

SOC495H1
New Topics in Sociology: The Gig Economy
Winter 2024
University of Toronto, St. George
Thursdays, 5:10pm-7:00pm

Instructor: Emily Hammond (she/her)

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Office Hours: Monday's, 9:00am-10:00am (via Zoom)

Course Description

Welcome to New Topics in Sociology: The Gig Economy! Work is one of the most fundamental aspects of human life. Many people begin paid employment at a young age and continue throughout the course of their lives. The jobs we do are crucial to claiming (and knowing) our place in society. Due largely to employers' efforts to gain flexibility, the world of work has changed significantly since the 1970s. In this course, we will examine current empirical findings and trends on the changing nature of work. Our theoretical exploration of the complex and dynamic relationship between work, technology and society will be anchored in relevant readings on the "gig" economy; rideshare services, dog walking, delivery driving and sex work. We will consider long-term historical, economic, political and social forces that have changed and shaped working conditions and given rise to the contemporary "gig" economy.

Land Acknowledgment

I live as a settler colonist in the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit River, where the University of Toronto is located. This territory was the subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and Confederacy of the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island. I am grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Prerequisites

The prerequisite to take this course is completion of 1.0 SOC at the 300-level. Students without this requirement will be removed from the course.

Course Objectives

It is my goal that by the end of this semester students will have a greater understanding of the current state, debates, and future directions of the sociological literature around the gig economy. This course will help students explore key concepts and theories and will provide the opportunity to apply these lens, frameworks, and ideas to lived experiences and the everyday world. Students will leave this course with an ability to think critically about the gig economy in the broader context of work, employment, and society.

Class Structure

This class will be taking place in-person on Thursdays, from 5:10pm-7:00pm. To maximize flexibility, I will be holding office hours over Zoom Monday's 9:00am-10:00am, or by

appointment. I'm also happy to meet in person with students who prefer, and this can be arranged via e-mail.

Textbooks and Other Materials

Articles and sections of books are available through the Quercus page under Library Reading List.

Evaluation Components

I have designed assignments to encourage and recognize a variety of academic skills. More details will be provided about individual assignments closer to their due dates (both in class and on Quercus).

Participation and Active Engagement (10%)

Your consistent engagement with the readings and lectures will contribute to your understanding of course content and will prepare you for the assignments. It is important that you come to class having read the weekly readings so that you can engage actively in class. Your grade will be determined by your efforts to engage in class discussions.

Discussion Lead (10%)

During the first class of the semester, students' will be assigned a week for which they will be responsible for leading discussion during class time (1-2 students per week). This discussion will be based on the course content for that week and will take the form of preparing engaging discussion questions for your classmates and facilitating conversation. You will be allotted 45 minutes of class time for this discussion.

Gig Platform Report (25%)

This report will be your first deep dive into one gig platform. For this assignment, you will pick a platform which employs gig economy workers to write a 3-4 page report. This assignment will require you to summarize information as well as think critically about your chosen platform. Reports should engage with both course materials and outside sources.

You will begin by providing an overview of your chosen platform, including its history, emergence, and the service(s) that it offers. Following this summary, you will be required to write a critical reflection about the pros and cons of this platform for service users, workers, and the company itself.

Research Paper Topic Statement (5%)

As the first step of your final research paper, you will submit a 1-2 paragraph thesis statement accompanied by supporting arguments which will form the basis of your final research paper.

Annotated Bibliography (15%)

You will find 5 scholarly sociology articles about your case that are not assigned for this course. You will write an annotated bibliography that summarizes the main argument of each article, identifies the method and data, and states how you plan to use each article to support the argument in your paper. You should aim for about 1-2 paragraphs per article.

Research Paper (35%)

You will write a final 8-10 double-spaced page research paper. Class time will be dedicated to coming up with a thesis statement wherein you can receive feedback from myself and peers to help guide your work.

In this paper, you will respond to the following prompt: *How is the gig economy reshaping the future of work?*

In answering this question, you may focus on a variety of themes covered in this course: gender/race/class equity, labour unions, precarity, algorithmic management, worker rights, etc. You may argue that the gig economy is positively reshaping the future of work, or negatively. You may also make an argument about a specific feature of the gig economy to focus in depth on.

You should use the articles that you used in the annotated bibliography, providing they were appropriate and taking into consideration feedback. Your paper must draw on at least 8 academic sociology articles (that are not assigned for this course).

