

# MGT 5845: Work In America

**Instructor: Dr. John Russo**  
[Youngstown State University](#)  
[Department of Management](#)  
[Labor Studies Program](#)  
[Williamson College of Business Administration](#)

## Contents

Welcome to the section for Work in America. On this site, you can access the course syllabus, weekly schedule, and other course resources. This course can be taken for undergraduate or graduate credit. Please make sure that you have registered for the course properly. If you have any questions or comments about the course, please e-mail me at [jbrusso@ysu.edu](mailto:jbrusso@ysu.edu).

## Course Description

Work in America is an interdisciplinary course designed to examine the work experience and the changing characteristics, expectations, and representations of work. This will include the exploration of demographic, technological, socio-economic, multi-cultural, ethical, popular and poetic perspectives.

## Course Policies

**Attendance:** Attendance is strongly encouraged, as there are many group activities.

**Audit Policy:** none

**Class Participation:** Participation in class discussions and bargaining simulation is of the utmost importance.

**Missed Exams and Assignments:** Exams and assignments must be completed in a timely fashion.

**Academic Honesty:** Cheating will result in course failure and possible referral for disciplinary action.

**Grades of Incomplete:** An incomplete grade of "I" may be given to a student who has been doing satisfactory work in a course but, for reasons beyond control of the student and deemed justifiable by the instructor, had not completed all requirements for the course when grades were submitted. A written explanation of the reasons for the "I" and a date (which must be within one year) by which all course requirements will be completed must be forwarded to the office of the

Registrar for inclusion in the student's permanent record, with copies to the student and department chairperson.

The instructor will initiate a grade change upon completion of the course requirements. If no formal grade change occurs within one year, the "I" automatically converts to an "F". If graduation occurs within the one-year time period, the Incomplete Grade will convert to an "F" before graduation.

## **Prerequisites**

The course has been designed as a swing course that can be used by both undergraduates seeking an upper-division elective or graduate students seeking a one-year certificate in Working-Class Studies or advanced degree in Business Administration. Prerequisites: Junior standing and 6 SH of GER approved SI or equivalent, 3 SH.

## **Core Goals and Competencies**

1. An ability to think critically about work and its commonalities and differences.
2. An ability to explain how multiple texts and narratives (including media, oral histories, polling data, art and music) shape our perspectives about work.
3. An ability to describe how work shapes and is shaped by social, economic, political and material conditions.
4. An ability to identify and solve problems characterized by uncertainty using various capacities for thinking and reasoning.
5. An ability to obtain, organize, and use information.
6. An ability to present and interpret information in writing with clarity and conciseness.
7. An ability to carefully listen and interpret the expressed views of other.
8. An ability to express views orally.
9. An ability to apply academically gained information and skills in the context of the "real world."

## **Grading Policy**

### **Graduate Grading Policy:**

In addition to undergraduates requirements, advanced degree or certificate students will be required to do supplementary reading and a 15-page writing project involving their area of interest. For example, this might involve creative writing, a formal paper involving historical, sociological or cultural analysis, or multi-media presentation. An abstract of the graduate project must be submitted by the fifth week of the semester and approved by the instructor.

30% - Midterm/Journal  
30% - Term paper/Journal  
30% - Graduate project  
10% - Participation and discussion

### **Undergraduate Grading Policy:**

40% - Midterm examination/Journal  
40% - Term paper/Journal  
20% - Class participation and discussion  
Required Texts

*The Oxford Book of Work*, edited by Keith Thomas, Oxford University Press.

*The State of Working America*, 2002/2003, Larry Meshel et al. Cornell University Press

*Steeltown USA: Work and Memory in Youngstown*, Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, University Press of Kansas.

Additional readings, viewings and listening activities will be assigned by the instructor.

## **Schedule**

### **Week One: Representations And How We Think About Work**

#### **Introduction**

Work is a common experience, yet it has very different meanings for everyone. Those meanings are socially constructed through work experiences and cultural representations as well as our understanding of the world. In Week One, we will attempt to question our assumptions about meaning of work and non-work, how they are shaped by various representations, and how these representations can be studied using a text analysis.

#### **Reading Assignment**

*Oxford History of Work*

#### **Activities**

Assignment 1: Working as individuals and then in teams, consider the economic, social, and psychological meanings of work in your life and society.

