INTRODUCTION TO LABOR STUDIES AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
Labor Studies 100:90 online

Fall 2013
Professors David Bensman and Maureen Sheridan:

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Please copy both professors when you email about the course. That way on eof us can be sure to get back to you.

This is an online course that is largely asynchronous. But you do need to be able to schedule an online activity on the following days/times, so plan your schedule accordingly:

- Sat. Oct. 19 from 10:00 a.m.- noon or 1:00-3:00 p.m., or Sun. Oct. 20 from 6:00-8:00 p.m. or 8:00-10:00 p.m. to negotiate the syllabus – this is an online exercise designed to make you familiar with how the negotiating room virtual reality software works and to insure you have suitable computer equipment for the bargaining exercise that takes place later in the course. You will need to give us a first and second choice of days/times.

- Sat. Nov. 23  1:00 – 3:00 p.m. or
  Sat. Nov. 23  7:00-10:00 p.m., or
  Sun. Nov. 24  4:00 – 7:00 p.m. or
  Sun. Nov. 24  7:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.
  You will need to give us a first and second choice in order to participate in the bargaining exercise online.

Schedule: The weeks in the course begin on Monday and end on Sunday evening at 11 p.m. You often will have things due on either Thursday evening or Sunday evening, just like any course that meets twice a week. The schedule and the assignments are subject to change.

This course addresses the Social Analysis (SCL) Learning Objectives of SAS:

h. Understand the bases and development of human and societal endeavors across time and place.
m. Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization.
n. Apply concepts about human and social behavior to particular questions or situations.

Your progress toward understanding how work, workers, and forms of worker organization fit into these social science goals will be assessed through before/after test items and rubrics applied to written assignments.

Equipment needed: USB Headset with a microphone (other types don’t work well); please do not attempt to use an “open” microphone built into a personal computer because it leads to feedback that will bother other students. You also need a personal computer with broadband connection. An Ipad or other tablet will not be sufficient.

Evaluation (Subject to change via a collective negotiations exercise):
For purposes of grading, there are five components of the course:

- Introductory exercises (Personal information sheet; pre-test participation; negotiate the syllabus exercise participation) (5%)
- 3 Threaded Discussions (Forums) at 10% each (30%)
- Op. Ed. Writing assignment (8%)
- Rights check and union knowledge check (2%)
- Bargaining exercise (10%)
- 3 Quizzes at 12% each (36%)
- One page take home final (9%)

Unit I. The Situation Working People Face Today (Sept. 9 – Oct. 6)

Week 1: Introduction (Sept. 3-8)
- Explore what the course is about and make note of what is required of you.
- Learn how to use Pearson E-college and locate readings & other online resources. There are excellent instructional videos online about the use of the e-college system.
- Post information about yourself for the instructor and other students you will be working with (worth 1% of your grade)
- Take the Pre-test. Your score does not affect your grade but it is important to be sure how your computer will interact with the exam software to prevent later problems. (worth 1% of your grade)

Assignment for this week: Interview at least one parent or grandparent about your family’s work history (preferably more). You do not need to write anything about the interview. It will form the basis of an online discussion next week.

Week 2: Work and Our Lives (Sept. 9-15)

- You and your family’s history of work
- Intergenerational economic mobility and immobility
- Intergenerational transmission of resources (types of economic and social capital)

Read:

Sweet & Meskins, Chapter 1

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 (links in the shell).

Watch: Richard Florida interview on Big Think:  
http://bigthink.com/ideas/18241

**Due week 2: Participate in Forum 1:** You need to post at least once by Thursday evening, and then a second time by Sunday evening. Both quantity and quality count so you may want to post beyond this minimum.

**Week 3: Corporations & Work in the “New Economy” (Sept. 16-22)**

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


Watch: 4 Video excerpts from *The Corporation* on You-tube.

PBS video, “A Job at Fords” from the series, *The Great Depression*

**Week 4: Social Class in the U.S. (September 23-29)**

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

Read: *NYTimes* website on Social Class:  
http://www.nytimes.com/pages/national/class/

Be sure to read on this site:  
(1) the Overview article,  
(2) Tamar Lewin “Up from the Holle” and  
(3) David Leonhardt “The College Dropout Boom” and  
(4) at least two other articles/blogs from the site.  
(5) Also read Bob Herbert’s op. ed. linked to the site.  
**6) You should also be sure to do the interactive exercise on the NYTimes site using your family of social origin.**
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.


Kate Pickett, Big Think Interview, “Why Inequality is Bad for Your Health” http://bigthink.com/katepickett. The rest is optional viewing.


Due in week 4 – nothing. However, you should start working on the assignment that is due on Thursday next week.

Assignment: Write a 500 word Op-Ed. on social class and inequality. You can choose any one of the following three suggestions for a central theme (Op-Eds advocate an idea or a public policy).

(a) “Social class is real in the United States.” These Op-Eds are typically built around the personal experience of the author, their family, and/or people they know. See the New York Times website on social class for several examples.

(b) “Widening economic inequality is a big problem in the United States.” This type of Op-Ed needs to be built on facts (the Domhoff reading in week 5 has many) but must be written in a way that is readable, convincing, and often illustrated by either personal experience or that of others.

(c) “We should reduce economic inequality in the United States by passing the following law.” Here you would need to choose a public policy that would help reduce economic inequality and advocate convincingly for its effectiveness. Explain why it would reduce this current problem.