Overview of Evaluation Components

Assignment	Due Date	Weight
Participation and Active Engagement	Ongoing	10%
Discussion Lead	Ongoing	10%
Gig Platform Report	February 1	25%
Research Paper Topic Statement	February 15	5%
Annotated Bibliography	March 7	15%
Research Paper	April 5	35%

Course Schedule and Due Dates

Class Meeting Date	Lecture Topic & Assigned Readings	Assignments & Events
Week 1 January 11	<u>What is the Gig Economy?</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Rosenblat, A. (2019). Introduction: Using an App to Go to Work - Uber as a Symbol of the New Economy. In Uberland (pp. 1–20). University of California Press.	
Week 2 January 18	<u>Definitional Debates</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Watson, G. P., Kistler, L. D., Graham, B. A., & Sinclair, R. R. (2021). Looking at the gig picture: Defining gig work and explaining profile differences in gig workers' job demands and resources. <i>Group & Organization Management</i>, 46(2), 327–361.	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liang, Y., Aroles, J., & Brandl, B. (2022). Charting platform capitalism: Definitions, concepts and ideologies. <i>New Technology, Work, and Employment</i>, 37(2), 308–327 	
Week 3 January 25	<u>The Development of the On-Demand Economy</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kalleberg, A. (2009). Precarious work, insecure workers: Employment relations in transition. <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 74(1):1–22. • Stanford, J. (2017). The resurgence of gig work: Historical and theoretical perspectives. <i>The Economic and Labour Relations Review: ELRR</i>, 28(3), 382–401. 	
Week 4 February 1	<u>The State and Regulation of Gig Work</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prassl, J. (2018). Chapter 5 – Disrupting the Disruptors. In <i>Humans as a Service: The Promise and Perils of Work in the Gig Economy</i> (pp. 93-118). Oxford University Press. • Halliday, D. (2021). On the (mis)classification of paid labor: When should gig workers have employee status? <i>Politics, Philosophy & Economics</i>, 20(3), 229–250. 	Gig Platform Report Due
Week 5 February 8	<u>Algorithmic Boss</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rosenblat, A., & Stark, L. (2016). Algorithmic labor and information asymmetries: A case study of Uber’s drivers. <i>International Journal of Communication</i>, 10, 3758–3784. • Shapiro, A. (2018). Between autonomy and control: Strategies of arbitrage in the “on-demand” economy. <i>New Media & Society</i>, 20(8), 2954–2971. 	In Class Activity: Research Paper Topic Discussion
Week 6 February 15	<u>Case Study: Rideshare & Food Delivery</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peticca-Harris, A., deGama, N., & Ravishankar, M. N. (2020). Postcapitalist precarious work and those in the “drivers” seat: Exploring the motivations and lived experiences of Uber drivers in Canada. <i>Organization</i>, 27(1), 36–59. • Gebert, R. (2021). Chapter 17: The pitfalls and promises of successfully organizing Foodora couriers in Toronto. In J. Drahokoupil & K. Vandaele (Eds.), <i>A Modern Guide to Labour and the Platform Economy</i> (pp. 274-289). Edward Elgar Publishing Limited. 	Guest Speaker: Luc Delannoy (Trexity) Research Paper Topic Due
February 22	Reading Week – No Class	
Week 7 February 29	<u>Case Study: Sex Workers in the Gig Economy</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levitt, L. (2021). Sex work/GIG work: A feminist analysis of precarious domina labor in the Gig economy. In <i>The Gig Economy: Workers and Media in the Age of Convergence</i> (pp. 58–71). Routledge. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easterbrook-Smith, G. (2022). OnlyFans as gig-economy work: a nexus of precarity and stigma. <i>Porn Studies</i>, 1–16. 	
Week 8 March 7	<u>Case Study: Gig Workers in Creative Industries</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chafe, D., & Kaida, L. (2020). Harmonic Dissonance: Coping with Employment Precarity among Professional Musicians in St John's, Canada. <i>Work, Employment and Society</i>, 34(3), 407–423. McDonald, P., Williams, P., & Mayes, R. (2021). How professional photographers engage with and resist digital platform work. <i>New Media & Society</i>, 23(6), 1602–1623. 	Annotated Bibliography Due
Week 9 March 14	<u>Intersectional Vulnerabilities in Gig Work</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Milkman, R., Elliott-Negri, L., Griesbach, K., & Reich, A. (2020). Gender, class, and the gig economy: The case of platform-based food delivery. <i>Critical Sociology</i>, 1-16. Kwan, H. (2022). Gendered precarious employment in China's gig economy: Exploring women gig drivers' intersectional vulnerabilities and resistances. <i>Gender and Development</i>, 30(3), 551–573. 	
Week 10 March 21	<u>Gig Work Globally</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graham, M., Hjorth, I., & Lehdonvirta, V. (2017). Digital labour and development: Impacts of global digital labour platforms and the gig economy on worker livelihoods. <i>Transfer (Brussels, Belgium)</i>, 23(2), 135–162. Altenried, M. (2022). Chapter 12: Platforms, Labour and Mobility. In I. Ness (Ed.), <i>The Routledge Handbook of the Gig Economy</i> (pp. 180-189). Taylor & Francis Group. van Doorn, N., & Vijay, D. (2021). Gig work as migrant work: The platformization of migration infrastructure. <i>Economy and Space</i>. 	
Week 11 March 28	<u>The Movement of Work and Workers: Solidarity & Resistance</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tassinari, A., & Maccarrone, V. (2020). Riders on the Storm: Workplace Solidarity among Gig Economy Couriers in Italy and the UK. <i>Work, Employment and Society</i>, 34(1), 35–54. Maffie, M. D. (2020). The Role of Digital Communities in Organizing Gig Workers. <i>Industrial Relations</i>, 59(1), 123–149. 	
Week 12 April 4	<u>Automation & The Future of Work</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balakrishnan, J. (2022). Building capabilities for future of work in the gig economy. <i>NHRD Network Journal</i>, 15(1), 56–70. 	Research Paper Due April 5 th at 11:59pm