Assignment 2: Look at the following texts:

---[Youngstown](#)

---[Smoke and Steel](#)

1. Consider the following questions
  - What can we learn from Bruce Springsteen and Carl Sandburg about work in Youngstown?
  - What else do we need to know about work in Youngstown to fully understand the significance of these songs?
2. Now listen to the song, Youngstown, or watch the HBO video from the Madison Square Garden Springsteen tour. Consider the following questions:
  - How does the meaning change when the words become lyrics
  - Does yours or your Springsteen's understanding and meaning of his song about Youngstown change?

Assignment 3: Using the text analysis rubric, do an analysis of a text from the *Oxford History of Work*. You should use the text analysis worksheet to complete the assignment.

Assignment 4: From your assigned reading in *The Oxford Book of Work*, discuss the nature, the kinds and the reform of work. What conceptions were the most meaningful to you and why? Be prepared to come to class and discuss your ideas with your team members.

## **Week Two: Changes In Work And The American Dream**

### **Introduction**

Over the last three decades, work has changed rapidly as the result of technology, transportation, finance, marketing, and power relations. The result has been dramatic transformations in occupational and industrial structures, the organization of work, economic status, and national economies. So unsettling have been these changes that our imagination of the so-called "American Dream" is now being challenged.

### **Reading Assignment**

Meshel et al, *The State of Working America*

View: *Office Space*, *9 to 5* or another movie dealing with work

### **Activities**

1. Working as individuals and then in teams, discuss what constitutes the "American Dream." How is the "American Dream" used in American culture? How does the "American Dream" connect with ideas about work?
2. Read your assigned section of *The State of Working America*. (Family Income, Wages, Jobs, Wealth, Poverty, Regional Analysis, International Comparisons.) Prepare a two page typed summary for the class including impact on the American Dream.

## **Links**

Review the following links:

[Contingent Work: A Brief History of Organizing](#)

[Ohio Labor Market Organization](#)

[North American Alliance for Fair Employment \(NAFFE\)](#)

[United States Department of Labor](#)

[News and Analysis from the Labor Research Association](#)

## **Week Three: Work And Memory - Poetry**

Guest lecture: Jeanne Bryner and Diane Fisher

### **Introduction**

Poets Diane Fisher and Jeanne Bryner have said the work of poetry is about the work of imagination. By imagination they meant that human faculty that integrates reason, senses, emotion, and spirituality. It is the imagination that brings us closer to reality, helps us determine right and wrong, and provides us access to the possible. Poetry brings us together by saying something that is true in a candid way and providing us an inward clarity. So as you read and write poetry, let the poetry go deep and through you.

There is a reciprocal relationship between work and poetry. On the one hand, work provides poetry a way of talking about truth and concrete universals. For example, listen and think of how much we can learn from people talking at or about work. Poetry needs the concrete quality that work can provide. Without work, poetry can become something only read by other poets. On the other hand, poetry provides work with a way of integrating culture and worklife. Often we study culture and work as if they were separate and not interconnected. Poetry can transform and raise the status of work and the status of working people. Fully imagined, poetry provides the basis for empathy and makes the disintegration of community more difficult.

### **Reading Assignment**

Read the poems that have been included in the course materials. Write a two-page summary that describes what it felt like to read them.

### **Activities**

Assignment 1: Read the poems that have been included in the course materials. Write a two-page summary that describes what it felt like to read them.

Assignment 2: Go the Center for Working-Class Studies website and look at the [research section](#) (links and videos) for songs and poems about working life and/or browse through the catalog at [Bottom Dog Press](#). Find a book or topic that seems relevant to you and your occupation.

Assignment 3: Using the following prompt for writing poems about work, complete the first three activities listed and then any of the five remaining. Place them in your journal.

-Make a list of words and phrases associated with a particular job or a particular kind of work—possibly your mother or father's work, or some kind of work very different from your own. Now write a poem about your work, using the language of that other work.

-Make a list of words and phrases associated with some kind of physical work and use that language to write a poem about politics or religion. Or, vice-versa.

-Make a list of words and phrases associated with some kind of paid work and use that language to write a poem about some kind of work that is important, but that you don't get paid for. Or, vice-versa.

-Write a poem in the voice of a person you regularly see at his or her work, but whom you don't know personally. Some things you could imagine: how s/he ended up in this job, what s/he thinks when s/he sees you, what s/he does/feels after work, the details of the workday.

