OVERVIEW

This course introduces students to theory and practice of workforce development, which is the system of programs, public policies and institutions that help workers and employers connect to one another in the labor market and make investments in skills and careers that promote household, business and community economic prosperity.

The course is divided into two sections. In the first portion of the course we will discuss the challenges of contemporary urban labor markets, and focus on three issues of central concern to the workforce development field – skill formation, employment networks, and career advancement – and role of public policy in addressing systemic failures and inequities in labor markets.

The second portion of the course will introduce different domains of the field of workforce development, as practiced in U.S. cities and regions. Through case material and guest speakers, a variety of topics will be covered, including: publicly-funded employment centers (e.g., Worksource Oregon), welfare-to-work, community colleges, unions and apprenticeship programs, community development and industry sector-based economic development initiatives.

There are no pre-requisites for this course. The course is intended for upper-division undergraduates in community development, urban and public affairs, sociology, political science, economics, social work and related fields, as well as graduate students in urban and regional planning, urban studies, public policy, public administration, social work and other related fields. Graduate students enrolled in the USP 539 section are strongly encouraged, but not required, to have completed a basic statistics course, and have basic familiarity of Microsoft Excel for the purposes of data handling and analysis.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course is designed to prepare students for professional opportunities in the workforce development field, including jobs within:

- Public agencies that deliver and/or fund employment and job training services;
- Community-based/non-profit organizations that provide social and human services, including workforce development; and
• Planning agencies, economic development organizations and consulting firms that engage in labor market analysis and/or community and regional economic development functions.

At the end of this course, a successful student should demonstrate the following learning outcomes:

1) Understanding of the labor market and institutional forces that influence skills development, employment access and career opportunities, and market failures and inequitable outcomes that inform the need for policy and planning interventions through workforce development;

2) Knowledge of existing policy frameworks, institutions, and practices for workforce development, especially in the United States, with a particular focus on their linkage to community and regional economic development planning; and

3) (a) Knowledge of concepts, tools and sources of labor market analysis, such as the U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and state labor market information agencies (e.g., Oregon Employment Department), that inform workforce development policy and planning interventions, and (b) apply those sources as appropriate to analyze and evaluate workforce development issues, problems and outcomes.

Not all learning outcomes will be equally relevant to students enrolled in the undergraduate (439) and graduate (539) sections of the course. Although all students will be introduced to concepts, tools and sources of labor market analysis (learning outcome 3a), graduate students taking the course as USP 539 will be expected to demonstrate learning outcome (3b) by utilizing labor market data sources, as appropriate and relevant to their topic, as part of their final class assignment (e.g., analyzing employment trends within a particular industry or occupation). Undergraduate students with interest and familiarity with statistical data sources are encouraged to utilize these sources, but not expected to do so.

TEXTS

There is no assigned text for the term. Each week there will be a series of readings (approximately 50-75 pages per week) that will be made available via D2L.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Your grade for the course will be based upon five components. Further details and guidance about each assignment will be provided in class and on D2L.

Worker Career Profile (due week 4, 15% of grade): For this assignment you will analyze and compare the career of two adults over 25 years of age that you know – at least one from a different class and/or cultural background as you – in relation to the three topics in Part I of the course: how/where they developed their skills, the networks used to find work, and their career pathway. You will identify challenges that they have faced/overcome (whether personal or work-related) to get where they are, and discuss the role that public policy has played in their respective labor market experiences. [Learning outcome 1]

WD Organizational/Initiative Profile (due weeks 5-10, 20% of grade): For this assignment you will identify a workforce development organization or initiative, either in Portland or elsewhere, and complete a brief (4-6 page, double-spaced) profile of it – who the organization is, who it serves and how, what issues it addresses, etc. – based on available primary and secondary materials. The due date will depend on the organization or initiative chosen, reflecting which of the topics in Part
II of the course to which it fits most closely. Students will be expected to give a brief (5-10 minute) classroom presentation of their profile. [Learning outcomes 1, 2]

**Final Assignment:** (due finals week; 35% of grade - 30% paper, 5% presentation): In groups of two or three (divided by graduate/undergraduate section), you will carry out an applied research project to inform the work of a community partner, such as Worksystems Inc. (the region’s workforce development board). The project will be developed in consultation with the community partner, and will generally require a mix of primary (i.e., interviews) and secondary research (i.e., literature/data gathering and analysis) activities. Graduate students will be expected to incorporate and utilize labor market analysis tools and sources in their project, as relevant and appropriate to the topic. The scope of the assignment will reflect the number of group members and needs of the community partner. [Learning outcomes 1, 2, 3(b) (539 section only)]

**Weekly Reading Responses (15% of grade):** In five of nine weeks (not including the first week), students will post a brief, 200-300 word response to the assigned readings via a D2L discussion board. To facilitate this, I will provide discussion questions to help you focus your comments toward themes to be addressed in the class discussion. [Learning outcomes 1, 2]

**Class Participation (15% of grade):** Students are expected to come to class prepared to contribute, having read (and thought about) the assigned material. While I do not take attendance, excessive absence will certainly harm your participation grade. Class participation can include sharing of materials (e.g., newspaper articles) via email or D2L relevant to class discussions.

