“CONTEMPORARY DEBATES” HONORS SPECIAL TOPICS SEMINAR PROPOSAL FORM

DEPARTMENT CHAIR: [Signature] 3/26/12

INSTRUCTOR (S): Sue Books

SPECIAL TOPICS HON COURSE TITLE: Work

DEPARTMENT: Secondary Education

SCHOOL OR DIVISION: School of Education

DESCRIPTION: Learning to do a job is one thing; learning to appropriate and affirm meaningful work for oneself is another. This multidisciplinary seminar will focus on the broad concept of work, a central facet of human life, and will invite consideration of a range of conceptual, philosophical, political, demographic, and policy-related questions, including these:

- What does the U.S. job market look like today and what is projected for the years ahead?
- What are the broader global and historical contexts that shape the U.S. job market?
- What are the demographics of employment and unemployment?
- What is the social significance and cultural meaning of work in U.S. society? What does it mean to be employed or unemployed in terms not only of income and benefits, but also of social status?
- What assumptions are made in the public discourse and in policy debates about questions such as the desirability of full employment, the role of government in “creating jobs” and in cushioning the hardship of unemployment, alignment of higher education with the existing job market, labor’s rights and responsibilities, the minimum wage, and the relationship between CEO and worker pay?
- Finally, what does it mean to “find” one’s work or to respond to a “calling”?

Such questions take on a heightened significance in a shifting and globalizing job market such as ours.

- Attach a brief narrative (not to exceed one page) describing how the course fits the criteria for “Contemporary Debates.”
- Attach a syllabus (including learning outcomes for “Contemporary Debates” and General Education based on category and competency).
- Attach a sample assignment or project.
- Provide your chairperson with the above documents so he or she can submit the proposal to the Honors Advisory Council.

Submit to Pat Sullivan, The Honors Program, CHH-111
Sue Books

How the proposed seminar on work fits the “Contemporary Debates” criteria

The proposed seminar aligns with the “contemporary debates” criteria in multiple ways.

- Because the topic of work is so close to the hearts and minds of students (as a source of excitement as well as sometimes anxiety), this seminar offers the “potential for creative, high impact learning.”
- Through its interdisciplinary orientation the seminar will help to “bridge gaps” among disciplines.
- Study of past employment trends and future projections will provide important perspectives on the current job market, and so will allow “historical contexts [to] serve as backdrops for contemporary conflicts.”

Both the mid-term assignment (Demographics of Employment) and the final project (Working Our Way Through School) will engage students in the review and analysis of secondary qualitative and quantitative data, and in most cases, in gathering original data through interviews and surveys. The mid-term assignment (Demographics of Employment) requires students to study the current status, historical trends, global context, and public discourse on employment of an under-represented group. The final project (Working Our Way Through School and Work and the Professions) will be alternated each semester. Both assignments require research, analysis, and collaborative planning conducted outside the classroom -- in the first case, to prepare a news article for The Oracle and, in the second, to plan a presentation for the class.

The learning outcomes for the proposed seminar also align with those specified for “Contemporary Debates” in at least two ways.

- Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data will require students to “read and understanding specialized literature.”
- Exploring “work” – an inherently interdisciplinary phenomenon – will require students to “understand different approaches to solving problems.”
WORK

Nothing is more tragic than failure to discover one’s true business in life, or to find that one has drifted or been forced by circumstance into an uncongenial calling.


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Learning outcomes:

- deepened understanding of the conceptual, philosophical, political, demographic, and policy-related dimensions of work, and of the public discourse on employment (Contemporary Debates Objectives 1, 2, and 3);
- strengthened ability to read, analyze, and draw conclusions from quantitative, qualitative, and primary-source data (Contemporary Debates Objective 4; GE Diversity Objective 3)
- development of critical-thinking skills through conceptual analysis as well as analysis of employment-related policy debates (Contemporary Debates Objective 2);

- description of the employment status (past, present, and projected) of a politically underrepresented group in the U.S. (GE Diversity Objective 1)

- description of national and global forces that have and are affecting the employment status of this group (GE Diversity Objective 2)

Possible texts:


Steinbeck, J. (1939), *Grapes of Wrath.*


**Evaluation**

Mid-term essay = 30%

Final project = 30%

Weekly in-class reflections = 30%

Participation in class discussions = 10%
Mid-term assignment: Demographics of Employment [short essay]

Choose a cultural, racial, ethnic, or politically under-represented group on which to focus – e.g., single mothers living in poverty, young people of color, American Indians, immigrants, or adults without a high school diploma. With this group in mind, consider:

- What have been the employment and unemployment trends for the group?
- What historical, national, or perhaps global forces have affected these trends?
- How do these trends tend to be explained, both by others and by the group itself?

These questions are designed to structure a review of relevant statistical data; study of the broader historical, national, and perhaps global contexts of employment trends; and consideration of the perspectives both of the public discourse and of the group itself.

- 6-8 pages, typed and double-spaced
- include direct citations of at least three substantive texts, one of which must be a first-person account written by a member of the under-represented group
- include a complete reference list

Final project: Working Our Way through School [news article created as a class project]

The outcome of this project will be a news article submitted to The New Paltz Oracle. As a first step, class members will join one of four teams, each charged with a particular task:

1. Interview team - interview peers about their college work experiences
2. Survey team - survey peers about their college work experiences
3. Research team - research national trends in college tuition and financial aid as well as student employment
4. Writers - write the story, using the data and research provided by the interview, survey, and research teams.

