Introduction to Digital Labor

Comm 100S
Summer 2019
T/Th 11:30 a.m. – 1:20 p.m.
Building 160 (Wallenberg Hall), Room 124

Instructor: Sanna Ali
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Office Hours Tuesdays 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. or by appointment
Building 120 (McClatchy Hall), Room 300 O/P

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Course Overview

Digital technologies have had a profound influence on our economy, the ways we communicate, and the ways in which we work. This course will provide a lens through which to understand digital labor and digital work today. We will explore the ideological and cultural values of Silicon Valley and their role in shaping the new business models of the Internet Age (such as crowdsourcing, the sharing economy, and humans-as-a-service). We will examine the past, present, and future of mechanisms of workplace control (from clocks to algorithmic management) and the implications of the digital turn on spatial and material dimensions of labor. Finally, we will turn our attention toward possible futures of work, given the increasing presence of automation and artificial intelligence in the workplace. By engaging with social scientific analyses and popular media, students will leave the course with a greater appreciation of worker perspectives and challenges in the digital era.

Course Requirements

Grade Breakdown
Class Attendance: 10%
Participation & Presentation: 15%
Reading Responses (2, 15% each): 30%
Paper Proposal: 15%
Final Paper: 30%

Class Attendance
Regular attendance is required for this course, as there will be substantial time devoted to discussion and exercises in class. Repeated failure to attend class could

result in your course grade being lowered, or your dismissal from the course, at the instructor's discretion. Students are expected to plan any travel or activities unrelated to class with the class meeting dates in mind (every Tuesday and Thursday).

Participation & Presentation

Students must come to class prepared to participate actively. This means having read and thought about the assigned readings prior to class and being prepared to describe key points, arguments, and questions.

Each week, a group of students will be assigned to present briefly their reflections on the topic/theme of the week (for 3-5 minutes). Students assigned to that week should come up with questions and activities to help the class engage with and understand the material in depth. Feel free to be creative and incorporate videos or any other learning tools that you think would be helpful to the class. In total, each student will be responsible for one presentation for the quarter. Students who are not assigned to that week are still expected to participate.

Your attendance and performance will be evaluated. Attendance (10%) and participation (15%) altogether account for 25% of the total grade, so please value their significance.

Reading Responses

You may choose any 2 weeks to write a response (approximately 300 words) to the readings. You should reflect on the major concepts and include questions that these readings bring up for you. Feel free to respond to classmates' posts as well. These should be posted to the discussion board on Canvas by **Tuesday at 8 p.m. of the week you have chosen.**

Paper Proposal

For this assignment, choose a digital object, website, or application that you believe has implications (direct or indirect) on labor. Alternatively, you may also choose to perform this analysis with regards to a piece of fiction (books, television, film, etc.) or a proposed digital object of your own that has yet to be invented. Your paper should be approximately 800 to 1,000 words and describe your plan of analysis (i.e., how this phenomenon or fictional piece relates to digital labor, what concepts from the course you plan to use to understand this better, etc.). This will be due on **Tuesday, July 23** at the start of class.

Final Paper

Develop your analysis of the digital object or fictional work further. Your final paper should be 2,000 to 2,500 words and should incorporate readings from the course. This will be due on **Tuesday, August 15** at the start of class.

Extra Credit

Students may earn up to 1.5% extra credit, in one or both of these ways:

- *Extracurricular Research Participation*: There will be an opportunity to participate in an extracurricular research activity, which will earn students

extra credit worth up to an additional 1.5% credit toward their final grades (.5% per activity, max 3 activities). Students should also write a brief (100 words) reflection on how the activity relates to digital labor.

- *Submit "Digital Labor in the News" Articles*: Students are encouraged to find and read news items (print, online and radio/TV) relevant to the class. You may submit a total of two of these for extra credit (0.5% each). To receive credit, you must: 1) write one page (250 words) describing why the news item is relevant to the class, *citing specific concepts or theories from class;* and 2) submit a copy of the article, or a link to an online stream/description (for TV/radio).

Cell Phones, Laptops, Tablets, and other Electronic Devices

To facilitate an environment in which we are all focused on discussion of relevant issues and learning, it is imperative that we all take steps to limit potential distraction. Except when clearly being used for purposes immediately related to class (and in a manner that is not distracting to others), laptops, tablets, cell phones, personal digital assistants, music players, cameras and other devices should all be turned off during class. You may not talk on the phone, text, IM, email, read, solve crosswords, take pictures, etc. during class. All of these activities are likely to distract you, your peers, and the instructors, which is not fair to others in the class. Those engaging in these activities may be asked to leave the class. Direct repercussions could include loss of class attendance and class participation points.

Respect privacy and do not make digital recordings of others without their consent

It is essential to the success of this class that participants feel comfortable sharing questions, ideas, concerns, stories, and experiences during class discussions. Therefore, you may not create any audio, photographic, or video recordings during class time.

Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae).

