workers' rights.
- Students will present oral and written analyses of a sampling of the above subjects. A variety of assignments will demonstrate students' comprehension of course readings, films, and discussions, as well as their ability to draw connections between course materials in the process of crafting original, well-evidenced arguments.

Required Texts:

- Candacy Taylor, *Counter Culture: The American Coffee Shop Waitress* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009)
- Additional required readings available on Titanium

Books for this course are available for purchase at Little Professor Book Center (725 N. Placentia) and the University Bookstore. I do **not** require a specific edition of any book, so feel free to purchase used copies or older editions (I recommend Half.com for used books).

Course Requirements and Policies

Attendance: You are allowed **three unexcused absences** over the semester. Any additional absences will result in a reduction of your final course grade by one half letter grade (5 percentage points) for each absence. If you have more than five unexcused absences, you will automatically fail the course.

Technical/Email Requirements: As a registered student you are enrolled in Titanium. I regularly use Titanium to communicate with you about this class, so be sure to check your student email address at least once every three days during the semester. With technical problems, contact the student help desk at (657) 278-8888 or email StudentITHelpDesk@fullerton.edu.

Participation: You are expected to complete the week's readings in time for class each week. Your **class participation grade** will depend not only on attendance and frequency of participation, but also on the substance of your participation, and whether your comments and questions contribute to the creation of an engaged and intellectually rigorous learning community. If you cannot participate verbally or need encouragement or assistance to do so, it is your responsibility to meet with me to discuss strategies for improving your participation level and, if necessary, identifying alternative methods of participation.

Classroom Tips and Policies:

- **Punctuality:** Get to class on time. I make most important announcements in the first 5 minutes. If you need to arrive late or leave early, please notify me in advance.

- **Attention:** I expect your full focus and attention for the entirety of every class meeting. No texting, no sleeping, no homework for other classes. No doing anything other than paying attention to what your classmates and I have to say about the subject matter at hand.
- **Etiquette:** I expect you will demonstrate tolerance and respect in all interactions with your classmates and professor. Disagreement is a natural, even necessary part of the learning process, and we will likely touch on sensitive topics in this class. I hope you will keep an open mind when others express opinions different from your own and approach all interactions in the spirit of intellectual curiosity. If someone offends you, give them the benefit of the doubt by assuming they did not intend to offend and either misspoke or were misinformed; respectfully help them see alternative perspectives or correct their misperceptions. However, if at any time you feel uncomfortable, insulted, or unsafe in our classroom, notify me immediately and we will work together to address the problem.
- **Phone Policy:** Please turn cellphones off and keep them in your bag. If need to make or receive a text or call during class time, please leave the classroom in order to do so.
- **Computer Policy:** You may not take notes on computers or audio record lectures unless specifically authorized to do so by DSS. Studies have confirmed that people retain far more information when they write rather than type their notes. Typing up notes, even verbatim, decreases students' retention of the material presented. I ban computers not because I'm an ogre or a Luddite but because I truly believe it helps you learn.
- **Questions:** Don't be shy with questions—I'm happy to answer them, big or small. However, always check the syllabus, website, and/or assignment sheets before contacting me in case the answer is already there (e.g., When is the paper due? What should I read this week?).

Course Assignments:

1. Presentation on Weekly Readings (15%): Over the course of the semester each student will be responsible for: 1) submitting comments and questions on a specific reading; and 2) an in-class presentation that helps the class understand one topic from the week's assigned reading. These will usually take place at the start of class the day the reading is assigned. Multiple students may present on the same reading, but each student will present on a separate topic from that reading.

By noon on the day before the class in which you're presenting, each presenter will email me: 1) three comments about that week's readings; 2) three questions for class discussion; and 3) the topic on which you plan to present. Although some days will have multiple presenters, the comments, questions, and topic should be yours alone. One third (50 pts) of your presentation grade will be based on the comments and questions you submit by email; the other two-thirds (100 pts) will be based on your in-class presentation.

- Your **comments** should concern something you found especially interesting or thought provoking in the reading; each of your three comments should be approximately one paragraph long (for a total of about three paragraphs). These comments should be thoughtful and original and must relate directly to the reading/s you are covering (and not just something they remind you of). When possible, reference specific pages, quotations, and/or sections of the reading. You may also choose to put the week's reading in discussion with readings from previous weeks. Questions should be thoughtful, specific, and designed to encourage class discussion about the week's readings.
- Your **questions** may connect to your comments, but they do not have to. Aim to create questions that will spark thoughtful conversation about the book, its arguments, and its implications for our understanding of work.
- Your **presentation** should teach the class about something you learned from that week's reading. **Do not summarize the reading**—your classmates are expected to have read it as well. Instead, your presentation is an opportunity for you to help the class understand and discuss a concept or idea from the reading. **Students presenting on the same readings must communicate beforehand—ideally in person—to ensure that their presentations do not overlap too much.** Each individual student presentation should be well-organized, informative, and between 5-10 minutes long. (I will show time cards at 3, 5, 7, and 9 minutes and stop you at 10 minutes.) You may use handouts or audiovisuals for your presentation but are not required to do so. If you choose to use video or audio clips, they should not take up more than 2 minutes of your presentation.
- ***You will be penalized for lateness. Comments and questions received after noon but before midnight on the day before your presentation will lose 5 points. Comments and questions received after midnight but still on the same day as your presentation will lose 10 points. Comments and questions will not be accepted after the day on which you present.***

