

# INTRODUCTION TO LABOR STUDIES AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY 37:575:100:02

**Note: This syllabus may be changed or modified as the course proceeds.**

Spring 2021



Instructor: Professor John Castella  
Email: john.castella@rutgers.edu

**Course Overview:** This is mainly an asynchronous course designed to give you an overview of various aspects of labor and employment relations, including the perspective of working people and their labor organizations. We will also study the changing nature of work, workers and workers' institutions and organizations; the impact of technological change, the economic cycle, social class, immigration, race, ethnicity, and gender; the role of government in labor policy; the history of unions, the role of unions in politics and challenges the labor movement faces today; and collective bargaining and workers' rights issues.

The class will include lectures, small group discussions, simulations, and media presentations. Quizzes will be administered via Canvas. Consisting of open book, timed, and completed within a particular pre-determined timeframe. Students are encouraged to express their views freely. Respect for the appreciation of different viewpoints will be a guiding principle in this course.

If your participation in this class is delayed for any reason(s) (Health, personal, internet, etc.), you are to notify me via email ASAP. There will be no leniency after the fact. Communication is of the utmost importance.

In this section, you will then have a CHOICE as to doing either:

- 1) A **synchronous (live at a particular time)** team-based collective bargaining exercise that requires planning with the team and then bargaining with the opposing union or management team online using "Big Blue Button."(See Appendix I)
- 2) An individual paper of about five pages regarding the relationship between the COVID-19 economic crisis and particular things you are learning about in the course. See the essay prompt in the shell for details. (See Appendix II)

**You will be required to fill out the Paper/Bargaining Questionnaire located under "Course Essentials" by February 7, 11:59 pm.**

**Textbook:** Stephen Sweet and Peter Meiksins. *Changing Contours of Work: Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Sage, 2015. (Please note: the Third Edition of this book is quite different from the first and second)

All readings, except for the textbook, are available on Rutgers Canvas, which you may access at <https://tlt.rutgers.edu/canvas>. To log on, enter your Rutgers ID and password in the upper right portion of the page.

**Learning Objectives:** Students in this course should achieve the following SAS, SMLR, and LSER learning objectives: School of Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum objectives met by this course: SCL (social analysis)

- Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization. (Goal m)
- Employ tools of social scientific reasoning to study particular questions or situations, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments. (Goal n)

**School of Management and Labor Relations curriculum objectives met by this course:**

- Demonstrate an understanding of relevant theories and apply them given the background context of a particular work situation. (Goal IV)
- Demonstrate an understanding of how to apply knowledge necessary for effective work performance. (Goal VI)

**Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department objectives met by this course:**

- Demonstrate an understanding of the perspectives, theories and concepts in the field of labor and employment relations. (Goal 1)
- Apply those concepts, and substantive institutional knowledge, to understanding contemporary developments related to work. (Goal 2)

**Grades:**

For purposes of grading, there are six components of the course:

- Introductory exercises (Personal information/choice of exercise; pre-test participation) (3%)
- Threaded Discussions (Forums) (40%)
- Rights check and union knowledge check at 1% each (2%)
- COVID-19 Paper (10%)
- 3 Quizzes at 12% each (36%)
- Short take-home final (9%)

## **Unit I. The Situation Working People Face Today (January 20- February 21)**

Most people have to work. Work shapes our lives and our conceptions of self, and at the same time it provides us with income. When work is insecure, low-paid, or we are not accorded dignity on the job, we suffer. On the other hand, when work is rewarding, it enlarges our capacities, allows us to connect to others, and enables us to contribute to the community at large.



In this unit, you will have a chance to ponder your family's history of work, consider how work has changed in the last 150 years, and explore the relationship of work and social class. A major topic is the prevalence of economic inequality in the United States today.

### **Week 1, January 20- January 24: Introduction and Course Requirements**

- Review the syllabus and make a note of what is required of you.
- Learn how to use Canvas and locate the readings.
- Take the pre-test. Your score does not reflect your grade. It's merely a tool to see if there are any software issues (2% of your grade).
- Post information about yourself for the instructor and other students you will be interacting with throughout the semester (2% of your grade- less if you are late).

#### **Assignments for Week 1:**

- Read Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 1
- Interview at least one parent or grandparent about your family's work history (preferably more). Take notes as it will form the basis of a discussion next week.