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anwar, M. A., Schäfer, S., & Golušin, S. (2023). Work futures: Globalization, planetary markets, and uneven developments in the gig economy. <i>Globalizations</i>, 1–19. 	
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Equity and Respect

In this course, we will strive to build an environment in which all feel included, safe, and respected. This is our collective responsibility. As a course instructor, I will not condone behaviour that undermines the dignity, safety, and well-being of any student in this course. Sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic, or xenophobic language will not be tolerated. In your course communications, please use gender-inclusive language and respect your peers' pronouns. If you believe that the instructor or any person in this course is engaging in language or practices that make you or your classmates feel unsafe or excluded, please reach out to the teaching team.

Accessibility

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have accessibility concerns, contact <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/> as soon as possible. If you are registered with Accessibility Services, please forward your accommodations paperwork to the instructor as soon as possible so that arrangements can be made. I will work with you to ensure you can achieve your learning goals in this course.

Grade Appeals

The teaching team will do our best to grade fairly and consistently. If issues with your grade arise and you wish to appeal, please follow the following procedure:

A student who believes that their term work has a substantive error in grading may ask the person who marked the work for re-evaluation. Please wait for 24 hours after the assignment has been returned to the class and submit your request within two weeks of that date. Requests submitted at a later date will not be considered. This request should consist of a short memo that clearly states specific reasons to justify the request. If your appeal is deemed appropriate, the entirety of your test/assignment will be re-graded. Please note that upon re-grade your mark may go down, stay the same, or go up.

Late/Missing Work

If you must miss the deadline for an assignment, please notify me as soon as possible to arrange for the submission of the assignment together with the necessary documentation. The late deduction is 2% for each day the assignment is late, including weekends and holidays. No work will be accepted more than 2 weeks past the original due date.

If you require an extension for a documented reason, please let me know in advance of the due date (as possible) and provide the necessary documentation. In the case of illness, students will need to declare their absence on Acorn and e-mail the instructor directly. Please use the Absence Declaration tool on Acorn found in the Profile and Settings menu to formally declare an absence from academic participation in the University. This can only be used once during the semester.

If a personal or family crisis prevents you from meeting a deadline, you are required to contact your college registrar and have your registrar email me, the instructor, directly. It is also a good idea to proactively contact your college registrar if you are dealing with a crisis that is interfering with your studies. College registrars can help negotiate solutions with the instructors of the classes you are taking.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is fundamental to learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Copying, plagiarizing, or other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Any student caught engaging in such activities will be referred to the Dean's office for adjudication and punishment. Any student abetting or otherwise assisting in such misconduct will also be subject to academic penalties.

Avoid plagiarism by citing sources in all written work and presentations. Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Ouriginal for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Ouriginal reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

Students not wishing their assignment to be submitted through Ouriginal will not be assessed unless a student instead provides, along with their work, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own.

You find additional information on the university's rules and expectations about academic integrity here: <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/students>

Generative Artificial Intelligence

Students are encouraged to make use of technology, including generative artificial intelligence tools, to contribute to their understanding of course materials. Students may not use artificial intelligence tools for taking tests, writing research papers, or completing major course assignments. Students may not copy or paraphrase from any generative artificial intelligence applications, including ChatGPT and other AI writing and coding assistants. Representing as one's own an idea, or expression of an idea, that was AI-generated may be considered an academic offense in this course. However, these tools may be useful when gathering information from across sources and assimilating it for understanding.