

IS331: Berlin Internship Seminar: Working Cultures, Urban Cultures

Seminar Leaders: Florian Duijsens, Agata Lisiak, Clio Nicastro

Course Times: Thursdays, 2-3:30 pm

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Office hours: by appointment

Course Description

The Berlin Internship Seminar accompanies third-year students' undertaking of an internship. The seminar offers a range of theoretical and analytical tools for thinking critically about how and why we work, how work is changing, and how it affects our daily lives and the places where we live. Over the course of the seminar, we will talk about contemporary ways of working and living in Berlin and beyond, asking: What do we mean when we talk about work? Do we need to *love* what we do? What renders work in/visible? How is work gendered and classed? What does it mean to inhabit the somatic norm of the workplace? How is work organized temporally and spatially, and how does that, in turn, affect a city and its residents? Which new forms of work have emerged in Berlin recently? What is the future of work?

One of the major issues we will tackle in class is the very phenomenon of unpaid internships. We will address this question by discussing privilege, the precariat, and affective labor. Drawing on Kathi Weeks' writing, we will consider what the problem with work actually is, and why we tend to define and value ourselves through what we do professionally. We will dissect Steve Jobs' "do what you love" mantra and discuss how work and love are interwoven. Of course, we will discuss how the pandemic has changed the way we work, and what the effects might be of the current renewed unionization efforts. Throughout, we will approach contemporary working cultures from an intersectional perspective, remaining sensitive to the workings of inequalities in structural, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains.

Besides in-class discussions and invited lectures, the seminar offers a platform for the regular exchange of observations, reflections, and comments on students' internships. The assigned readings, too, will be discussed in class in the context of students' internships. Students are required to keep an internship journal and provide regular updates on the progress of their internship.

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the Bard College Berlin Accessibility page. Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, one absence over the course of the entire Internship Seminar will not affect participation grade or require documentation. Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8. Students are expected to properly prepare for each class and find ways to meaningfully contribute, either by sharing their insights, asking questions, and/or supporting contributions by their peers.

Readings

On a weekly basis, you will be expected to devote 2-3 hours to complete the readings and 15-20 minutes to update your internship journal. It may be possible for you to get both done during your commute to the internship. Though all of the texts you will be required to read are included in the **course reader**, which you should purchase from BCB Library, the highly topical nature of this course means that we will also be posting up-to-date articles, essays, podcasts, and videos on **Google Classroom** to enrich our discussions. Students are encouraged to do the same.

Assignments

This class will include several assignments that will add up to your final **pass/fail grade** for this class alongside your participation: 1) regular entries in your internship journal; 2) a take-home midterm exam; and 3) a 1500–2000-word final paper/creative response. See below for deadlines and grading criteria.

Internship Journal

All students are required to keep an internship journal in which they regularly (at least once a week) reflect on their work experiences and respond to prompts related to that week's readings. The journal should be kept in electronic form on Google docs and shared with the seminar instructor. The goal of this journal is twofold: not only does it provide students with important material with which to reflect on their internship experience when they are writing their final papers, but it also provides the instructor with a discreet way to make sure the internships are going well (or step in should issues arise). Each week's entry should be completed at the latest the night before the class in question. Failing to update the journal regularly will negatively affect your chances to pass this course. For more details (and examples) see the Internship Journal Handout.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress. Students must receive a "pass" for class participation and all the assignments (journal entries, midterm, final assignment) in order to pass the course.

Grade Breakdown and Deadlines

Class participation // all semester
Regular entries in your journal // all semester
Midterm // 15–16 October
Final paper/project // 17 December

Grading criteria for the midterm

PASS: The exam demonstrates student's full command or at least general familiarity with the material and reflects their critical engagement with the readings.

FAIL: The exam demonstrates student's lack of engagement or unfamiliarity with the readings and lack of familiarity with the key concepts discussed in class and/or fails to adhere to the academic standards as set out in the Student Handbook.

Grading criteria for the final

PASS: The paper/creative response demonstrates the student's command of the material, has a solid, consistent focus, and demonstrates clear argumentation/conceptualization. Ideally, it manifests compelling thinking and skillful writing/execution.

FAIL: The paper/creative response has major deficiencies in writing, execution, and/or argumentation and lacks overall cohesion and/or fails to follow the basic points of the assignment and/or fails to adhere to the academic standards as set out in the Student Handbook.