### **Week 2, January 25- January 31: Work and Our Lives**

- You and your family's history of work
- The contemporary economic/work situation
- Longer-term trends in work

#### **Assignments for Week 2:**

- **Participate in Forum 1: You need to post at least twice by Sunday evening**, and then another two times by next Sunday evening. Both quantity and quality count, so you may want to post beyond this minimum.
- Class conference meeting (Online) January 26<sup>th</sup> @ 7:15pm

#### **Read:**

- Heather Long & Andrew Van Dam, "Pay Cuts Are Becoming a Defining Feature of the Coronavirus Recession," *Washington Post*, July 1, 2020.

**Watch:**

- NBC News, "What Does the Future of Work Look Like in a Post-COVID-19 World Look Like?" May 22, 2020.
- Richard Florida, "The Rise of the Creative Service Worker," on Big Think (link in the course shell)
- Joseph Stiglitz, "What's Next for the U.S. Economy," June 4, 2020, CNBC

**Week 3, February 1- February 7: Corporations & Work in the "New Economy"**

- The rise of contingent work
- Old and new forms of work organization
- Corporations- structure, power, and rights

**Assignments for Week 3:**

- Complete Forum #1
- Make sure the Major Assignment Questionnaire is completed by February 7, 11:59 pm (Located under "Course Essentials")

**Readings:**

- Sweet and Meskins, *Changing Contours of Work* chapter 2
- Peter Capelli et al., excerpts from *Change at Work*, "The Employment System that Died," and "How the World Began to Change,"

**Watch:**

- Four video excerpts from *The Corporation* on You-tube
- PBS video, "A Job at Fords" from the series, *The Great Depression*

**Week 4, February 8- February 14: Social Class in the U.S. and Economic Inequality**

- Class and opportunity in the U.S.
- Class and social mobility
- Relationship between wealth and power
- Has class faded in American culture?

**Assignments for Week 4:**

- Complete Forum #2 First post is due by Thursday (11:59 pm). Follow up posts are due by Sunday (11:59 pm). The forum closes promptly at 11:59 pm. You will not be able to post after, causing a significant point reduction.

**Readings:**

- Read the following on the *New York Times* website on Social Class:

<http://www.nytimes.com/pages/national/class/>

1. The Overview article, Shadowy Lines That Still Divide"
2. Tamar Lewin "Up from the Holler" (Click on Day 3)

3. David Leonhardt "The College Dropout Boom" (Click on Day 5)
4. At least two other articles/blogs from the site.
5. Bob Herbert Op-Ed, "Mobility Myth" (Click under "Readers Opinions")

- Serkez, Yeryna, "Who is Most Likely to Die from the Coronavirus," *New York Times*, June 4, 2020.
- Bunker, Nick "5 Charts that Show How Increasing Income Inequality Leads to Less Opportunity," Center for American Progress

**Watch:**

- Professor Francis Ryan, Rutgers Labor Studies & Employment Relations Dept. speak about the history of the ideal of social mobility in the U.S. and the reality today.
- Joseph Stiglitz, "The Price of Inequality: How today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future," Interview June 6, 2012, on *Democracy Now*.
- Kate Pickett, Big Think Interview, "Why Inequality is Bad for Your Health" <http://bigthink.com/katepickett>

**Week 5, February 15- February 21: Economic Inequality Today**

- Cass, race, and gender inequality
- Health and various other effects of inequality

**Assignments for Week 5:**

- Take the Unit I Online Quiz by: Saturday, February 20, or Sunday, February 21. Once the quiz is started, you must complete it.

**Readings:**

- The Pew Charitable Trust, "A Third of Americans Now Say They Are in the Lower Classes," and watch the accompanying short video on absolute vs. relative income mobility (link in the online course shell).
- Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 3
- Review two *New York Times* articles on the reasons for lagging wage growth and rising inequality:
  - David Leonhardt and Yaryna Serkez, "The U.S. is Lagging Behind Many Rich Countries. These Charts Show Why," July 2, 2020
  - Unions role - July 6, 2018

**Watch:**

- Richard Wilkinson's TED Talk, on the impact of inequality globally.