- 2. Job Description (10%):** The second week of class we will read excerpts from Studs Terkel's classic oral history collection, *Working*. You will then write your own 3-4 page entry about a job you have held for a new (imaginary) edition of *Working*. Write in the first-person, as if you were being interviewed by Terkel himself, about a job you have held. It can be a formal position you held (e.g., receptionist, server) or an informal one (e.g., babysitter), a paid or volunteer role, even your "job" of being a student or homemaker or parent. Be honest and detailed. Use the interviews you read in *Working* as models for style and content.
- 3. TV Show Analysis (20%):** For this paper, each student will select a TV show and analyze how specific occupations are depicted in that program. Your paper will consider questions such as: What jobs do people do on this show? What parts of their labor, if any, is depicted? What do their work spaces look like? Does their work appear to be financially lucrative—how do you know? HOW is their work depicted—as a chore, a joy, a calling, a challenge, a breeze, a lifestyle, etc.? What do the depictions of work on this program teach us about how specific types of work and workers are understood in US culture?
- 4. Interview Report (25%):** Each student will interview someone engaged in an occupation that interests you, one you've considered for yourself or would like to learn more about. Interviews must be recorded (I have audio recorders I can loan you). You are not required to transcribe the entire interview, although you are welcome to do so and I believe you will find it helpful in your analysis. I do recommend transcribing the most important portions of your interview, as all quotations must be word-for-word. I will provide specific questions your interview must cover, and you will also draft questions specific to that occupation and shaped by your own interests. You will use the interviewee's responses to your questions to write a paper reporting what you learned about the occupation and connecting the interview to course readings and themes. Your interview report will be **approximately 4-5 pages long** and should: **1)** briefly describe who you interviewed and why; **2)** answer the provided questions about this occupation; **3)** connect your analysis of the interview to **at least two** course readings; and **4)** reflect on the experience of interviewing someone about their work. You may focus on any occupation you choose, but you must obtain my approval of your choice before conducting the interview. You cannot focus on an occupation we read about in class. You will also present your interview findings in a brief in-class presentation.
- 5. Final Paper (30%):** At the end of the semester, each student will write a final paper in which they trace a single theme across three of the occupations we studied in this class. Each paper should make an original argument and incorporate **at least three** course readings (you may also reference films we watched in class but these do not count toward the required minimum of readings).

Graduate Student Requirements: Graduate students will complete the same readings and assignments as undergraduates but will be expected to demonstrate a higher level of written and oral communication and a greater scope, depth, and length of analysis than that expected of undergraduates. **In lieu of the final undergraduate project, each graduate student will complete an original research project on a specific occupation or occupational group.** These projects will culminate in a **final paper of approximately 10-15 pages** that demonstrates a substantial engagement with a minimum of ten secondary sources (not including course readings). Graduate students may opt to complete the film or website versions of the final project, but if so there will be additional requirements to those assigned for undergraduates. I will meet with graduate students over the course of the semester to determine any additional requirements.

Grading Details and Procedures:

In grading your assignments and exams I will pay close attention to both substance and form (grammar, spelling, organization, and clarity of expression). In evaluating the substance of an essay, I will examine whether you have demonstrated a critical understanding of course materials **and** presented and substantiated a coherent thesis or argument.

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| Reading Presentations | 15% | Presentation dates will vary |
| Job Description | 10% | Due 2/7 in class |
| TV show analysis | 20% | Due 3/5 in class |
| Interview Report | 25% | Due 4/11 in class |
| Final Paper | 30% | Due 5/18 to my mailbox in UH-313 by 4:30pm |

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|----|---------|----|--------|----|--------------|
| A | 92-100% | B- | 80-81% | D+ | 68-69% |
| A- | 90-91% | C+ | 78-79% | D | 62-67% |
| B+ | 88-89% | C | 72-77% | D- | 60-61% |
| B | 82-87% | C- | 70-71% | F | 59% or lower |

The +/- grading system will be used. Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade for every unexcused day overdue. Extensions must be requested well in advance of the assignment deadline. There is no make-up work in this class without a documented excuse. Keep all graded assignments so that any discrepancies can be easily and fairly straightened out. I reserve the right to add or modify assignments over the course of the semester. There are currently no extra credit assignments for this course; I elect to add extra-credit assignments during the semester they will be equally available to all students.

