

PLAN 774 Planning for Jobs: Labor Market Transformations and Employment Policy in the 21st Century

Fall 2023
Wednesdays, 4pm-630pm
Classroom: 0403 Dey Hall
Office hours: by appointment

Prof. Allan Freyer
Email: amfreyer@ad.unc.edu
allan@peregrine-strategies.com

1. Course Description

Economic inequality is the result of structural changes within the U.S. labor market—in turn creating deep sources of worker vulnerability that further intensified with the COVID-19 pandemic. This graduate seminar explores the changing nature of American jobs and the transformative forces—from corporate restructuring and weakened labor laws to labor union decline and the rise of ‘gig’ economy—that have influenced this change in recent decades and have added to growing economic insecurity. We will consider how these and equally powerful forces, including climate change, and the rise of hybrid and remote work, are experienced by workers across different sectors and socio-economic and racial/ethnic groups. Throughout the course, we will also examine the various political forces shaping local leaders’ ability to develop policies that adequately address these challenges.

In this context, we will consider a range of local and regional strategies for helping workers and workplaces withstand changing economic and environmental pressures and break down barriers impeding greater racial equality in labor market outcomes. Specific policy interventions discussed include: shoring up labor laws and worker protections; coordinating place-based economic and workforce development initiatives; advancing new forms of labor organizing that promote economic, environmental and racial justice; using novel employer engagement tools that promote strong, safe, inclusive and opportunity-rich workplaces. This seminar will not only help you think through the policy and planning responses to U.S. labor market restructuring, but also consider how the forces behind this restructuring potentially affect your own career journey.

There are no prerequisites for this course, which is open to graduate students from all disciplines. Given the analytical nature of the final assignment, students will be in a stronger position if they have acquired basic skills in descriptive data analysis or qualitative research in a social science context.

2. Schedule and Format

Format: Planning for Jobs is a highly interactive class, with significant opportunities for student leadership and engagement. This class will utilize a mix of learning styles, including peer-to-peer learning, large-group discussion, and, rarely, traditional lectures. Most sessions will include a structured overview to provide background or motivate small group discussion. Most sessions will include presentation slides and a video or audio clip relevant to the theme or topic of the day. Most sessions will also involve a small group activity (5 students or less), designed to encourage active debate and dialog among students. Guests—including planners, policy-makers and advocates—will join us throughout the semester.

Class Schedule (weekly readings, assignment schedule and grading policy): This semester I am using a google sheet to share information on the class schedule. Here is the link (it is in view mode and cannot be edited by students):

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1oFsTdnmT5I93gkh5mDMRByYb6dpsuPMH/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=110919394373291654770&rtpof=true&sd=true>

I will use this sheet to identify topics covered for each class session; indicate what you need to prepare in advance of each class session; note which guests are visiting our class; list assignments by their due date; outline the grading policy for individual assignments and expectations for group work. This format is easier for me to update regularly, so please check weekly as some items might change to accommodate emerging issues or guest schedules.

Readings and Other Assigned Resources

Some classes will not cover all of the material in the readings and audio/video clips I assign, but it is still important that you keep up with the required materials. For class sessions that involve a guest, readings and other materials will offer background on the topic they are speaking to and will be useful as you formulate questions to ask them.

3. Assignments

SUMMARY

- Assignment 1—Transformative Trends and Debates: Group class facilitation).....20%
- Assignment 2—Solutions Case Study: Handout and Presentation.....20%
- Assignment 3—Final Paper: Writing a policy brief..... 30%
- Assignment 4—Career Development & Networking (All students)..... .20%
- Class Participation.....10%

ASSIGNMENT 1: Transformative Trends and Debates: Group class facilitation—(20%)

This assignment provides students with an opportunity to lead class discussion a given class session.

A small group of students (2-3) will pair up to facilitate discussion of one key debate or transformative trend that could shape labor market dynamics for years/decades to come (see list on google sheet for topics and dates). Each group will assign 2-4 readings related to this debate (and post assigned readings to Canvas at least 1 week in advance of your session—I can suggest some readings). Required readings should not total more than 45 pages.

The group should plan to facilitate a 45 minute class session allowing time at the beginning or end for general announcements, updates, “pop in” guest visit. You should build in 10-15 minutes for a small group activity (using the break-out room function). One idea is to ask small groups to reflect on how this debate or topic relates to planning, broadly defined, perhaps asking the group to develop 3-4 talking points that planning practitioners might use to help clients and stakeholders understand the nuances of this particular debate and how it relates to their own circumstances or professional practice. Be creative with the format.