**Unit II: Diversity, Work, and Employee Rights (February 22- March 28)**

Employment law is the fundamental law of the workplace. It is essential for you to know something about your rights at work, or lack thereof. And obviously, future managers need to recognize their own rights and how they can, and cannot, treat employees.



Employment law is mutable—it has changed in the past and may change in the future. One of the most significant changes in American employment law occurred in the 1960s in the face of demands for greater equality by race, color, national origin, religion, and gender. Employment opportunities for people of different races and national origins have become more equal under the law since then. However, racial and ethnic divisions and discrimination still persist throughout the workforce.

Gender also matters for employment outcomes, although again, the workplace is much more equal today than in 1964 when the Civil Rights Act was passed. As more women have entered the workplace on a full-time basis, families are increasingly juggling the demands of two (or more) jobs along with the need to care for their families.

### **Week 6, February 22- February 28: Employment Rights in the United States**

- The NLRA (Wagner Act)
- Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA)
- Employee at-will
- Exceptions to employee at-will

#### **Assignments for Week 6:**

- Participate in the forum on employment rights. Pay particular attention to the instructions, as there will be additional questions toward the end of the week.

#### **Read:**

- Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 4
- Steven Greenhouse, Low-Wage Workers are Often Cheated. Study Says, September 1, 2009, *New York Times*.
- Lewis Maltby, Can They Do That? (New York: Portfolio, 2009). Chapter 4, "Wrongful Discharge and Employment at Will," pp. 57-67 and a portion of Chapter 13, "The Rights You Have," pp. 196-203.

#### **Watch:**

- Three short videos on Employment-at-Will and the common law exceptions from Professor Carla Katz
- CBSDFW short news story, November 2, 2016, "How Social Media Can Cost Someone Their Job."

### **Week 7, March 1- March 7: Work, Race, Ethnicity, and Equality**

- Civil Rights Act of 1964

- The Memphis Garbage Workers Strike with Martin Luther King
- Race, ethnicity, and inequality in the workplace

**Assignments for Week 7:**

- Participate in the forum on HRM policy (Parts 3C and 3D)

**Readings:**

- Sweet and Meskins, *Changing Contours of Work*, chapter 7
- Charlie LeDuff, "At a Slaughterhouse, Some Things Never Die: Who Kills, Who Cuts; Who Bosses Can Depend on Race," *New York Times*, June 16, 2000.
- "Whites Account for Under Half of Births in the U.S.," *New York Times*, May 17, 2002, p. 1.
- *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 2020, "California Latino, Black Residents Hit Harder by Coronavirus,"

**Watch:**

- *At the River I Stand* (directed by David Appleby, Allison Graham, and Steven Ross, 1993).
- Mr. Wade Henderson, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, Testimony to U.S. Senate Subcommittee, 2009 about the relationship between union rights and civil rights.

**Week 8, March 8- March 12: The New Immigration**

- Effects of immigration on wages and work
- Public policy debates regarding immigration policy for the United States

**Assignments for Week 8:**

- Participate in Forum 4. Pay particular attention to the instructions provided.

**Readings:**

- Immanuel Ness, *Immigrants, Unions, and the New U.S. Labor Market*, chapter 2 (Canvas)
- *New York Times*, 1/27/2007, "Study of Immigrants Links Lighter Skin and Higher Income"

**Watch:**

- Professor Janice Fine, LSER Department, Rutgers, speaking about immigration issues.

**Review:**

- Ellis Island Web site, "Immigration Timeline." Be sure to review information about the predominant nationalities of immigrants in various periods.

**March 13- March 21 Spring Break**

**Week 9, March 22- March 28: Gender, Work and Family**

- Women's participation in the paid labor force.
- Gender inequalities and discrimination.
- Work/family policies and the law

**Assignments for Week 9:**

- Complete Online Quiz Unit II: Available Saturday, March 27- Sunday, March 28. Once the quiz has started, it must be completed.

**Readings:**

- Sweet and Meskins, *Changing Contours of Work*, Chapters 5 and 6
- "Nearly 40 Percent of Mothers Are Now the Family Breadwinners", *Washington Post*, May 28, 2014

**Unit III Improving Working People's Lives (March 29- May 2)**

Union membership grew rapidly in the 1930s-1950s. Collective bargaining between unions and employers in major industries helped raise the standard of living not only for union members but



also for the entire workforce. For the past 35 years, however, the labor movement has been in steep decline in the U.S.

