INTRODUCTION

Work – as opposed to a job or employment – is fundamental in defining human society and social agencies that constitute it. Frederick Engels argued that the ‘performance of labour’ is a defining element in the formation of human civilization. Social differentiation is partly determined by the occupations of individuals or groups. In societies marked by class differentiation, what work we do often signifies our location in the class ordering of power, wealth, and status. Likewise, gender structuration of society is largely marked and signified by the work we do or the nature of our performance of labour. The changing nature and content of work have become key organising concepts for periodising human history or ascribing hierarchies to them. For instance, in the last hundred years different models of accumulation existed and co-existed within the capitalist mode of production, e.g., Taylorism, Fordism, Toyotism or post-Fordism, and neo-Fordism.

What is unique about human work (or ‘labour’) is that it is conscious and purposive rather than a product of instinct. The distinction between ‘conception’ and ‘execution’ – i.e., from imagining and planning work, to actually doing it –is central to thinking about work in a variety of situations and circumstances. This course will be framed by the notion of labour process and the debate that followed the publication of Harry Braverman’s Labor and monopoly capital: The degradation of work in the twentieth century. Not all work is a ‘job’, not all jobs are about employment (i.e., paid work for a third party). Work can be related not only to the industrial context but also to the non-industrial context. While we will engage with varieties of work related to the formal economy, we will also examine work and work experiences in ‘informal’, domestic, agrarian, and pre-capitalist contexts.

Several forms and aspects of work are not adequately explored by industrial and economic sociologists, yet they define the daily experiences of many people. Here we are referring to employment such as domestic workers, car guards, hawkers, etc. What is it about these forms of work that separates them from work in an industrial context? How are social structures related to forms of work and work organisation in agrarian/rural and pre-colonial contexts? How do we understand forms of performance of labour in the domestic context and other types of work? What are the links between gender-structuration and production for use value in the domestic/household context?

This course will explore the sociology of work by locating the workplace within the prevailing economic and political processes. We will examine the differences
between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies, and how these shape the workplace in each epoch; outline the relationships between the workplace, the capitalist ‘mode of production’, and the different ‘social formations’; examine the relationships between production, distribution, consumption, and social reproduction; consider the relationship between work, class, and ideology; and analyse the relationship between work and labour in pre-modern and modern capitalist, ‘free’ and ‘unfree’, industrial and non-industrial, paid and unpaid, domestic and public, formal and informal, agrarian and urban contexts.

OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Develop an understanding of sociological perspectives on the nature of capitalist society, and on work in pre-capitalist and capitalist society.
- Develop an independent capacity to critically evaluate theoretical approaches in relation to concrete empirical contexts.
- Develop a critical understanding of how different historical contexts and moments affect the economy, work, and society.
- Develop a critical analysis of the relationship between capitalism and work on the one hand, and work and class, gender, race, and consumption on the other.

ASSESSMENT

The evaluation for this course involves the following:

- A test
- An assignment on Volkswagen factory visit
- An essay
- An examination

STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

The course runs over seven weeks in the first term [11 February – 29 March] and will be divided into different sections. First, we will explore the concept of the capitalist mode of production and the concept of work, including their different
dynamics and general forms. We will also focus on different sociological understandings of work. Second, we will locate work and the worker within the larger processes of capitalism, and its changing models of accumulation. We will examine the transformation of work in an industrial context ranging from the emergence of the factory system to the ‘post-Fordist,’ ‘post-modern’ ideas of flexibility and casualisation. The different models of capital accumulation and their ideologies will be discussed: namely, Taylorism, Fordism, Toyotism, and post-Fordism or neo-Fordism. The last two sections cover the following topics: (a) the informal economy and the informal sector in urban and rural contexts, the transformation of work in an agrarian context, and the permanence of pre-capitalist relationships; and (b) work, gender, class and race; and aesthetic and emotional labour, with special attention to the South African workplace.

### TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The teaching and learning activities for this course include the following:

- **Active participation in the lectures from Tuesdays to Thursdays. Attendance (80%) and active participation in the lectures is a requirement of this course. Reading the course material is essential. You should not substitute prescribed readings for materials found elsewhere.**

- **Compulsory practical discussions on Fridays.**

- **Volkswagen factory trip on Tuesday, 19 March.** Information about the trip will be provided in class and by e-mail. The factory and museum visit will be from 09h00 to 12h00. We will be leaving from the university at 07h00 and will return to Grahamstown at approximately 14h00. Students who will miss classes as a result of this trip should ask for a letter from the department.

- **A test in a Friday lecture slot. The date of the test will be indicated during the first weeks of the course.**

- **An essay due on Thursday, 28 March and submitted no later than 12h00 to the administrator or the secretary. You need to cover all the essential readings as well as some of the recommended readings. The essay must be between 7 to 8 pages in length and typed in 1.5 line spacing.**

- **Some of the readings listed in this outline are on RUConnected in the INS III section for this course. Focus on the prescribed/compulsory readings.**
Please consult Handout No. 1 for an outline of the university policy on plagiarism, guidelines on the formatting and writing of assignments, the departmental rules regarding citations and referencing, and the criteria for assessing written work. A copy of the Assignment Cover Sheet, which must accompany all assignments submitted to the Department, is also available in Handout No. 1.

COURSE STRUCTURE AND READINGS

SECTION ONE: WORK IN THE CAPITALIST MODE OF PRODUCTION

In this section, we will discuss the concept of work in capitalist societies, what capitalism is, the development of productive forces, the divisions of labour, and social formations. In addition, we will have a broad overview of sociological perspectives of work and the meanings of work. We will also explore some key concepts related to work, such as different forms of value, composition of capital, absolute and relative surplus, fetishisms of commodity, and the theory of ideology.

Compulsory Readings:


Recommended Readings:

SECTION TWO: WORK IN AN INDUSTRIAL CONTEXT

In this section, we will analyse the different models of accumulation and the transformation of work in the 20th century. The transformation of work in the 20th century, we are often told, produced a shift from Fordist production regime to a
post-Fordist one. The former is associated with assembly line production technology and workplace regimes; the latter a dissembling of Fordist work regimes into something often called flexible work regimes. Much of the intellectual work has revolved around the labour process debate. Central to understanding Braverman’s critical contribution is the distinction that Marx made between labour-power and labour. We will explore the sociological accounts of work in the industrial context using this lens. Finally, we will study the concept of flexible labour and casual labour as part of the current processes of workplace restructuring.

Compulsory Readings:


Recommended Readings:


SECTION THREE: WORK IN A NON-INDUSTRIAL CONTEXT

This section will explore non-standard labour, the growing informal economy in urban and rural areas, the influence of pre-capitalist relations on informal work, and rural and agrarian work.
Compulsory Readings:


Recommended Readings:


This section outlines the relationship between work and gender differentiation, work and social class divisions, work and race, and work and leisure time and leisure activities. In addition, a brief introduction to emotional and aesthetic labour will be provided.

Compulsory Readings:


Recommended Readings:


