GEOG 510
Economic Geography: Growing up in a Global Economy

Instructor: Dr. Stephen Young, 426 Science Hall
Email: sjyoung3@wisc.edu
Office Hours: Office hours by appointment on Friday 2.30-3.30 in SH234
Meeting Times: Thursdays 2.20-5.25 in SH350

Course Overview

A number of geographers argue that youth have been more adversely affected than most by recent economic restructuring (Katz 2004; Jeffrey 2008). A scarcity of secure work, lack of public sector support and growing indebtedness are just some of the problems that millions of young people confront today. Yet, they are not passive in the face of such changes. Indeed, youth have been at the forefront of a number of recent protests from NYC, to London, to Cairo. Some scholars even argue that because young people experience a “fresh contact” with entrenched social problems, they are particularly adept at developing innovative ways to tackle them (Mannheim 1923; Cole 2004).

The focus of this course will be on how youth in different parts of the world are responding to a shifting social-economic landscape. We will begin by examining some important conceptual debates in economic geography regarding neoliberalism, economy, youth and spatiality. We’ll then read a series of critical ethnographies that will take us from southern Africa to Silicon Valley and many places in between. We will be centrally concerned with the question of how young people find a way to “make ends meet”, often under conditions of considerable constraint. In the process, we will also be trying to “make ends meet” in an academic sense by considering how these case studies relate to one another, what similarities and differences are revealed, and how they might inform larger theoretical debates in economic geography.

Readings

There are four required texts for this course. The books are available for purchase and copies will also be placed on reserve at the College Library. The books are:


There are also a number of articles available on-line through the course Learn@UW site. Please note that I have provided electronic copies of the articles in order to contain course costs but you should feel free to print hard copies.

Assessments

Think Pieces and Class Participation 20%

Everyone will be required to submit weekly “think pieces” to the course Learn@UW dropbox. The think piece should be a 2-page [approx. 600 words] reflection on the most interesting
themes that emerged in the readings that week. You can also raise points of confusion or disagreement, identify links with other course readings, and propose questions for discussion. You must submit your think piece by 5pm on the Tuesday before class. You are also expected to participate in class discussions and activities each week.

**Leading Discussion** 15%
Everyone will lead discussion once in the semester. This will involve first contextualizing the readings through a short presentation. Feel free to use ppt slides or youtube clips as part of your presentation. You should also think of additional materials – e.g. newspapers articles – and activities – e.g. small group discussions – to use in class to stimulate thinking. You must email or meet with me prior to class to think of key questions that will frame the conversation that week, preferably on the Tuesday or Wednesday.

**Midterm** 25%
There will be a take-home midterm exam comprising two essay questions in Week 8. You will have 1 week to answer the questions. The word limit is 1,500 per question.

**Final Paper** 40%
Everyone must submit a final paper of approx. 3,500 words (double-spaced, size 12 font) due on the last day of class (May 8). The paper must develop an argument that relates to a topic raised in the course: e.g. neoliberal restructuring, un/underemployment, educational regimes, youth politics, work and masculinities, illicit economies, welfare reform, social reproduction. I expect you to draw on course materials but also to find additional books and articles that will help with your analysis. I will be available for office hours to talk about your papers, so please feel free to ask for an appointment.

**Grading Scale**
The grading scale used in the class is the standard scale used in most courses on campus:
A: 93-100
AB: 88-92
B: 83-87
BC: 78-82
C: 70-77
D: 60-69
F: 59 or lower

**Course Communication**
During class, everyone will be given an opportunity to ask questions and discuss course content. If you have additional questions you can either:
(a) Write me an email
(b) Make an appointment to meet with me

**Disabilities and Special Needs**
Any student with special needs or a disability should notify me as early in the semester as possible in order to coordinate any necessary arrangements.
**WEEKLY SUMMARY OF TOPICS AND READINGS**

**Week 1. Introduction to the Course (Jan 23)**

**Week 2. Markets, Policies and Technologies (Jan 30)**

Ong, Aiwa 2007. “Neoliberalism as Mobile Technology,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32, 1, 3-8


**Week 3. Sites, Spaces and Subjects (Feb 6)**


**Week 4. Youth, Culture and Class (Feb 13)**

**Week 5. Education, Cosmopolitanism and Morality (Feb 20)**


Fong, Jenifer 2007. “Morality, Cosmopolitanism, or Academic Attainment? Discourses on “Quality” and Urban Chinese Only-Children’s Claims to Ideal Personhood,” *City & Society* 19, 1, 86–113

**Week 6. Inequalities, Aspirations and Obligations (Feb 27)**

**Week 7 Boredom, Inertia and Dislocation (March 6)**

Cross, Jamie 2009. “From Dreams to Discontent: Educated young men and the politics of work at a special economic zone,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 43, 3, 351-379

**Week 8. Middlebury Conference (March 13)**
No class. Work on the exam.

**Week 9. Spring Break (March 20)**

**Week 10 Love, Sex and Money I (March 27)**

**Week 11. Love, Sex and Money II (April 3)**


**Week 12. AAG (April 10)**
No class. Work on your final papers.

**Week 13. Enterprise, Informality and Improvisation (April 17)**


**Week 14. Wages, Work and Wellbeing (April 24)**


**Week 15. New possibilities (May 1)**

**Week 16. (May 8) Last class!**