In this final unit for the course we will try our hand at collective bargaining during an in-class simulation. We will also explore the reasons why the labor movement has been in decline, as well as some of the newest and most innovative efforts on the part of unions, worker centers, and community organizations to organize workers in the ever-changing economy. The course will end with a discussion of public policies that could reshape the future of work.

**Week 10, March 29- April 4: Unions Today in the United States, Part I**

- What do unions do?
- Collective bargaining.
- Are unions good or bad for the economy?

**Assignments for Week 10:**

- Review PowerPoint on what American unions do
- **Those participating in the bargaining exercise should read the materials for the exercise starting this week. Next week you can begin meeting with your team to plan your strategy**

**Readings:**

- Kim Kelly, "What a Labor Union is and How it Works," *Teen Vogue*, March 12, 2018.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Union Members 2019."

**Explore:**



- "Learn about Unions" on the AFL-CIO website. This site contains a lot of information from an obviously pro-union perspective.

**Watch:**

- Reverend Jim Wallis, Sojourners, Testifying on unions and economic inequality, before a Senate subcommittee, 2009.
- Professor Paula Voos, Rutgers, Testifying about the economic effects of unions, before a Senate subcommittee, 2009.
- Professor Carla Katz, Rutgers, "Unions and Individual Voice"

**Week 11, April 5- April 11: The Legacy: The New Deal and Labor**

- A new relationship between government and working Americans in the 1930s
- Union growth and consolidation in the 1930s-40s
- The CIO and the sit-down strike
- The "New Deal System's" achievements and limitations

**Assignments for Week 10:**

- **First**, upload a copy of your post to demonstrate that it is not copied but is your own writing.
- Participate in Forum 5. The first post is due by Thursday evening; additional posts are due Sunday evening.
- You should be starting the COVID-19 paper.
- Review PowerPoint on Unions
- Collective Bargaining Teams meet to discuss the case & plan strategy. This is a planning session. You only need to read the case and the secret information before attending. Group Bargaining strategy due the day before your scheduled bargaining session. No exceptions.

**Readings:**

- Andrew Leonard, "Lessons for Obama from the New Deal," *Salon*, 2011.
- Jack Metzgar, Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000). "Getting to 1959," first part pp. 17-39.

**Watch:**

- Professor Paula Voos, Speaking about the New Deal, WWII and Labor (3 sections)
- A feature video (54 min.), "Mean Things Happening: The Great Depression, Part 5" from PBS also on You-Tube. Please pay particular attention to the second half of the video on steelworkers in Western Pennsylvania.
- A short You-Tube video regarding the early 1930s and the San Francisco General Strike: OPTIONAL
- A short You-Tube video on the sit-down strike and its use by the CIO Autoworkers union in the 1930s: OPTIONAL

**Week 12, April 12- April 18: Collective Bargaining Exercise or COVID-19 Paper**

**Assignments for Week 12:**

- Those writing a paper have a chance to complete it
- There are no additional reading or assignments this week. However, I recommend you consider starting the Week 13 reading/videos since it is the week with a great deal of content.

**Week 13, April 19- April 25: Unions Today (Part II) Union Organizing and Membership**

- How unions are formed
- Union membership trends over time
- New tactics of contemporary unions – example, the Fight for \$15

**Assignments for Week 13:**

- **First:** Take the union knowledge check. This is a quiz that you can take and retake over the course of the week until you get a perfect score and the full number of points (10).
- Review the PowerPoint on union membership
- **Submit the COVID-19 Paper via Canvas.**

**Read:**

- "The Process of Establishing Collective Bargaining," pp. 65-66 of Fact-Finding Report, Commission on the Future of Worker-Management Relations, May 1994.
- "The Fight for \$15," from Steven Greenhouse, Beaten Down, Worked Up, NY: Knopf, 2019, pp. 232-248.
- "Biggest Gains in Union Membership in 2017 Were for Younger Workers," by John Schmitt, EPI website, January 25, 2018.