-Write a poem describing an article of clothing that someone wears to work. What does it look like lying on the floor at the end of the workday? Account for why it's tired, stained, torn—for why it looks and feels however it looks and feels. Or, do the same thing, but describe someone's hands.

-Go someplace where you can listen to what people say as they work and record as exactly as you can what you hear people say. Make a poem out of that talk.

-Write a poem about anything (e.g. a relationship) in a form associated with work--- a production list, a job evaluation form, a contract, a tally sheet, a paycheck stub (e.g. what was earned, what was taxable, what was withheld).

-Write a poem about what work is in the form of a dictionary entry. You could include: pronunciation, etymology (what other words this word derives from), common usages of the word (usually given in descending order of common use), examples of the word used in sentences, idioms, and set phrases that include the word, indications of which usages are formal/colloquial/archaic/slang, any irregular forms of the word, synonyms/antonyms/homonyms, class and differentiation; i.e., situate the word within its class, then explain how it is different from other members of its class.

-Write a poem about the first day on the job, but don't use any emotion/abstract words, let a description of the surroundings do the job of telling how it felt to be there on that day. Or, write a poem about the last day.

-Go to a public place, like a laundry mat, and write about who is doing what. Write as if the dryers and washers had a voice. Be sure to get in all the smells and sounds.

-Describe the worst job you ever had in a poem, but don't tell the reader what it is. Make the work visceral.

-Think carefully about the parts of your body that perform your work. Write a thank you poem to these body parts. Be sincere. Maybe it can be a listing poem.

-Write about getting fired or suddenly finding out your work no longer exists. What's the first thing you want to do? Do it in the poem.

-Write a poem to your supervisor telling him/her how to improve current job conditions. Write as if you know he/she will listen and implement change.

-Write a poem about all the jobs you've had. Start it like: Not the job flipping burgers at Wendy's or delivering the newspapers in the blue cold, No. Not the bussing of tables at Anthony's/ or the lifeguard job at the country club/ No.

Bibliography: Working-Class Poets and Poetry about Work

## **Anthologies**

Coles, M.D., Robert, and Randy Testa, eds. *A Life in Medicine: A Literary Anthology*. New York: The New Press, 2002.

Coles, Nicholas, and Peter Oresick, eds. *For a Living: The Poetry of Work*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995.

Davis, Cortney, and Judy Schaeffer, eds. *Between the Heartbeats: Poetry and Prose by Nurses*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995.

----*Intensive Care: More Poetry and Prose by Nurses*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003.

Gemin, Pamela, ed. *Are You Experienced?: Baby Boom Poets at Mid-Life*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003.

Gemin, Pamela, and Paula Seigi, eds. *Boomer Girls: Poems by Women from the Baby Boom Generation*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999.

McKinney, Irene, ed. *Backcountry: Contemporary Writing in West Virginia*.

Morgantown: Vidalia Press, 2002.

Oresick, Nicholas, and Nicholas Coles, eds. *Working Classics: Poems on Industrial Life*. University of Illinois Press, 1990.

Weems, Mary E. and Larry Smith. *Working Hard for the Money*. Huron: Bottom Dog Press, 2002.

## **Individual Collections of Poetry**

Anderson, Maggie. *Cold Comfort*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986.  
 ---- *A Space Filled with Moving*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992.  
 ---- *Windfall*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992.

Autry, James. *Life After Mississippi*. Oxford, Mississippi: Yoknapatawpha Press, 1989.  
 --- *Nights Under a Tin Roof*. Oxford, Mississippi: Yoknapatawpha Press, 1983.

Beatty, Jan. *Mad River*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995.

Berry, Wendell. *Anything by Wendell Berry*.

Bryner, Jeanne. *Breathless*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1995.  
 --- *Blind Horse*. Huron: Bottom Dog Press, 1999.  
 --- *Tenderly Lift Me*. Forthcoming in 2004 from Kent State University Press.

Carson, Jo. *Stories I Ain't Told Nobody Yet*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1991.

Corso, Paola. *A Proper Burial*. Johnstown, Ohio: Pudding House Publications, 2003.

Daniels, Jim. *Anything by Jim Daniels*.

Davis, Cortney. *Details of Flesh*. Corvallis: CALYX Books, 1997.

Dove, Rita. *Thomas and Beulah*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon, 1986.

Enzweiler, Joseph A. *Stonework of the Sky*. St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 1994.

