

Entrepreneurship and Aspirations

Entrepreneurial ethos– to be creative, flexible, experimental, and one’s own boss– has permeated every aspect of contemporary life, almost on a global, universal scale. Tied with aspirations of social and economic upward mobility and the pursuit of the good life, entrepreneurialism is not simply a form of economic participation but rather, a way of life. In this course, we will critically examine the popularization of entrepreneurship and aspirations by tracing its social, economic, and political moorings. The course begins with examining the structural shifts– the ascent of neoliberalism as an ideological framing and the implementation of structural adjustment programs in many developing, postcolonial countries across the world– that together valorized entrepreneurship and its aspirations as an individual and societal good and created conditions for their burgeoning. We examine the coalescing of enterprise culture that has promoted core entrepreneurial values of creativity, flexibility, and experimentation through numerous vehicles, from education and self-improvement classes to cinema, popular culture, and social media. Emergent forms of entrepreneurial practices are examined, from digital start-ups to social media influencers. In addition, grey areas of entrepreneurial practices are also attended to, such as criminal entrepreneurship. Attending to different forms of entrepreneurial practices and their variable success in the pursuit of aspirations, this course concludes with examining the concept of entrepreneurial citizenship and those who are included in and excluded from it.

Course materials include readings and multimedia resources, like films, documentaries, podcasts, and social media content. Assessments for the course will include written assignments and oral presentations and comprise group and individual work.

Assessment:

Class Participation: 15
Group Presentation: 15
Mid-term Individual Written Assessment: 20
Individual (end of semester) Presentation: 10
End-term Written Assignment: 40

Suggested Framework

Week 1: Entrepreneurship and Aspirations– An Introduction

Week 2 & 3: Contextualizing Entrepreneurialism

Week 4 & 5: Aspirations and Desperation

Examine some major institutional shifts that have fostered enterprise culture following economic liberalizations and reforms globally. Emphasis on the *Enterprising Self* as an ideal contemporary subject.

Week 6: Entrepreneurial Socialities

Examine the role and expectations of social networks in entrepreneurial participation.

Week 7: Digital Entrepreneurship

Examine changing trends of entrepreneurial participation with the rise of digital influencers and entrepreneurs. What are some wider social ramifications and experiences of these?

Week 8 & 9: The Business of Feelings

Explore the role of religion, spiritualism, and feel-goodness as both enterprise and cultivating the entrepreneurial subject.

Week 10: Entrepreneurship from the Margins

What does entrepreneurship look like from the point of view of those typically on the margins? Does entrepreneurship open up avenues for mobility for historically marginalized communities or do they continue to be excluded? What are some mechanisms of gate-keeping entrepreneurial participation?

Week 11: Entrepreneurship and Social Change

Examine some ways in which entrepreneurship engenders social change, recovery, tiding over crises.

Week 12: Scammers' Paradise

Explore illicit/illegitimate forms of entrepreneurship, why they occur, and how they relate to economic structures.

Week 13: Conclusion– Assessing Entrepreneurial Aspirations

Examine entrepreneurial citizenship and whose work counts as entrepreneurial.

Remaining weeks are for in-class assessments.