**Watch:** Q&A videos on union organizing:

- Videos, Professor Carla Katz

**Watch:** For an overview of how employers combat union organizing campaigns:

- Target anti-union employee orientation video on YouTube
- Levitt, Confessions of a Union Buster Video on YouTube

**Watch:** For an understanding of where contemporary unions are strong and where they are struggling, and why:

- Professor Jeff Keefe on unions in the public sector and among low-wage service workers
- Two videos on unions today by Professor Adrienne Eaton. One is about the challenges posed by contingent and non-standard work. The other is about unions among athletes, actors, professors and other "stars."

**Week 14, April 26- May 2: Public Policy and the Future of Work**

**Assignments for Week 14:**

- Participate in an Extra Credit Forum (optional)
- Online Quiz Unit III: Available Saturday, May 1 through Sunday, May 2

**Read:**

- Sweet and Meiskins, Chapter 8.

**Watch:**

- Paul Krugman, May 17, 2012, "End This Depression Now: Paul Krugman Urges Public Spending, Not Deficit Hysteria," on *Democracy Now*.
- Adrienne Eaton, Professor, Labor Studies Department, Rutgers, Unions and Informal Work
- Dr. Teresa Boyer, Executive Director, Center for Women and Work, Rutgers, on Work and Family policy

**Week 15, May 3- May 9: Final Exam and Course Wrap up**

**Assignments for Week 15:**

- Take the short final exam. It will be available May 3. The exam **MUST** be submitted by May 9 at 11:59 pm.

**Appendix I**

**Collective Bargaining Assignment Dates and times**

If you choose the Collective Bargaining Exercise, you are required to participate in one of the three scheduled dates and times. You will have the option of choosing a first and second choice.

However, in the spirit of making full bargaining teams, your first choice may not be your final posted date and time

Option 1: Meet ONLINE Wed. April 7; Bargain Wed. April 14 -- both from 6:00-9:00 p.m.

Option 2: Meet ONLINE Sat. April 10; Bargain Sat. April 17 - both from 9:00 am-12:00 noon.

Option 3: Meet ONLINE Sun. April 11; Bargain Sunday April 18 from 4:00-7:00p.m.

## **Appendix II**

**COVID-19 Paper- Due April 25, 2020**

An individual paper of about five pages regarding the relationship between the COVID-19 economic crisis and particular things you are learning about in the course. Double spaced, Times New Roman 12 font. Your name **MUST** be on the paper. This is a paper to be written in your own words. You are not to simply answer my questions. My questions are merely a guide. Furthermore, it is to be in essay form.

1. For anyone:

- I. How is the COVID-19 virus (coronavirus) affecting and likely to affect working Americans? Which types of workers are most in danger of infection, of losing significant income, or unemployment? What policies by employers and government can/could help protect working Americans? How do you see the landscape of work changing for working Americans post COVID-19? Do you think more employers will be offering paid sick-leave or shifting to allow telecommuting for their workers? Should laws be changed given changes you predict?

2. For international students (or U.S. students, with permission): How does your country compare to the United States for one of the things we have studied this semester:

- I. For instance, is employment at will the general legal rule governing the employment relationship in your country or do significant differences exist with regard to when/why workers can be fired (discharged) by employers? Explain the law in your country in comparison to the U.S. In general, do workers have more rights in your country than they do in the U.S., about the same, or fewer rights? What led to that?
- II. Or, consider discrimination against certain groups of workers (women, young or old, ethnic/racial/religious minorities, class, disability) in the workplace/labor market (getting certain types of jobs; pay; etc.). What social attitudes in your country exist that create barriers for particular groups? Is your government trying to reduce certain types of discrimination and if so, what are they doing? In discussing this, please be sure to compare the situation in your country to the United States.
- III. Or, for instance, explain how worker representation by labor unions or other organizations works in your country. Do workers have more or less opportunity to be represented by a union than in the U.S. and why is that so? How do legal rights of workers to representation compare to the U.S.?
- IV. Or, for instance, consider migration/immigration. Does your country have a significant group of immigrants and if so, how does the situation they are in compare to that in the U.S.? Is there considerable hostility/discrimination toward immigrants among some of your citizens? What public policy debates about immigration are ongoing now? Or if your country is mostly a source of migration to other countries, where do your citizens mostly migrate to? How are they treated when they arrive to those countries – in comparison to how they are treated when they arrive in the U.S.?

