

SOC389: The Meaning of Work: Money, Power, Purpose

Fall Semester 2021

M/W 2:30-3:45pm

New Psych 230

Professor: Dr. Tracy Scott

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Office Hours: Thursdays between 11:30am-5:30pm.

- Please sign up on my Calendly Link: [\[link\]](#)

Prof. Scott's Office: Tarbutton 230. If you are on campus we can meet in-person in my office.

- If you are unable to meet in person, here is the Zoom option: [\[link\]](#)
- Office hours are for you! So please feel free to sign up for any open time, any week.

Teaching Assistant: Allison Sullivan

E-mail: allison.sullivan@emory.edu

Office Hours: Wednesdays 4:00-5:00pm

Office: Tarbutton 202

COURSE OVERVIEW

Course Description

This course will use a sociology of culture approach to explore how the notion of “work” is socially constructed in U.S. society. The course proceeds in three sections:

1) Narratives of Work Meaning: The American Dream (Money)

We will explore the meaning of work through the societal narrative of “The American Dream.” We will consider how this narrative contains major theoretical and philosophical views on the definition and meaning of “work,” particularly around notions of money. We also look at counter-narratives.

2) Realities of Work Meaning: Gender, Race, and Class (Power)

We will study how work is socially constructed around different groups, particularly gender, race, and social class. We will look at sociological research that shows how these cultural meanings are embedded in power structures in the U.S.

3) Creating Work Meaning: Purpose

We will explore issues of organizational culture and how workers create meaning at work. We will also look at how individuals create meaning in their own work lives and through work identities.

Course Content KNOWLEDGE Objectives

- Understand how a sociology of culture approach helps us see behind implicit assumptions about the meaning of work in societies.
- Understand empirical realities around how culture is embedded in economic systems (structures of work) and the consequences this has for workers.
- Understand how meso-level organizational culture is created in the workplace.
- Understand how culture shapes the way individuals construct meaning around their own work.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS Objectives

Transferable skills transfer from one domain to another. They are more foundational than technical skills which often do not transfer across domains, and which often become obsolete with new techniques.

Transferable skills are the most important “skills” that you will gain from your education at Emory. These skills are highly valued by employers and will be invaluable for any career you choose.

1. Critical Thinking

What is “critical thinking”?

“**Critical Thinking:** the objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a considered (thought about carefully) decision or conclusion.” Adapted from Dictionary.com, retrieved online at Lexico.com.

Key to Critical Thinking in Sociology is the **Sociological Research Process**.

Sociological Research Process Logic = Problem-Solving Skills

- Sociological Research requires objectively analyzing and evaluating evidence in order to come to a considered conclusion (critical thinking).
- Sociological Research involves **logical steps** in which one must do careful, “considered” thinking (critical thinking) at each step, rather than relying on quick or formulaic rote rules. This research process logic is the best basis for all problem-solving.
- **This course will teach you sociological research process logic.** You will read sociological research articles. **All paper assignments will require you to apply the sociological research process logic** to your own data gathering and written work.
- Please read the following for the importance of sociological knowledge and how it encourages important critical thinking and observation skills:
Tim Wise. 2019. “Forget STEM, We Need MESH: The importance of media literacy, ethics, sociology and history education.” *Medium*. Sep. 17, 2019.
<https://medium.com/our-human-family/forget-stem-we-need-mesh-43ab6f6273cd>

2. Writing

All course assignments are exercises in good writing. This is a skill not to be underestimated. Over the course of your careers, you *will* write. (You will write thousands of emails if nothing else.) The better you write, the better you will do in your work.

- Please read the following for an interesting view about the effectiveness of good writing.
Jane Rosenzweig. 2019. “The Whistle-Blower Knows How to Write: His complaint offers lessons on how to make a point.” *The New York Times*. Sep. 27, 2019.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/27/opinion/whistleblower-complaint.html>

3. Observation/Listening

Sociology, and sociological research, are fundamentally about **observation of the social world and listening to others**, with a goal of **understanding other groups’ realities** (rather than listening only in order to apply one’s own personal belief system or agenda). Listening and observation are foundational to cross-cultural understanding and communication. Specifically, **course assignments will involve qualitative interviewing (listening) and direct or participant observation.**

- Please read the following for the importance of listening as a skill:
Kate Murphy. 2020. “It’s time to tune in: why listening is the real key to communication.” *The Guardian*. Jan. 25, 2020.
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/jan/25/its-time-to-tune-in-why-listening-is-the-real-key-to-communication>

COURSE MATERIALS

Canvas site:

This site will include all Readings, Assignments, and Lecture Outlines.