Policies and Resources

Office Hours: I encourage you to attend office hours or schedule an appointment at another time if those hours do not work with your schedule. I am always happy to talk with you about course readings, assignments, and broader questions about American Studies and academic life. It is a pleasure for me to get to know you and your intellectual interests, so don't hesitate

to drop by with questions or to mull over something you've been thinking about. If you're struggling in the class, contact me sooner rather than later so we have time to work together to improve your performance before the semester ends.

Student Information Page: Visit <http://fdc.fullerton.edu/teaching/syllabus.php> for info on:

- Disability Support Services
- Academic Dishonesty Policy
- Emergency Preparedness
- Student Learning Goals and Outcomes
- Library Resources

University Learning Center (ULC): The ULC provides CSUF students with academic support including assistance with assignments, general study skills, and computer user needs. The ULC offers one-to-one peer tutoring, online writing review, and many more services. More information can be found on the [ULC website](#).

Writing Center: Located on the first floor of Pollak Library, the Writing Center offers 30-minute, one-on-one peer tutoring sessions and workshops, aimed at providing assistance for all written assignments and student writing concerns. Registration and appointment schedules are available at the [Writing Center Appointment Scheduling System](#). Walk-in appointments are also available on a first come, first served basis, to students who have registered online. More information can be found at the [Writing Center webpage](#) or by calling (657) 278-3650.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

1/22 & 1/24 Introduction

- No Reading
- **In Class:** *Sign up for class presentations*

1/29 & 1/31 Thinking about (and Studying) Work

- Studs Terkel, *Working*, Intro & **TEN** narratives (choose whichever interest you most)
- David Graeber, "On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs"

2/5 & 2/7 Factory Workers (Meaning, Exploitation, and Flow)

- Caitrin Lynch, *Retirement on the Line*, pp. 1-63
- Video: "Investment in Older Workers Turns a Big Profit"
- **DUE 2/7: Your Job Description**

2/12 & 2/14 Plumbers and Mechanics (Class, Skill, and Physical Labor)

- Mike Rose, *The Mind at Work*, Introduction and Ch3
- Matthew Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, Introduction & Ch. 1 & 4

2/21 Diner Waitresses (Gendered Labor) [No class Monday—Presidents' Day]

- Candacy Taylor, *Counter Cultures*

2/26 & 2/28 Investment Bankers (Hiring for "Smarts" vs. Skills)

- Karen Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*, Intro. & Ch. 1-2

3/5 & 3/7 TV Show Analysis

- No reading
- **DUE 3/5: TV Show Analysis**

3/12 & 3/14 Flight Attendants and Manicurists (Emotional Labor, Intimate Labor)

- Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, Ch1&6
- Miliann Kang, *The Managed Hand*, Introduction & Ch2

3/19 & 3/21 High-Tech Workers (Occupational Culture and Corporate Care)

- Imaginary Worlds Podcast, “Atari vs. the Imagination Gap” [audio]
- Jan English-Lueck and Miriam Lueck Avery, “Intensifying Work & Chasing Innovation”

* * * **SPRING BREAK** * * *

4/2 & 4/4 Morticians and Sex Workers (Stigmatized Work)

- William Thompson, “Handling the Stigma of Handling the Dead”
- Juline Koken, “Independent Female Escorts’ Strategies for Coping with Sex Work Related Stigma”

4/9 & 4/11 Interview Analysis

- No reading
- **DUE 4/11: Interview Analysis**

4/16 & 4/18 Homemakers and Caregivers (Unpaid Work and Work/Life Integration)

- Arlie Hochschild, “The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home”
- Liz O’Donnell, “The Crisis Facing America’s Working Daughters”
- Brad Harrington et al., “The New Millennial Dad”
- Shannon Hayes, “Meet the Radical Homemakers”

4/23 & 4/25 Domestic Workers (Race, Power, and Hierarchy)

- Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Domestica*, Preface and Ch. 1-2, 6-8

4/30 & 5/2 Models & Bike Messengers (The Body at Work)

- Ashley Mears, “Discipline of the Catwalk”
- Jeffrey Kidder, *Urban Flow*, Introduction and Ch1

5/7 & 5/9 Gig Work and Assembled Careers (Legitimacy and Precarity)

- Rachel Sherman, “Time Is Our Commodity”
- Susan Hill, “The Gig Economy and its Entanglements”
- Carrie Lane, “The Self-Assembled Career”

5/18 FINAL PAPERS DUE to my mailbox in UH-313 by 4:30pm