An Op-Ed is an opinion piece (named such because it is usually placed "opposite the editorials" in a publication) designed to offer an alternate position to what the media provides. Typically, an op-ed is written by an expert in a subject area or in industry. Generally, the goal of an op-ed is to educate the public on an issue. While the op-ed is largely an "opinion" piece, it must be based in fact and should be persuasive in style rather than a simple report. Take the time to edit, reedit and then reedit again. A clean, concise and compelling op-ed is your goal.

Week 5: Economic Inequality Today (Sept. 30 – Oct. 6)

- Class, race, and gender inequality
- Does the U.S. have a power pyramid?
- Health and other effects of income inequality

Read: Sweet & Meskins, Chapter 3, and

Review:

Power-point slides by Alan Kruegar, Chairman, Council of Economic Advisors of the President of the U.S., Jan 2012, “The Caucuses and Consequences of the Growth of Income Inequality.”

Watch:

Professor Jeff Keefe, LSER Department, Rutgers, speaking about economic inequality. There are two videos.

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


Assignment: Write a 500 word Op. ed. See week 4 (above) for details.

Take Online Quiz on Unit 1: Sunday October 6

Unit II: Diversity, Work, and Employee Rights (October 7 – November 3)

Week 6: Employment Rights in the U.S. (October 7-13)

- Employment at-will
- Exceptions to employment at-will
- The NLRA (Wagner Act) and state bargaining laws
- The Fair Labor Standards Act & the Occupational Safety and Health Act

First: Take the rights 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.

Read:

Sweet & Meskins, Chapt. 4

Steven Greenhouse, Low-Wage Workers are Often Cheated, Study Says, September 1, 2009, New York Times.


Center for American Progress, “10 Things to Know about the Employment Non-Discrimination Act,” from their website.

Watch: Videos on Employment at Will and the common law exceptions from Professor Carla Katz

Due Week 6: Participate in the forum on employment rights. At a bare minimum, the first comment is due by Thursday and the second by Sunday on each of the two scenarios.

Week 7: Work, Race, Ethnicity and Equality: (October 14-20)

- Race, ethnicity and inequality in the contemporary workplace
- Discrimination and Fairness
- Civil Rights Act of 1964
- The Memphis Garbage Workers Strike and Martin Luther King

Read: Sweet and Meiksins, Chapter 7, “Race, Ethnicity and Work.”


- pp. 107-112
- pp. 158-164
- pp. 192-197
- pp. 202-206


Watch: Three videos

(1) One is an excerpt from the movie, At the River I Stand, about the Memphis Garbage workers strike and Dr. Martin Luther King

(2) The second is a YouTube video that continues the story of the Memphis garbage strike.

(3) Mr. Wade Henderson, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, Testimony to U.S. Senate Subcommittee, 2009.


Due in Week 7: Participate in “negotiate the syllabus exercise” on Saturday or Sunday of
this week at your scheduled time. Instructions will be sent in the weekly message for this week.

**Week 8: The New Immigration (October 21-27)**
- Effects of immigration on wages and work
- Public policy debates regarding immigration policy for the U.S.

Read:


An optional reading by Ray Marshall is also available online.

Watch: Two videos

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.

**Week 9: Gender, Work and Family (October 28 – November 3)**
- Women’s participation in the paid labor force
- Gender inequalities and discrimination
- Work/family policies and the law

Read: Sweet and Meskins, Chapters 5 and 6, and


**Take Online Quiz on Unit II: Sunday November 3**

**Unit III Improving Working People’s Lives (November 4 – December 8)**

**Week 10: The Legacy: The New Deal and Labor (November 4-10)**
- 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

Read:

Watch: Various videos.

(1) Professor Paula Voos, Speaking about the New Deal, WWII and Labor (3 sections)

(2) A short You-Tube video regarding the early 1930s and the San Francisco General Strike:

(3) A short You-Tube video on the sit-down strike and its use by the CIO Autoworkers union in the 1930s:

(4) 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.

Due in week 10: Participate in Forum 3

Week 11: Unions Today, Part 1 (November 11-17)

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

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.

Read:


Posted materials for the bargaining exercise

Explore: “Learn about Unions” on the AFL-CIO website. See various pull down items, but be sure to review “Collective Bargaining,” and “The Union Difference” at the bottom of the bargaining page.

Watch:

(1) Reverend Jim Wallis, Sojourners, Testifying on unions and economic inequality, before a Senate subcommittee, 2009.
Due week 11: Organization of students for collective bargaining exercise will begin this week. You will be assigned a role and begin to have access to background materials you need to read for the exercise.

Week 12: Continue preparation for bargaining, and then bargain as part of your union or management team (November 18-24)

Read: Materials for the bargaining exercise posted online.

Due in Week 12: Bargaining preparation by your team due on Thurs (Initial proposals; bottom line, etc.). Contract bargaining with your team in the time you are assigned (Saturday or Sunday).


- How unions are formed
- Union membership trends over time


Watch Q&A videos on union organizing:

3 Videos, Professor Carla Katz

Watch for an overview of how employers combat union organizing campaigns:

(1) Target anti-union employee orientation video on YouTube

(2) 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:

(3) Professor Jeff Keefe on unions in the public sector and among low-wage service workers

(4) 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.”
Review: Power-point on union membership

**Week 14: Public Policy and the Future of Work (December 2 – 8)**

Read:

Sweet and Meiskins, Chapter 8.

Watch the following videos:


2. Adrienne Eaton, Professor, Unions and Informal Work

3. Dr. Teresa Boyer, Executive Director, on Work and Family policy

4. Sattik Deb, Director of Student Services, Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department “How you can get involved”

**Due in week 14:** Take Online Quiz on Unit III: Sunday December 8

**Short Week 15 Wrap Up (Dec. 9-11)**

A short (one page) take home final can be handed in any time over these 3 days.