Readings

All readings will be posted on **Canvas**, under the relevant class session **Module**.

You are expected to complete the readings before the class date listed on the syllabus below. We will discuss some of the readings in class, so both the reading and class attendance are important.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

I. Class Discussions & Activities (20%)

- We will have periodic class discussions and activities that will be incorporated into your written assignments. These will not be graded, but participation is required. If you miss any of the required discussions/activities because of an unexcused reason, you will lose 5 points (per activity missed). See details and dates below in the Class Schedule, marked by purple font.
- Beyond this, being present in class is important to understanding the course content material, which you will need to understand in order to do well on the paper assignments.
- **NOTE: absence due to illness is considered “excused.” (See more under “Teaching and Learning during the Pandemic” below.)**

II. Two Critical Thinking Papers (each worth 20% for total of 40%)

These papers focus on the first two broad sections of the course (Society-Money; System-Power). Each paper will involve multiple modes of work: reading summaries, reflections on in-class discussion/activity, and writing (5-6 pages per paper).

1. Society: Narratives of Work Meaning (Money) (20%) – DUE: Wed, Sep 29

- You will write **brief reading summaries** of any 4 of the 5 readings from Sep 8-22 (Giridharadas, Lewis, Smarsh, Kidder, Butler) and incorporate them in this paper.
- You will also incorporate **reflections about** your observations/listening experience in the small **group discussions from Sep 15 and Sep 22.**
- Detailed instructions to be provided.

2. System: Realities of Work Meaning (Power) (20%) – DUE: Wed, Nov 3

- You will write **brief annotated bibliographies on any 3 of the 4 readings from Oct 4-18** (Roth; Rivera & Tilcsik; Ray; Cook & Glass)
- You will write **a fourth annotated bibliography** on the original research source for **one of the readings from Oct 25** (Quillian et al; Quadlin; Rivera & Tilcsik)
- Your paper will incorporate lessons learned from the **evidence activity in class on Sep 29.**
- Detailed instructions to be provided.

III. Final Project (40%): DUE: Monday, Dec 13th by 5:30pm

Creating Work Meaning (Purpose) *How has this class shaped your view of the meaning of work?*

This final project is your chance to delve more deeply into how workers find meaning in their work, as well as to construct your own meaning of work. Here are the general parameters of the project, with detailed instructions to be provided.

- You must include **brief reflections** on what you learned from the **first two papers.**
- You must include **brief reflections** on at least **3 readings from Sections 3 & 4** (any three from this group: Ho, Szymczak & Bosk, Van Maanen, Bailey & Madden, Khazan)
- You must do **primary data collection** (interviews) to learn from others about what is meaningful to them at work. For the interviews you will use the Bailey & Madden article as guide.

IN-PERSON CLASS RULES

I am so glad that we are together in-person! If you want us to stay this way, please follow these rules!

- **Wear your mask (face covering) at all times!** Coming into the room, during class, leaving class – and yes, even when you ask a question. Masks are very important to help mitigate the spread of the Delta variant.
- **NO eating or drinking in class** (unless emergency – dehydration, etc.).

- Do NOT come to class if you have any symptoms! Follow the instructions here: <https://www.emory.edu/forward/resources/faq/index.html#anchor-health> .

SOME other GROUND RULES

Laptops

- **Laptops (or tablets) are permitted in this class, with caveats.** Please refrain from texting, checking social media, shopping, or any other non-class activities on your computer. If you are found to be engaging in these activities, you will be asked to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class, so as not to distract students who prefer to be electronics-free. Recent research shows that the use of laptops is associated with lower grades for the user as well as for those around the user. Computers are distracting!

General Communication

I provide very detailed information and instructions in all the course documents.

- **Please read all the written course communications thoroughly!**
- If you have questions after you have read everything in a particular course document (syllabus, paper instructions, study guide), then feel free to ask me.

