I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

In the 1980s “contingent” or “non-standard” work was defined as any form of employment that departed from the “standard” full-time, year-round, fixed schedule, single-employer relationship. It included temporary, part-time, seasonal, day labor and on call work. It also included contract-company employment, independent contracting, and other forms of self-employment. In nearly all its forms, most experts, academics and workers understood contingent work as the kind of employment that you tried to avoid or find your way out of as soon as possible. It was all understood as the kind of employment that happened in low-wage “secondary” labor markets.

Fast-forward to the “downsizing” of 1990s” and the advice of a CEO who famously stated, “People need to recognize we are all contingent workers in one form or another!” And in case the message wasn’t clear, another corporate executive also quoted in the ‘90s put it this way:

“There will never be job security! You will be employed by us as long as you add value to the organization, and you are continuously responsible for finding ways to add value. In return, you have the right to demand interesting and important work, the freedom and resources to perform it will, pay that reflects your contribution, and the experience and training needed to be employable here or elsewhere.”

More recently, having struggled through the Great Recession, about all we can say is that employers have continued to think in these terms. They have, for the most part, made the case and pursued an employment agenda that calls for the continual and constant restructuring of work, fitting people to jobs (as opposed to the reverse), and the dismantling of jobs when the project or desired work is completed. It speaks to a model of “flexibility” that is an inherent feature of global neoliberal capitalism and it has permeated all labor markets in the developed and developing world.

It is in this new landscape of flexible, short-term thinking, and short-term work relationships, that this class will look at the contingent nature of all work. In short,
whether we like it or not, **we are all contingent** and thus we all need to prepare ourselves for kinds of employment uncertainty that lies ahead.

That said, for the first half of this course we will take a close look at how the neoliberal agenda has turned the idea of standard stable employment on its head and is forcing us all to rethink our relationships with employers. But rather than just look exclusively at employer/employee relationships, we will look a bit deeper into how the contingent nature of employment has and will continue to impact our communities, families, and working lives.

Once we have established our own place in the new and changing world of work, we will take a close look at how contingent work is currently organized in low-wage sectors across a wide range of industries and occupations. We will conclude the course with an analysis and evaluation of how worker-centers, unions, and communities are actively searching and testing out new strategies to combat and reverse the steadily deteriorating conditions that exist in most low-wage labor markets and throughout the country and globally.

**II. EXPECTATIONS**

**Preparation**
We will be covering a lot of ground in a very short time so please read and bring the assigned material to each class, take good notes and come to class ready to discuss what you’ve learned.

**We Will Disconnect!**
Using laptops, ipads or cell phones (including texting, talking, emailing, etc.) are all prohibited during class. (Occasionally, I will ask/allow you to use laptops and ipads but I will let you know when.)

**Communication**
Check your official Rutgers email account regularly for class announcements. I will communicate all course correspondence via email. Students are responsible for all information communicated via email. And please feel free to contact me (again via email or by phone if necessary) with questions or concerns about the course. I will do my best to get back to you within 24 hours.

When emailing always include “Contingent Work” in the subject line of your email.

**III. EVALUATION**

Final grades will be based on the following:

1. Class Prep (12pts)
2. Class attendance (14pts)
3. Class participation (14pts)
4. Mid-Term (30pts)
5. Final Exam (30pts)
Class Preparation
It is vitally important that you come to class ready to contribute to the discussion. With this in mind, everyone will be required to hand in a 1-page summary (approximately 300 words) for each weekly reading assignment—including weeks 3-14. Each summary is worth 1 point of your final grade (for a total of 12pts). One-page summaries should be delivered to the Sakai drop box prior to the start of each class. (Note: I will read them and keep in touch on an as needed basis.)

Attendance
Fourteen points (14pts) of your final grade will be based on attendance so it is vitally important that you come to every class. Failure to sign the sign-in sheet will result in a loss of attendance points. You can only be excused for an illness, death in the family or other real emergencies.

Students who are late to class will lose attendance points so please be punctual. Also, if you leave early without permission you will be marked absent for the entire class.

Participation
Another fourteen points (14pts) of your final grade will be based on your in-class participation. Class sessions will include short lectures, small group discussions, group exercises and large group discussions. The expectation is that everyone will have an opportunity to actively participate in each class.