Possibilities for your remaining 30 or so minutes include: a structured in-class debate, bingo or Jeopardy

style class quiz, use of an introductory video, radio or podcast segment to motivate a learning activity (10 minutes of video use at most), or a structured class discussion (you can combine these modalities, but given time constraints I would not use more than two different formats). Visual aids are strongly encouraged (PowerPoint if necessary).

Due date: Various class sessions scheduled for September (see google sheet for topics and dates)

ASSIGNMENT 2: Case Study of Workforce Development Solution: Handout and Presentation (20%)

Each student will present on a real-world example of an intervention designed to improve working conditions or worker rights, making sure to explain how the trend of intervention impacts different racial and gender groups differently. An “intervention” is a course of action that attempts to resolve a labor market-related problem or challenge. This can be an action taken by an existing labor market intermediary, workforce development organization, community development organization, new federal or state law or policy, labor union campaign (I have provided a list of examples on the google sheet, but these are not exhaustive).

Presentations should be approximately 15 minutes in length, followed by 15 minutes for Q&A. Each student must present some of the material to get credit. You **must also prepare a two page detailed “handout” or graphic visualization** for the presentation to allow students to follow along—ideally something that we can print out or save on our computers (1/3rd of your grade is based on the handout). Sample copies of handouts are posted to Canvas.

Presentations and handouts should cover three different aspects of the intervention:

- **The why?** Frame the labor market problem the intervention is trying to address, with attention to the ways different racial and gender groups are affected.
- **The how?** Provide an overview of the program/policy and solution it offers to the problem, again with attention to how it addresses (or doesn't) the different experiences of different racial and gender groups..
- **The what works?** Reflect on what works well and why and provide some transferable lessons on what might be needed to implement the policy.

Due date: Various class sessions in September, October and November (see Google sheet for dates and suggested solutions).

ASSIGNMENT 3: Final Paper: Writing a policy brief—(30%)

Write a 3-4 page persuasive policy brief on a workforce development problem of your choice, possibly related to your chosen case study from Assignment 2.

The goal with this assignment is to learn the basic approach to advocacy-oriented policy writing, which requires you to persuasively frame a policy problem in a compelling (and evidence-supported) way, propose and defend a solution to the problem, and use data and analysis to support your recommendation. The key aspect of this approach to writing is to take a clear position and defend it clearly and persuasively.

Your policy brief should include the following components:

1. **The problem.** Identify a specific workforce development or labor market problem that needs solving and frame it in such a way that it supports the argument you are about to make in the rest of the paper.
2. **Why it matters.** Explain why it matters to people and policy makers, and then provide a specific policy solution designed to address the problem. This is often the part where policy writers will include a discussion of other relevant research in ways that fit the overall framing of the paper.

3. **The solution.** Propose an action or policy intervention at the sub-national level designed to improve worker protection or “ratchet up” some other job quality standard (some outcomes includes: increased wages; more predictable scheduling; paid sick leave; work-based learning or vocational training; conversion of independent contractors to paid employment; improved worker representation etc) for workers holding that job now or in the future.
4. **Why your solution is the right one.** Focus on why you are proposing this action be taken (what is motivating this recommendation and why now; what specific challenge are you hoping to address with this recommendation; what leads you to believe there will be support for this kind of intervention or policy change [if you know that something similar is working well in another community or state, you are welcome to reference that]).
5. **Empirical evidence.** You should incorporate at least one piece of original evidence, whether to frame and describe your problem, or to argue in support of your proposal. This can include simple descriptive quantitative analysis (e.g., comparing wages over time) or qualitative analysis, including news media quotes, learnings from an interview, or other similar kinds of evidence. This component does NOT require advanced statistical analysis, only the tools you’ve learned in Urban Spatial Structure or a similar course.
6. **Attention to differences across race, ethnicity, or gender.** Make sure your paper addresses how different groups experience your problem and your potential solution.

Your policy brief should be written in MSWord: 3-4 pages, double-spaced, and Times New Roman size 12 font.

I will provide—and we will discuss in class—a learning guide for completing this kind of mini-research project.

Due Dates:

- **September 20—Paper Topic**
- **October 18—Key Elements (Bullet point summary of Elements 1, 2, 3, and your proposed data source for 5).**
- **December 6 (Last Day of Class)—Final paper due**

ASSIGNMENT 4: Career Development & Networking (All students)—(20%)

This assignment is intended to help you explore your career interests within the broader cluster of roles associated with economic development, workforce development, labor organizing, economic research, advocacy, and consulting. **The assignment has two parts, and all students must complete both of them.**

Part 1. Alumni and Expert Panel Planning—(10%)

We will have a total of three (3) different panel discussions over the course of the semester—two alumni panels, where DCRP graduates will come discuss their careers and how they found their first job, and one panel on the future of workforce policy, where we will invite outside experts to come talk about where labor market and workforce development policy is headed over the next 25 years. **Students will be divided into three groups based on their interests and each group will lead the planning and implementation of one of these panel discussions.** As instructor, I will provide suggestions of participants and broker key introductions, as needed.