Email Communication:

I generally try to respond to emails within 24 hrs, but I do not guarantee a response within 24 hrs. I do not answer emails after 8pm at night.

General Conduct:

Please be mindful of the general code of conduct that you would use in any classroom setting. I expect us all to be respectful of one another.

- Please do not arrive late to class.
- Once in class, please refrain from carrying on private conversations with your neighbor(s). This is distracting for everyone else in the room.

The use of cell phones is not permitted in this class. Please turn OFF your phones.

Missed Classes: You are responsible for missed material. Please get notes from one of your classmates. After you have read all the missed material, if you still have questions, please come to my office hours.

Late Assignments:

I will accept late assignments but your grade on the assignment will be lowered by half a letter grade for each day the assignment is late. Personal illness and family emergencies are valid excuses, but they still will require some form of documentation.

Extra Credit: There are **no** extra credit assignments available in this course.

Video/Audio: You may not video or audiotape lectures without my express consent.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Stress management and mental health

Many students face challenges that can interfere with their academic success and overall wellbeing. If you are struggling with this class, please visit me during office hours or contact me via email. If you are feeling overwhelmed and need support, please go to: <http://campuslife.emory.edu/support/index.html> Emory also offers free, 24/7 support resources via TimelyCare: <https://timelycare.com/emory>.

Other Emory resources include:

- [Counseling & Psychological Services](#)
- [Office of Spiritual & Religious Life](#)

- [Student Case Management and Interventions Services](#)
- [Student Health Services Psychiatry](#)
- [Emory Anytime Student Health Services](#)

Accessibility and Accommodations

If you have a documented disability and have anticipated barriers related to the format or requirements of this course, or presume having a disability (e.g., mental health, attention, learning, vision, hearing, physical or systemic), and are in need of accommodations for this semester, please **contact the Department of Accessibility Services (DAS), as soon as possible**, to request accommodations.

Students who have accommodations in place should contact me sometime during the first weeks of the semester, to let me know your specific needs for the course as it relates to your approved accommodations. All discussions with DAS and faculty are confidential.

Additional information regarding DAS: <https://accessibility.emory.edu/index.html>

Contact information for the Department of Accessibility Services: Phone: 404-727-9877 | TTD 404-712-2049. Email: accessibility@emory.edu

Emory Writing Center

The Emory Writing Center (EWC) is open to support students in Emory College. They offer one-on-one remote and in-person tutoring for a range of composition projects (essays, reports, theses, etc.), at any stage of the writing process (from brainstorming to final revisions). Writing Center tutors work on idea development, structure, use of sources, style, grammar, and more. They are not a proofreading or editing service, but rather offer strategies and resources writers can use as they compose, revise, and edit their own work. Tutors also support the literacy needs of English Language Learners (ELL); several tutors are trained ELL Specialists. The Writing Center is located in Callaway N111.

- **Learn more and make an appointment at** <http://www.writingcenter.emory.edu> .
- Please review their policies before your first appointment, including our new policy on inclusivity and respect: <http://writingcenter.emory.edu/appointments/policies.html>.

Academic Conduct:

Emory College has established an Honor Code outlining an appropriate code of conduct with respect to academic honesty and plagiarism. Information on Emory's Honor code can be accessed at:

<http://catalog.college.emory.edu/academic/policies-regulations/honor-code.html>

The Honor Code is in effect throughout the semester. By taking this course, you affirm that it is a violation of the code to cheat on exams, to plagiarize, to deviate from the teacher's instructions about collaboration on work that is submitted for grades, to give false information to a faculty member, and to undertake any other form of academic misconduct. You agree that the instructor is entitled to move you to another seat during examinations, without explanation. You also affirm that if you witness others violating the code you have a duty to report them to the honor council.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE (subject to change)

Prelude

Aug 25 (W) Introductions

Aug 30 (M)

Our Framework: On Sociology and Culture

Johnson, Allan G. 2013. "Aren't Systems Just People?" Selection from *The Forest and The Trees: Sociology as Life, Practice, and Promise*.