The first three teams will complete their work several weeks before the end of the semester, to leave adequate time for the writers to then craft the story.

Each team will develop a plan for completing its tasks early on and will meet with me to review the plan.

Alternative final assignment: Work and the Professions

This is a three-part assignment:

- review/analysis of a professional biography, autobiography, or memoir - written individually
- At least one sustained interview with someone working in the field (or a related field) on which the book is focused - conducted individually
- A group presentation focused on the book - planned collaboratively

For the book review/analysis, please choose one of these professional biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs (or suggest another, subject to instructor approval):

- Mike Rose, *Lives on the Boundary: A Moving Account of the Struggles and Achievements of America’s Educationally Underprepared*
- David Hilfiger, *Not All of Us Are Saints: A Doctor’s Journey With the Poor*
- Alvin Zontz, *A Lawyer in Indian Country: A Memoir*
- Juan Williams, *Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary*
- Greg Johnson, *A Very Famous Social Worker*
- Sara Paretsky, *Writing in an Age of Silence*
- Tim Parsons, *The Sea’s Enthrall: Memoirs of an Oceanographer*

You will need to order a copy of the book on your own very early in the semester. Everyone will need to read the chosen book in time to plan a presentation with classmates and to complete a book review. Presentations will be scheduled during the last few weeks of class.

For the presentation, you will meet with classmates reading the same book to plan an intellectually substantive and engaging lesson for the class that focuses on the book as well as the interviews conducted by group members. Groups will be able to meet during at least one class period, but almost certainly will need to meet outside of class as well.

Guidelines for group presentations

- PowerPoint or Prezi.com presentations are fine, but please limit the number of slides/screens and use mostly visuals. You’ll want to avoid projecting remarks, then reading from the projection.
- Presentations should be creative, should engage the class intellectually, and should explore important ideas. Better to focus on a few key ideas than to try to “cover” everything.
- This should be a coherent group presentation - i.e., not a collection of individual reports presented consecutively.

Other assignments: weekly in-class reflections on readings and class discussions. These reflections will be graded check, check-plus, and check-minus. A cumulative total will be converted into a point count for the final assessment.

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Policy on Academic Integrity: Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty in their academic work. Cheating, forgery, and plagiarism are serious offenses, and students found guilty of any form of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action.
Policy on Support for Students with Disabilities: According to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and the provisions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, reasonable accommodations must be made to make all college programs, curricula, and specific courses accessible to students who have a disability but are otherwise qualified for admission.
"Contemporary Debates" (CD) Learning Outcomes

1. Read and understand specialized literature.
2. Understand different approaches to solving problems.
3. Answer questions from disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives
4. Analyze data

GE III Diversity Learning Objectives

1. Students will describe the historical, social, cultural, or political perspectives in the U.S. society of at least one cultural, ethnic, racial or historically under-represented group towards itself and its place in society.
2. Students will identify national and global forces that have influenced or shaped the perspectives of others towards the under-represented group(s) being studied.
3. Students will analyze and synthesize sources objectively, incorporating some primary sources in the voices of the group.
Sue Books

Proposal: “Contemporary Debates” seminar on work

Sample assignment

Mid-term: Demographics of Employment [short essay]

Choose a cultural, racial, ethnic, or politically under-represented group on which to focus – e.g., single mothers living in poverty, young people of color, American Indians, immigrants, or adults without a high school diploma. With this group in mind, consider:

- What have been the employment and unemployment trends for the group?
- What historical, national, or perhaps global forces have affected these trends?
- How do these trends tend to be explained, both by others and by the group itself?

These questions are designed to structure a review of relevant statistical data; study of the broader historical, national, and perhaps global contexts of employment trends; and consideration of the perspectives both of the public discourse and of the group itself.

- 6-8 pages, typed and double-spaced
- include direct citations of at least three substantive texts, one of which must be a first-person account written by a member of the under-represented group
- include a complete reference list
Rubric for evaluation of mid-term assignment (possible points = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay describes the employment/unemployment trends for the under-represented group. (possible points = 8)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Exceptional description = 7-8 points</td>
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<td>- Adequate description = 4-6 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Problematic description = 1-3 points</td>
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<td>- No evident description = 0</td>
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<th>Essay describes the historical, national, or perhaps global forces that have affected the employment trends. (possible points = 8)</th>
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<td>- Exceptional description = 7-8 points</td>
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<td>- Adequate description = 4-6 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>- No evident description = 0</td>
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<th>Essay describes the explanations of these trends offered both by scholars/commentators and by members of the under-represented group. (possible points = 8)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>- Exceptional description = 7-8 points</td>
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<th>Essay includes citations of at least three substantive texts, one of which is a first-person account written by a member of the focal group. (possible points = 6)</th>
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<tr>
<td>- High-quality sources (journal articles, book chapters, substantive reports) = 5-6 points</td>
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<td>- Lower-quality sources (Web sites, especially those with unclear origins, Wikipedia) = 3-4 points</td>
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<td>- Sources missing = 0-2 points</td>
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<th>Essay includes clear language, good use of transitions, and few spelling or grammatical errors. (possible points = 6)</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Clear language = 1-2 points</td>
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<td>- Smooth transitions = 1-2 points</td>
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<td>- Few, if any, grammatical errors = 1-2 points</td>
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