Due dates: Various class sessions starting September 6 (see google sheet for due dates)

Part 2. Career Development Journal—(10 %)

This is an opportunity to conduct independent research on your future career in planning, economic development or another post-graduation profession. **All students will write 4 journal entries:**

- The **first entry** should be based on an informational interview conducted this semester with two planning professionals in jobs you might like to have yourself in a few years. One of these can be a follow up interview with someone you have previously spoken with. (3 double spaced pages).
- A **second entry** will involve a comparison of 5 organizations you might want to work at post-graduation using at least four criteria you define (that matter most to you. For example-starting wage, advancement opportunities, work-based learning, work that challenges you, career-life balance, location etc. Write brief summaries of each organization and create a one-page matrix/table for comparison that can be shared with your classmates. An example can be found on our course Canvas site.
- For a **third entry** you will write one sample cover letter for a post-graduation job, responding to an actual job posting. In addition to the letter, you should provide some background on why you chose to target this job or organization and what skill sets or experiences you think you have that make this a good fit.
- For your **final, fourth journal entry**, pick one alumni panel and write a 1-page reflection on the most important take-aways from the panel and any lessons you gleaned for your career planning over the semester.

All journal entries must be in MSWord, double-spaced, and Times New Roman size 12 font.

Due Date: October 11 (Entries 1 and 2) & December 6 (Entries 3 and 4)

Class Participation—(10%)

There is a lot of interactive learning in this class and most class sessions will have some kind of small group activity or discussion. Please complete all assigned readings before class and be prepared to contribute!

Please sign up for your preferred topics & dates at the following link by 5pm Friday, 8/25:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1FkhF82nSPxjJy1zZcx82i1ZAw-gr_2D/edit?usp=sharing&oid=110919394373291654770&rtpof=true&sd=true

4. Attendance and Grading

Grading. Taken together, the assignments, attendance and participation allow students to earn up to a total of 100 points, which correspond to the following grades:

H: 90-100 points

P: 80-89 points

L: 70-79 points

F: Anything below 70 points = Failing

Late assignments will be docked 1 point for every day after the due date, except in cases where I have granted an extension. Please feel free to reach out to me and let me know in advance—or in cases of emergency—if you need an extension.

Attendance. Given this is a seminar and that we meet only once a week, attendance is mandatory. Students

will lose 5 points for every unexcused absence. More than 3 unexcused absences will result in automatic failure of the class. As with the grading policy, however, I am more than happy to offer excused absences with prior notice. Please let me know when and if you need to miss a class (including for emergencies), and provided it's because of a reasonable reason, I will normally grant at least one excused absence.

5. Resources and Rules

Academic Assistance

My purpose is to help you to excel in this learning environment. Should you need further assistance beyond my help, please consult the following on-campus resources:

The Writing Center: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/>

Center for Student Success and Academic Counseling: <http://cssac.unc.edu/>

Learning Center: <https://learningcenter.unc.edu/>

Counseling and Psychological Services: <https://caps.unc.edu/>

Honor code

The UNC honor Code states: "Conduct all academic work within the letter and spirit of the Honor Code, which prohibits the giving or receiving of unauthorized aid in all academic processes." We are committed to treating Honor Code violations seriously and urge all students to become familiar with its terms set out at <https://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/honor-code/> If you have questions it is your responsibility to ask the professor about the Code's application.

Attendance/Absences

There is a lot of uncertainty this semester and I recognize that this could affect attendance. Please try to attend all classes! If you must miss class, try to notify me in advance of class or shortly afterwards so I can mark you down with an excused absence.

For a list of approved or excused absences, see below: <https://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/attendance-grading-examination/>

"For situations when an absence is not University approved (e.g., a job interview or club activity), instructors determine their own approach to missed classes and make-up assessments and assignments."

Cell phones and Email Use

Please turn off your cellphones before joining class and avoid checking email.

Disability

If you have a documented disability that may require assistance, you may need to contact the Academic Services office that houses the Academic Success Program for coordination in your academic accommodations. Please contact me to discuss any accommodations that may be required to satisfy your needs.

Title IX Resources

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Please contact the Director of Title IX Compliance (Adrienne Allison – Adrienne.allison@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.