When participating in discussions use your experience and the information you get from the readings. When you take a position try to back it up with facts, data, examples and your own experience. And above all, we must all be respectful and listen when others are speaking. You do not have to agree but you must give full attention and consideration to other points of view.

Mid-Term and Final Exams
The mid term and final will be worth 30pts each and they will be written take-home exams that will cover all course readings, lectures, discussion questions, films/documentaries, exercises, etc. You will have one week to complete the mid-term and one week to complete the final exam.

IV. COURSE READINGS
All reading assignments are available on the course Sakai website. You can access the site by following these directions:

- Go to http://sakai.rutgers.edu
- To log on, enter your Rutgers net ID and password in the upper right hand corner.
- Click on “resources” on the menu on the left hand side of the next page. You should see the course syllabus and all of the course readings.
V. SYLLABUS

COURSE INTRO/OVERVIEW:

W1&2. WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29 – THE SHAPE WE’RE IN


Sweet and Mieksins, *Changing Contours of Work*, Chapter 4: Whose Jobs Are Secure?

In-Class: Introduction: Our expectations for the class, review syllabus

For Group Discussion: Defining contingent work, the new limits on job security and what we want from work.

PART I: Work and Worry

W3. WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5TH – OUR EXPECTATIONS OF WORK

Read: Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character*, Chapters 1-4

In-Class Discussion on work, routine, and corporate flexibility

For Group Discussion: How connected are we to our jobs? How connected should we be? How connected do we want to be?

W4. WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12TH - THE REALITIES OF WORK IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Read: Richard Sennett, The Corrosion of Character, Chapters 5-8

In-Class: Discussion on risk, reward and failure

Movie: Office Space

W5. WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19TH – HOW LABOR MARKETS FUNCTION (I)


In-Class: Is labor a commodity defined by your basic supply and demand theories or is there more to the story?
For Group Discussion: Do we get what we deserve?

**W6. WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26TH – HOW LABOR MARKETS FUNCTION (II)**

Read: Jeffery J. Sallaz, *Labor, Economy and Society*, Chapters 5-8

In-Class: Are labor markets really about individual buyers and sellers or do employers and workers act more in more collectively defined ways?

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**Part II: How Did We Get Here?**

**W7. WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5TH – HOW FIRMS THINK AND HOW WE RESPOND**

Read: Osterman and Shulman, *Good Jobs America: Making Work Better For Everyone*, Chapters 3 and 4

In-Class: How do employers “think” about labor? To what extent do high wage employers “think” about labor differently than low wage employers?

Movie: Money Ball

**W8. WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12TH – HOW SHOULD WE THINK ABOUT OUR LABOR?**

Read: Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class As Soul Craft*

In-class: How do you develop skills and who decides what is and is not skilled labor?

**MID-TERM TAKE HOME TEST (DUE MARCH 26TH)**

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**PART III: The Temp Economy**

**W9. WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26TH – INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS (PORT TRUCKERS)**

Read: *David Bensman, Port Trucking: Down the Low Road*

In-Class: When is a contractor an employee?

Group Discussion: The worker/contractor disconnect.

**MID-TERM TO BE HANDED IN AT THE START OF CLASS**

**W10. WEDNESDAY, APRIL 2ND – LOW WAGE TEMPS**
Read: Mike Grabel, Pro Publica, *Temp Land Working in the New Economy*
http://www.propublica.org/series/temp-land

In-Class: Low wage work and why no one gets out…

Group Discussion: Connecting low temps with Richard Sennett’s bakery workers.

Movie: On The Waterfront

**W11. WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9TH – DAY LABORERS**

Read: Dick J. Reavis, *Catching Out: The Secret World of Day Laborers*

In-Class: Comparing the worlds of day laborers, temps and independent contractors

Group Discussion: Organizing day laborers

**Documentary:** Farmingville

**W12. WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16TH – ADJUNCTS AND EDUCATION**

Read: *To Be Announced*

In-Class: How are the problems of adjuncts, day laborers, temps and independent contractors similar and how are they different?

**Documentary:** Con Job: Stories of Adjunct and Contingent Labor

**PART IV: Turning Bad Jobs Into Better Jobs**

**W13. WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23RD – CURRENT WORKER AND POLICY INITIATIVES (I)**


In-Class: Can you turn a bad low wage job into a good job?

**W14. WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30TH – CURRENT WORKER AND POLICY INITIATIVES (II)**

Read: *To Be Announced*

In-Class:
Final Exam