Fairchild, B.H. *The Art of the Lathe*. Farmington: Alice James Books, 1998.  
 --- *Early Occult Memory Systems of the Lower Midwest*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2003.

Fisher, Diane Gilliam. *One of Everything*. Cleveland: Cleveland State Poetry Center, 2003.  
 --- *Recipe for Blackberry Cake*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1999.

Gemin, Pamela. *Vendettas, Charms, and Prayers*. Minneapolis: New Rivers Press, 1999.

Harjo, Joy. *She Had Some Horses*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1983.

Kendrick, Dolores. *The Women of Plums*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1989.

Jeffers, Honoree Fanonne. *The Gospel of Barbeque*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 2000.

Kumin, Maxine. *Connecting the Dots*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996.  
 --- *The Long Marriage*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002.  
 --- *Looking for Luck*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1992.

Levine, Philip. *Anything by Philip Levine*.

Llewellyn, Chris. *Steam Dummy & Fragments from the Fire*. Huron: Bottom Dog Press, 1993.

Metras, Gary. *Today's Lesson*. Jamaica, Vermont: Bull Thistle Press, 1997.

Orlowsky, Dzvinia. *A Handful of Bees*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon, 1994.

Russell, Timothy. *Adversaria*. Evanston: Northwestern university Press, 1993.

Stone, Ruth. *In the Next Galaxy*. Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2002.

Symborska, Wislawa. *View with a Grain of Sand*. Stanislaw Baranczak and Claire Cavanagh, trans. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993.

Tokarczyk, Michelle M. *The House I'm Running From*. Albuquerque: West End Press, 1989.

Wright, James. *Above the River: The Complete Poems*. N.P: The Noonday Press and University Press of New England, 1990.



## **Songs (all CDs)**

Anndrena Belcher. *Sweet Lucy*. Bristol, Virginia. Classic Recording Studio, 1998.  
Hazel Dickens. Anything by Hazel Dickens, or by Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard.  
Gerri Gribi. *The Womansong Collection*. Green Bay, Wisconsin. Lilyfern Records, 1996.  
M.L. Liebler and the Magic Poetry Band. Anything by M.L. Liebler and the Magic Poetry Band.  
Kate Long. Anything by Kate Long.  
Reel World String Band. Anything by the Reel World String Band.  
Various Artists. *Coal Mining Women*. Cambridge Massachusetts. Rounder Records, 1997.

## **Poems**

Use these poems to complete Assignment 1:

[I Stop Writing the Poem](#), by Toss Gallagher. From the book, *For a Living*, by Nicholas Coles and Peter Oresick.

[The Art of the Lathe](#), by B.H Fairchild. From the book, *The Art of the Lathe*.

[Coming Close](#), by Philip Levine. From the book, *What Work Is*, By Philip Levine.

## **Week Three: Work And Oral History, Storytelling, And Autobiography**

### **Introduction**

Much of our understanding of work comes from stories we hear while we're growing up and from our own work experiences and that of others close to us. At one time, academics devalued and dismissed storytelling, autobiography, and oral history as anecdotal, biased, and less important than other documents or the histories of business or labor. But in recent years, these representations have been given greater credibility as evidence and found essential to more fully understand work and working people. In addition, workers are now being given photographic training and cameras and asked to go into their homes and workplaces to document their lives, thus creating a visual record of their lives.

### **Reading Assignment**

To get a better understanding of oral histories, visit the [History Matters](#) website and read the discussion about oral history. Then visit the [Youngstown State Oral History](#)

[Digital Collection](#) and read an oral history. Write a one-page summary about your research.

### **Activities**

1. In groups, form story circles of five or fewer people. Each person has three minutes to tell a story about a work experience. There is no discussion following each of the stories. Simply move to the next person. Repeat this process three times. In your journal, discuss your experience (reason, emotion, spiritual etc) with story telling.

2. Visit the [Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor](#). Go to the [Archives](#) and review a video oral history. Write a one-page summary about what you heard and saw that you might not obtain from other types of representations.

