

AMST 410
The Office: White-Collar Work in American Culture

Fall 2013
Tuesday 4:00-6:45pm
UH-319

Instructor: Dr. Carrie Lane
Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:00-3:00pm & by appointment
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Course Description: While most Americans will work in an office at some point in their lives, few have the opportunity to examine the office and office workers in cultural or historical perspective. This interdisciplinary course uses film, television, fiction, and scholarly works to explore the history and culture of white-collar work from the 1870s to the present. Topics include: gender, race, and hierarchy; ideas of merit, success, and upward mobility; the relationship between work and home; management theory; workplace design; downsizing and layoffs; business ethics; and the future of office work.

The **Learning Goals** for this course are as follows:

- Students will come to understand white-collar work and representations thereof from a uniquely interdisciplinary and cultural perspective. They will learn about white-collar work and workers from a variety of cultural documents, including advertisements, films (documentary and feature), office floorplans, and television programs.
- Students will analyze how white-collar work has been represented in American popular culture in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. In doing so they will gain skills and perspective that they can later apply to the analysis and critique of US popular cultural representations more broadly.
- Students will use the study of work as a lens through which to examine broader aspects of American history and culture, such as hierarchy and discrimination, gender relations, the American Dream, workers' rights, the work ethic, and the nuclear family.
- 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 an original, well-evidenced argument.

Required Texts:

- Robert Jackall, *Moral Mazes: The World of Corporate Managers*
- Stephen Barley and Gideon Kunda, *Gurus, Hired Guns, and Warm Bodies: Itinerant Experts in a Knowledge Economy*
- Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*
- Additional required readings available on Titanium

Course Requirements:

Attendance & Participation: You are allowed **one unexcused absence** 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 three unexcused absences, you will automatically fail the course. You are expected to have completed 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 in doing 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.

Presentations on Weekly Reading: For most class sessions, a team of undergraduates will be responsible for kicking off class discussion. By 4:00pm on the day **before** the class in which they'll be presenting, each student will submit to me by email three comments about that week's readings and three questions for class discussion. Your comments should concern something you found especially interesting or thought provoking in the reading, and 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 that week's reading/s. You should, 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 equally thoughtful and should be designed to encourage class discussion. Your questions may connect back to your comments on the readings, but they do not have to. You will be graded on the quality of your comment for that week as well as the questions you present to the class. Students presenting on the same week's readings must meet beforehand to decide who will ask what and to ensure their questions and comments do not overlap too much. You and your co-presenter(s) can decide whether you want to alternate questions or do your presentations separately. You may use handouts or audiovisuals for your presentation but you are not required to do so. Two-thirds of your presentation grade will be based on the comments and questions you submit; the other third will be based on your in-class presentation.

Historical Essay: In this short paper (approximately 4 pages) you will discuss the rise of white-collar work, focusing both on the forces that compelled the expansion of offices and office work as well as the challenges these changes posed for corporate employers and employees. Your essays must draw on both Davis and Kwolek-Folland.

Movie Review & Presentation: For this assignment you'll select a feature film or documentary that focuses on an office or office work. The film can concern any era but must focus on the United States. Your review will be approximately four pages long, and should: 1) briefly describe the movie; 2) discuss what you think the film tells the viewer, intentionally or not, about office work in American culture; and 3) connect your analysis of the film to **at least two** course readings. Be sure to draw on course materials and discussions to frame and bolster your discussion of the film. I will provide a list of possible films; you may select a movie not on the list so long as you receive my prior approval. You cannot review a film we watch together in class. You will also present your analysis of the film in a brief in-class presentation.

Final Paper: Your final paper (minimum 6 pages) will demonstrate your comprehension of course readings, films, and discussions and will require you to draw thoughtful connections between a variety of course readings in the process of making an original and well-evidenced argument.

Graduate Students: For all requirements outlined above, graduate students 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. Graduate students will also read **one additional scholarly book** concerning the history or culture of the office in the U.S. You will then **write a review** of approximately 5 pages in which you 1) summarize the book and its core arguments; and 2) offer your own assessment of the book's strengths and weaknesses. I will meet with graduate students over the course of the semester to determine any additional requirements.

In grading your assignments, 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. I reserve the right to modify or add assignments throughout the semester.

Calendar of Assignments: All assignments are to be submitted at the beginning of class on the due date unless otherwise specified.