Note: Students are advised to visit BCB's Learning Commons before turning in their final papers.

Schedule

Class 1

3 September 2026: Practicalities & Expectations

We will go over the internship documents for the semester: your Internship Agreement and the Internship Timesheet. We will discuss the course content, pedagogical goals, and grading requirements. You will also be introduced to the internship journal. No readings are required.

Class 2

10 September 2026: What Is Work? A plenary session led by Prof. Dr. Agata Lisiak.

- Andrea Komlosy, *Work: The Last 1000 Years* (2018). Introduction.
- David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005). Introduction.

Class 3

17 September 2026: The Problem with Work

- Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (2011). Excerpts.

Class 4

24 September 2026: Do What You Love?

- Madeline Schwartz, "Opportunity Costs: The True Price of Internships," *Dissent* (2013).
- Miya Tokumitsu, "In the Name of Love," *Jacobin* (2014).

Class 5

1 October 2026: The Forms of Capital and the Creative Class

- Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" (1986).
- Michael Sandel, "Toppling the Myth of Meritocracy." *The Harvard Gazette* (2021)

Class 6

8 October 2026: Emotional Labor

- Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* (1983). Chapter 1.
- Michael Geoffrey Abuyabo Asia, "The Quiet Cost of Emotional Labor," ed. Milagros Miceli, Adio Dinika, Krystal Kauffman, Camilla Salim Wagner, and Laurenz Sachenbacher (2025).

Class 7

15 October 2026: Time and Labor: A lecture by Dr. Clio Nicastro.

- Readings TBA.

MIDTERM EXAM

For this take-home midterm, you'll be sent the questions right after class at 3:30pm on 15 Oct. The midterm will be made up of three shorter questions about the readings so far, plus one longer critical response to one of three quoted statements. The midterm is due **3:30 pm, 16 Oct at the latest**.

FALL BREAK

Class 8

29 October 2026: Space Invaders

- Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders* (2004). Introduction.
- Sara Ahmed, *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook* (2024). Excerpts.

Class 9

5 November 2026: The grind

- Heike Geißler, *Seasonal Associate* (2018). Excerpts.
- David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs* (2018). Excerpts.

Class 10

12 November 2026: Organizing at Work

- Ian Allinson, *Workers Can Win: A Guide to Organising at Work* (2022). Excerpts.
- Efsun Kızılay, "West Germany's Migrant Wildcat Strikes," *Rosa Luxemburg Foundation* (2023).

Class 11

19 November 2026: Gentrification: Who owns Berlin?

- Andrej Holm, "You Have to Do Everything Yourself...": Tenants in Berlin protest against gentrification and displacement. *The Fine Art of Living*, ed. Ina Wudtke (2018).
- Andrej Holm, Germany Needs Federal Rent Control (2025).
- Niloufar Tajeri, The Gecekondu Protest Hut of Kotti & Co: A Space of Housing Rights in Berlin, *The Funambulist* (2019).

Class 12

26 November 2026: Working in Creative Industries: a conversation with a BCB alum (details TBA)

Class 13

3 December 2026: Le Future de Travail?

- Alex Gourevich, Post-Work Socialism? *Catalyst* (2022).

Class 14

10 December 2026: The Future of Work: Utopia/Manifesto

- Sarah Jaffe, "What is Love?", *Work Won't Love You Back* (2021).

FINAL PAPER/PROJECT

Your final paper will be a 1,500-2000-word essay or a creative project (a video, a visual essay, a game, a short story, a manifesto, etc.) reflecting critically on (a particular aspect of) your internship experience that is anchored in, and informed by, at least two readings we have covered during the semester (at least one from after Class 6!). It should investigate a concept, paradox, or question from the readings through your own internship experience. In other words, the readings should

provide the lens, the internship the material. Go through your journal and your reader, asking yourself: Which texts did you annotate most extensively? Which seem to resonate most with your internship? Which questions would you like to explore?

If you choose to submit a creative response rather than a standard academic essay, please pitch your idea latest by the end of November and make sure to include a 500-word statement in which you explain how the project relates to the readings. Group creative projects are only allowed up to two people, and subject to prior approval. Deadline for submission of the final essay is **midnight of 17 December, 2026**. Please be in touch by 10 December if you wish to apply for an extension.