**LATE SUBMISSION POLICY:** Late submissions for all written assignments will be accepted with a 1 percent per hour penalty (based on 100-point scale). Students may request additional time without penalty to complete assignments, as long as the request is submitted at least 24 hours ahead of the deadline and accompanied by a reasonable justification (to be determined by the instructor). A good rule of thumb is: if the reason could not have anticipated in advance, then it is generally reasonable. Deadlines in other classes or at work generally do not meet this criterion.

**ACCESS AND INCLUSION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** PSU values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. My goal is to create a learning environment that is equitable, useable, inclusive, and welcoming. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) [https://www.pdx.edu/drc] provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. If you already have accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received a faculty notification letter and discuss your accommodations.

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:** It should go without saying that plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated, but I will say it anyway. “Academic dishonesty,” according to Section 577-031-0136 of the PSU Student Code of Conduct, refers to as “the act of knowingly or intentionally seeking to claim credit for the work or effort of another person or participation in such acts.” [http://www.pdx.edu/dos/codeofconduct] This encompasses both egregious acts of cheating like copying the answer to someone else’s exam, but also more mundane acts like lifting reference
On-campus material from websites without attribution. Per university policy, instances of academic dishonesty may result in a zero grade for those assignment(s).

**SAFE AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:** As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe and inclusive learning environment for my students and for the campus as a whole. We expect a culture of professionalism and mutual respect in our department and class. You may report any incident of discrimination or discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, to either the Office of Equity and Compliance or the Office of the Dean of Student Life.

Please be aware that as a faculty member, I have the responsibility to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about sexual harassment or sexual violence to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can find a list of those individuals. For more information about Title IX, please complete the required student module Creating a Safe Campus in your D2L.

**COURSE OUTLINE**

*NOTE: Topic scheduling of weeks 6-8 subject to change based on speaker availability.*

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<tr>
<th><strong>Week 1:</strong> Workforce Development in a Changing (and Challenging) Labor Market</th>
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<td>In the first week we will set the context for the practice of workforce development in U.S. cities and urban regions. How have contemporary labor markets been changing – both prior to and since the Great Recession? What issues can planners and policymakers address through workforce development (and which ones can’t they address)?</td>
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<td>Various “Future of Work” projects and reports (D2L)</td>
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<th><strong>Week 2: Skill formation systems</strong></th>
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<td>In this week we address what is arguably the core concern of workforce development – helping to “develop the workforce” in ways that improve both individuals’ labor market potential, but also the economic potential of regions and nations. Many businesses and workforce development officials claim that there is a “skills gap” that requires public investment and educational reform, while others suggest that employer disinvestment is the problem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>This week will also feature a brief presentation on labor market analysis concepts.</td>
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Week 3: Employment networks

The old saying, “it’s not what you know, it’s who you know,” underscores an important challenge for workforce development. One’s ability to find jobs is shaped heavily by the networks that connect workers and employers, via matching processes that can generate inequality in labor market outcomes across race, gender and space. In this week we discuss how economic and sociological theories conceptualize the matching process, and how workforce development strategies attempt to enhance both the efficiency and equity of the matching process in local labor markets.

This week will also feature a brief presentation on labor market analysis tools and data sources.

Readings:

Week 4: Careers and advancement

It is hardly an overstatement to say that the nature of careers and career advancement has radically changed in recent generations, for white- and blue-collar workers alike. Long-term relationships between employers and workers have given way to external job mobility and employment relationships punctuated by corporate restructuring. In this week we discuss the impacts of these trends for the economic security of workers and families, and the role of workforce development in supporting career advancement.

Readings:

Assignment 1 Due: Worker Career Profile
Part II: Institutions

Week 5: Workforce development system overview

We begin the second part of the course with an overview of the various policies and institutions that are generally considered part of the “workforce development” system in the United States. We will discuss the historical track record of job training programs, and recent trends within the field.

Readings:


Optional:


Week 6: Workforce intermediaries: connecting to opportunity

One of the most important functions of the workforce development system is enhance access to good jobs for disadvantaged and underrepresented populations. In this week we discuss the role of “workforce intermediaries” in shaping labor market outcomes by connecting employers and jobseekers.

Readings:


## Week 7: Moving from Welfare to Work

Workforce development programs have historically served populations with low skills and work experience, and substantial barriers to employment. However, the imperative to promote work and labor market attachment has increased dramatically in the last two decades as a result of welfare reform and other policies requiring most individuals on public assistance to work. In this week we discuss welfare-to-work programs and other initiatives targeted at helping individuals connect with jobs and advance in the labor market.

**Readings:**

## Week 8: Community Colleges and WD

Community colleges are arguably the most important institution in the workforce development system today, as they provide a wide range of education and training opportunities to diverse populations. In this week we will talk about how community and technical colleges are attempting to pull together their resources in new ways to meet the needs of jobseekers for career advancement, but also the changing workforce needs of business and industry in their community.

**Readings:**

## Week 9: WD and Community economic development

Historically workforce development programs have focused on “people prosperity,” but what role can they play in “place prosperity”? In this week will talk about the possibilities and barriers to connecting workforce and community economic development efforts.

**Readings:**
Week 10: Sector programs and regional economic linkages

Another approach to connecting workforce development with place prosperity is by supporting the changing needs of industry sectors that are important to the local and regional economy, helping those businesses to adapt and change more effectively. In this week we will discuss “sectoral” models of workforce development, and efforts to connect workforce with regional economic development.

Readings:


Finals Week

Final Assignment Due, Presentations (Date/Time TBD)