Academic Integrity at Stanford University

Students are expected to comply with University regulations regarding academic integrity. If you are in doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, speak to the instructors before the assignment is due and/or examine the University web site. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating on an exam (e.g., copying others' answers, providing information to others, using a crib sheet) or plagiarism of a paper (e.g., taking material from readings without citation, copying another student's paper). Failure to maintain academic integrity on an assignment will result in a loss of credit for that assignment —at a minimum. Other penalties may also apply, including academic suspension. The guidelines for determining academic dishonesty and procedures followed in a suspected incident of academic dishonesty are detailed on the website. For more information, visit: https://web.stanford.edu/dept/lc/language/courses/academicIntegrity.html

Well-Being, Stress Management, & Mental Health

If you (or someone you know) are experiencing personal, academic, or relationship problems and would like someone to talk to, reach out to the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) on campus. CAPS is the university's counseling center dedicated to student mental health and wellbeing. As specialists working with undergraduate and graduate students, CAPS staff will work to address your needs through an initial CAPS phone screen appointment. CAPS provides a broad range of services including: crisis counseling, individual therapy, medication assessment and management, and group therapy. These services are provided by a diverse and multicultural professional staff. Many services are available without additional charge for students who have paid the Campus Health Service Fee. For more information about CAPS services, visit: https://vaden.stanford.edu/caps-and-wellness

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Introduction & Silicon Valley Ideologies of Work as Pleasure
- Tokumitsu, M. 2014. "In the name of love." *Jacobin Magazine*. https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/01/in-the-name-of-love/
- Terranova, T. 2000. "Free labor: Producing culture for the digital economy." *Social text*, *18*(2), 33-58.
- Zukin, S., & Papadantonakis, M. 2017. "Hackathons as Co-optation ritual: Socializing workers and institutionalizing innovation in the 'new' economy." In *Precarious work* (pp. 157-181). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Week 2: Invisibility & Hypervisibility
- Irani, L. 2015. "Difference and dependence among digital workers: The case of Amazon Mechanical Turk." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *114*(1), 225-234.

- Newton, Casey. 2019. "The Trauma Floor." *The Verge.* https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/25/18229714/cognizant-facebook-content-moderator-interviews-trauma-working-conditions-arizona
- Ticona, Julia, & Mateescu, A. 2018. "Trusted strangers: Carework platforms' cultural entrepreneurship in the on-demand economy." *New Media & Society*.

Week 3: Scientific to Algorithmic Management- Piecework, Crowdwork, Gig Work & More

- Alkhatib, Ali, Michael Bernstein, & Margaret Levi. 2017. "Examining crowd work and gig work through the historical lens of piecework." In *Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 4599-4616). ACM.
- Rosenblat, Alex, and Luke Stark. 2016. "Algorithmic labor and information asymmetries: A case study of Uber's drivers." *International Journal of Communication*.
- Levy, Karen, & Barocas, Solon. 2018. "Privacy at the Margins | Refractive Surveillance: Monitoring Customers to Manage Workers." *International Journal of Communication*.

Week 4: Temporality & Work

- Thompson, E.P. 1967. "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism." *Past & Present*.
- Wajcman, Judy. 2015. "Working with Constant Connectivity." Pp. 87-109 in *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism.*

Week 5: Worker Autonomy & Resistance

- Roy, Donald. "Quota restriction and goldbricking in a machine shop." *American Journal of Sociology* 57: 427-442.
- Irani, Lilly C. and M. Six Silberman. 2013. "Turkopticon: Interrupting Worker Invisibility in Amazon Mechanical Turk." *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*.
- Christin, Angèle. 2017. "Algorithms in Practice: Comparing Web Journalism and Criminal Justice." Big Data & Society.

Week 6: Selling your whole self- emotional labor and personal branding

- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1983. The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling. Chapter One (pp 3-23.)
- Lair, Daniel J., Katie Sullivan, and George Cheney. 2005. "Marketization and the Recasting of the Professional Self: The Rhetoric and Ethics of Personal Branding." *Management Communication Quarterly*.
- Duffy, Brooke Erin, and Emily Hund. 2015. "'Having it All' on Social Media: Entrepreneurial Femininity and Self-Branding Among Fashion Bloggers." *Social Media + Society* 1-15.

Week 7: Place & Space

- Huws, Ursula. 2014. "Fixed, Footloose, or Fractured: Work, Identity, and the Spatial Division of Labor in the Twenty-First-Century City." *In Labor in the Global Digital Economy: The Cybertariat Comes of Age*.
- Gandini, Alessandro. 2015. "The rise of coworking spaces: A literature review." *Ephemera*.
- Burrington, Ingrid. 2018. "Who Gets to Live in Silicon Valley?" https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/06/who-gets-to-live-in-silicon-valley/563543/

Week 8: Futures of Work

- Shestakofsky, Benjamin. 2017. "Working Algorithms: Software Automation and the Future of Work." *Work and Occupations* 44.4 (2017): 376-423.
- Sholz, Trebor. 2016. "Platform Cooperativism: Challenging the Corporate Sharing Economy."