<https://www.agjohnson.us/glad/arent-systems-just-people/>

Watts, Alan. 2007. *Music and Life*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERbvKrH-GC4&feature=youtu.be>

SECTION 1: SOCIETY and MONEY: Narratives of Work Meaning: The American Dream (Money)

Macro-Level Social Context: U.S. Society

Sep 1 (W)

The Social Construction of Work and The Meaning of Work

Budd, John W. 2011. "Introduction," pp. 1-13 in *The Thought of Work*. Ithaca, NY: ILR/Cornell University Press.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. 2015. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions.

SELECTION TBA.

Sep 6 (M):

LABOR DAY HOLIDAY – NO CLASS

Sep 8 (W)

Prevailing U.S. Ethos: The American Dream

Giridharadas, Anand. 2018. *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*. New York: Knopf.

Selections: Prologue (pp. 3-12), Chapter 1: But How is the World Changed? (pp.13-34), A Note on Sources (pp. 271-273).

Sep 13 (M)

The American Dream (Money) Part 1

Lewis, Michael. 2010. *Liar's Poker*. Reprint ed. W. W. Norton & Company.

Selections: Preface (pp. 9-12), Chapter 1: Liar's Poker (pp. 13-20), Chapter 2: Never Mention Money (pp. 21-38), Epilogue (pp. 307-310).

Sep 15 (W)

The American Dream (Money) Part 2

Smarsh, Sarah. 2018. *Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth*. New York: Scribner.

Selections: Author's Note (p. ix), Dear August (pp. 1-3), Chapter 4: The shame a country could assign (pp.126-167).

Listening Groups & Discussion: The American Dream

Sep 20 (M)

Alternative Ethos: Service (Contribution, Calling)

Kidder, Tracy. 2009. *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World*. New York: Random House.

Selections: Chapter 1 (pp. 3-8), Chapters 5-9 (pp. 47-95), Epilogue (pp. 303-312).

- Sep 22 (W)** **Alternative Ethos: Essence (Human Identity / “Passion”)**
Butler, Octavia. 1996. “Positive Obsession,” pp. 123-136 in *Blood Child and Other Stories*.
New York: Seven Stories Press.
Listening Groups & Discussions: Alternative Ethos

SECTION 2: SYSTEM and POWER: Realities of Work Meaning in Social Systems: Power
Macro Level Social Context: Work System/Structures

- Sep 27 (M)** **On Evidence, Theory and Methods**
Giddens, Duneier, Appelbaum, and Carr. 2020. “Chapter 2: Asking and Answering Sociological Questions.” In *Introduction to Sociology*, Seagull 12e. NY: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Pariser, Eli. 2011. *TED Talk: Beware Online “Filter Bubbles”*:
https://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles
- Tufekci, Zeynep. 2014. *Hollaback and Why Everyone Needs Better Research Methods: And Why All Data Needs Theory*: <https://medium.com/message/that-catcalling-video-and-why-research-methods-is-such-an-exciting-topic-really-32223ac9c9e8>

- Sep 29 (W)** **In-Class Activity: Evidence**
This activity requires use of the internet, so please bring your laptops/tablet to class.
(If you need a laptop/tablet, please email me. I can provide one.)
Paper 1 Due

Gender and the Meaning of Work in the U.S.

- Oct 4 (M)** Roth, Louise. 2004. “Engendering Inequality: Processes of Sex-Segregation on Wall Street.” *Sociological Forum* 19: 203-228.
- Oct 6 (W)** Rivera, Lauren. and Andras Tilcsik. 2019. “Scaling Down Inequality: Rating Scales, Gender Bias, and the Architecture of Evaluation.” *American Sociological Review*. 84: 248–274.

OCT 11 (M): FALL BREAK - NO CLASS

Race and The Meaning of Work in the U.S.

- Oct 13 (W)** Ray, Victor. 2019. “Why So Many Organizations Stay White.” *Harvard Business Review*. November 19, 2019.
<https://hbr.org/2019/11/why-so-many-organizations-stay-white>
- Oct 18 (M)** Cook, Alison and Christy Glass. 2013. “Glass Cliffs and Organizational Saviors: Barriers to Minority Leadership in Work Organizations?” *Social Problems* (60): 168-187.

Cultural notions (Gender and Race) embedded in the System: On Resumes

- Oct 20 (W)** **In-Class activity: Resume Evaluations**
- Oct 25 (M)** Quillian, Lincoln, Pager D., Midtbøen A.H., and O. Hexel. 2017. “Hiring Discrimination Against Black Americans Hasn’t Declined in 25 Years.” *Harvard Business Review*. October 11, 2017.