3. View The Unseen America (video) and go on-line to search for reports on the exhibition. Write a two-page summary comparing the three forms of representations (storytelling, oral history and photographic documentation).  
Links

Review the following links:

[Women's Studies Quarterly--Working-Class Studies](#)  
[Community Arts Network](#)  
[Roadside Theater Webletter Fall 1997-Spring 1998](#)  
[Ohio Humanities Council--Wallpaper Project](#)  
[North American Working Class Autobiographies](#)

## **Week Four: Work And The Fine Arts**

### **Introduction**

We learn about work through what we see. But there are different ways of seeing. Seeing is about perception and, in part, perception is based on what we have seen or have not seen before. As the artist Salvador Dali has said, "Seeing is thinking" and this is very important as we are bombarded by visual images in a modern society.

### **Reading Assignment**

But how many of us really think about what we see? Before we think about visual images of work by fine and graphic artists and photographers, we need to do some research on visual perception. Review the tutorials on visual perception at the following websites:

[The Use of Visual Information in Art](#)  
[The Art of Visual Perception in Photography](#)

Then write a two-page summary about what you learned.

Begin to read *Steeltown USA: Work and Memory in Youngstown*, Chapters One and Two

### **Activities**

1. Now visit the [Butler Institute of American Art](#) and look at several paintings that you think are about work and do a text analysis of each.
2. Review the following videos at the Center for Working-Class Studies: *Diego Rivera: The Age of Steel* and *America and Lewis Hine*
3. Visit the [Labor Arts](#) website and look at the photographs. Do a text analysis of several photographs.
4. Buy a disposable camera and photograph people working either in your workplace or another. Bring your photographs to class and be prepared to talk about them.

## **Week Five: Work And Visual Popular Culture**

### **Introduction**

In modern society, we are continually bombarded with visual images. For example, think of the images and messages we receive every day from commercials, television, movies, DVDs, and newspapers. These popular visual images reflect ideological patterns of the culture, but they also influence them. Popular cultural texts provide tools--narrative patterns, explanatory models, terms, and images--that individuals use in interpreting their lives and experiences. Audiences use these discursive tools in divergent ways, creating stories and models that may reinforce dominant ideologies or offer resistant variations.

Reading Assignment.

Continue reading *Steeltown USA: Work and Memory in Youngstown*, Chapters 4 and 5.

### **Activities**

Critically watch a television program or commercial; go to movie or rent a video; and go on-line to the [Dilbert website](#). Describe the images as they relate to work and working people. Then do a formal text analysis for each text.

### **Links**

Review the following links:

[The Official Dilbert website](#)

[The Labor Cartoons of Gary Huck and Mike Konopacki](#)

[The Simpsons Archive](#)

[Working-Class Films](#) compiled by [Bottom Dog Press](#)

## **Week Five: Work And Music**

### **Introduction**

In starting to think about work and representations, we looked and listened to Bruce Springsteen's song, [Youngstown](#), as a poem, an acoustical song, and a video performance with the E Street Band. We analyzed each representation using a text analysis rubric (signs, structure, intent, use, and memory) and asked what it told us about work, workers, and place in America. The text analysis rubric provided a way of thinking about representations and a vocabulary to study the various texts used in the Work in America course.

Now, we need to dig a little deeper by learning to see and listen more carefully to music and videos in ways that go behind mere pleasure. Let's start with music.

Reading Assignments

Continue reading *Steeltown, USA Chapters three and four*

### **Activities**

Listen to some music about work and the answer following questions. Be prepared to listen to the music and discuss your ideas in class as well. [We'll listen to *Hard Times Come Again No More: Early American Rural Songs of Hard Times and Hardships* (Volume one) and *Chicago Blues: Hard Times* in class]

### **Questions**

1. Use three concrete adjectives to describe some of the songs. (Listen to the sound, and how it works rather than saying its sad, slow, or the voice is breathy)
2. What sounds of work do you hear?  
How do the sound effects change your listening?
3. What sorts of work are mentioned in the various songs? (Mills, stockyards, farm labor, etc.)
4. What kind of voices are privileged? (Compare the different songs in terms of voices and content. Why do you think the differences developed?)
5. A number of songs deal with migrations. What are people leaving behind when they came to the city? What are the pull factors drawing them to the city? Where, specifically, did some of these particular singers come from and move to? How could we find that information?
6. Pick some shared themes on the recordings, or shared tropes or images, and list the songs they appear in.
7. What is the effect of amplification in the various musical forms?

8. How does gender and/or race get defined by the music? (For example, black men got called 'boy' no matter how old, why does being a 'man' become so important in the blues?)

9. What are some vocal moves the singer uses to convey emotion? What are the singers' strategies to communicate a certain mood?