<u>Due Date</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
Sept. 17	Historical Essay
Oct. 29	Movie Review
Dec. 3	Book Review (grad students only)
Dec. 17	Final Paper

Grading Procedures and Standards:

Undergraduates

Class Participation	20%
Historical Essay	20%
Movie Review & Pres.	15%
Final Paper	30%
Presentation on Weekly Readings	15%

Graduate Students

Class Participation	20%
Historical Essay	20%
Movie Review & Pres.	15%
Final Paper	30%
Book Review	15%

Extensions should be requested well in advance of the assignment deadline. There is no make-up work in this class without a written documented excuse.

A+ 100% or higher	B- 80-82	D 63-67%
A 93-99%	C+ 78-79%	D- 60-62%
A- 90-92%	C 73-77%	F 59% or lower
B+ 88-89%	C- 70-72	
B 83-87%	D+ 68-69%	

The +/- grading system will be used. *Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade for every unexcused day overdue.* Keep all graded assignments so any discrepancies may 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, but I may elect to add an optional extra-credit assignment during the semester.

Academic dishonesty includes such things as cheating, inventing false information or citations, plagiarism, and helping someone else commit an act of academic dishonesty. When you use information from sources external to yourself, you must reference the source appropriately. Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade on that exam/assignment. Violations will be reported to the Dean's Office for further action. For information on University policies and tips on how to avoid plagiarism, see the Judicial Affairs website: <http://www.fullerton.edu/deanofstudents/judicial/Letter%20to%20Students.asp>

Students with special needs: Please inform me during the first week of classes about any disability or special needs you may have that may require specific arrangements related to attending class, carrying out assignments, or taking examinations. CSUF requires students with disabilities to register with Disability Support Services (DSS), located in UH-101 and at 657-278-3117, in order to receive prescribed accommodations appropriate to their disability.

Emergency Procedures: See http://www.fullerton.edu/emergencypreparedness/ep_students.html

Office Hours: I encourage you to attend office hours, or to schedule an individual appointment with me if those hours are not compatible with your schedule. I am always happy to talk with you about the course readings, assignments, and broader questions about American Studies and academic life. It is a true pleasure for me to get to know you and your intellectual interests, so please drop by with any questions or to mull over something you've been thinking about.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Introduction

- 8/27 Watch:** Episode of “The Office” (2005)
**Decide which week you'll lead class discussion*

Transitioning into the White-Collar World

- 9/3 Read:** Davis, *Company Men*, Intro., Ch. 2-4, 6
Watch: *The Crowd* (1928)
- 9/10 Read:** Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business*, Intro. & Ch. 2, 4, 6

Critiques of the Organization Man and Organizational Structure

- 9/17 Read:** No Reading
Due: Historical Essay
- 9/24 Read:** Whyte, *The Organization Man*, Foreword & Part 1
Watch: *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, excerpts
- 10/1 Read:** Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Ch. 2-5
Watch: Episode of “Mad Men” (2007)

Ethics and Inequality in Office Life

- 10/8 Read:** Jackall, *Moral Mazes*, Intro. & Ch. 1-4
Watch: “Enron: The Smartest Men in the Room” (2005)
- 10/15 Read:** Jackall, *Moral Mazes*, Ch. 5-8 & Author’s Note
- 10/22 Read:** Pierce, “Racing for Innocence”
DiTomaso, “How Social Networks Drive Black Unemployment”
Davila, “The Underrepresentation of Hispanic Attorneys in Corporate Law Firms”
Chen, “The State of the Asian in Corporate America”

10/29 Read: No reading

Due: Movie Review: Come prepared to tell the class about your movie review

Restructuring Corporate Employment

11/5 Read: Newman, *Falling from Grace*, Ch. 3

Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character*, Preface, Ch. 1, 7-8

11/12 Read: Barley and Kunda, *Gurus, Hired Guns, and Warm Bodies*, Ch. 1-4, 7-9

Watch: "Startup.com"

11/19 Read: Barley and Kunda, *Gurus, Hired Guns, and Warm Bodies*, Ch. 10-13 & Epilogue

* * * **FALL BREAK** * * *

12/3 Read: Sandberg, *Lean In*, Introduction & Ch. 1-6

Due: Book Review (*Grad Students only; come prepared to discuss your review*)

12/10 Read: Sandberg, *Lean In*, Ch. 7-11

12/17 Due: Final Paper