<https://hbr.org/2017/10/hiring-discrimination-against-black-americans-hasnt-declined-in-25-years>

American Sociological Association. 2018. "Gendered Stereotypes Can Penalize Women for Having Good Grades." *NewsWise*. Mar 21, 2018.

<https://www.newswise.com//articles/gendered-stereotypes-can-penalize-women-for-having-good-grades>

Rivera, Lauren and Andras Tilcsik. 2017. "How Subtle Class Cues Can Backfire on Your Resume." *Harvard Business Review*. UPDATED April 04, 2017.

<https://hbr.org/2016/12/research-how-subtle-class-cues-can-backfire-on-your-resume>

OPTIONAL (original research articles/sources):

Quillian, Lincoln, Pager D., Hexel O., and A. H. Midtbøen. 2017. "Meta-analysis of field experiments shows no change in racial discrimination in hiring over time." *PNAS* 114 (41): 10870-10875. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1706255114>

Quadlin, Natasha. (2018). "The Mark of a Woman's Record: Gender and Academic Performance in Hiring." *American Sociological Review* 83: 331–360.

Rivera, Lauren A. and Andrés Tilcsik. 2016. "Class Advantage, Commitment Penalty: The Gendered Effect of Social Class Signals in an Elite Labor Market." *American Sociological Review*. 81: 1097–1131.

Organizational Form [System] and Meaning: Bureaucracy in the U. S.

Oct 27 (W) Ritzer, George. 2018. *The McDonaldization of Society: Into the Digital Age*, Ninth Edition. Sage Publications.
Ch. 1 Introduction, pp. 1-8; Ch. 2 Key Predecessors, pp. 38-43.
Various selections on Higher Education, Medicine, Disney, and Digital Sites: pp. 84-85; 128-131; 135-138; 145-149; 174-175; 185-192; 197-201.

Nov 1 (M) **Organizational Form [System] and Meaning: Bureaucracy in the U. S**
Film: TBA

Nov 3 (W) **Finish Film & In-Class Discussion/Activity**
Paper 2 Due

Section 3: GROUP and PURPOSE: Creating Work Meaning: Purpose

Meso Level Social Context: Small Work Groups

Micro Level Social Context: Workers

Organizational Culture: The Organization (Motivation and Control)

Nov 8 (M) Ho, Karen. 2009. "Biographies of Hegemony: The Culture of Smartness and the Recruitment and Construction of Investment Bankers," chapter 1 (pp. 39-72) in *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Nov 10 (W) Ho, Karen. Continued.
In-Class Internet Activity: Online exploration of the organizational culture of a company.

Organizational Culture: Worker Response

Nov 15 (M) Szymczak, Julia E. and Charles L. Bosk. 2012. "Training for Efficiency: Work, Time, and Systems-Based Practice in Medical Residency." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 53:344-58.

Nov 17 (W) Van Maanen, John. 1991. "The Smile Factory: Work at Disneyland." Pages 58-76 in *Reframing Organizational Culture*, edited by Peter J. Frost, et al. Sage Publications.

Workers: Own Meaning/Purpose

Nov 22 (M) Bailey, Catherine and Adrian Madden. 2016. "What Makes Work Meaningful — Or Meaningless." *MIT Sloan Management Review* (Summer 2016): 53-61.

Nov 24 (W) **THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY – NO CLASS**

Nov 29 (M) Khazan, Olga. (2018). 'Find Your Passion' Is Awful Advice: A major new study questions the common wisdom about how we should choose our careers. *The Atlantic*. July 12, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2018/07/find-your-passion-is-terrible-advice/564932/>

OPTIONAL (original research article source):

O'Keefe, Paul A., Carol S. Dweck, and Gregory M. Walton. 2018. "Implicit Theories of Interest: Finding Your Passion or Developing It?" *Psychological Science*. 29(10), 1653–1664.

Dec 1 (W) ***In-Class Internet Activity: TBA***

Dec 6 (M) ***Wrap-Up***

Dec 13 (M): **Final Paper due by 5:30pm**