

The Fictions and Realities of Work

Students in this course will study the history, politics, and cultural narratives of labor in twenty-first-century North America. Who do we become when we go to work? What is the ideal balance between work and life, and is such a balance even possible? Why do we work as hard as we do? And how might we imagine alternatives to the way we work now? This co-taught course will investigate each of these questions from two different disciplinary perspectives. Drawing on groundbreaking works of sociology alongside a handful of highly acclaimed contemporary novels, students in this course will consider how the stories we tell ourselves about work both reflect and shape the realities of labor in the twenty-first century.

Key topics and texts may include:

- Work/life balance, Ling Ma's *Severance*, and television's *Severance*
- Service work and emotional labor in elite hotels and Emma Cline's *The Guest*
- Startup culture, workplace surveillance, and Helen DeWitt's *Lightning Rods*
- Passion projects, dream jobs, and Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*

In all, students in this course will not only encounter a range of perspectives on contemporary labor, but also be introduced to the scholarly methods central to sociology as well as literary and cultural studies.