

**INTRODUCTION TO LABOR STUDIES AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS**  
**Labor Studies 575:100, Section 80 – Fall 2011**  
**Tuesday, 6:00 to 8:40 p.m.**

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Office Hours by Appointment: Wednesdays, 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.

The purpose of this course is to provide students with an overview of the world of work, the history and key activities of U.S. labor unions, and the challenges facing working people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As an academic discipline, Labor Studies addresses these issues from the perspective of working people and their labor organizations. In this respect, the field of Labor Studies is closely linked to workers' aspirations for an improved standard of living, rewarding and fulfilling work, and a more democratic society.

Although this course is based on a labor-oriented perspective, students are encouraged to freely express their views, including those that are critical of labor unions. Respect for and appreciation of different viewpoints will be a guiding principle in the class. Through lectures, group activities, and class discussions, we will attempt to develop a more critical understanding of the subject matter.

Here are some important guidelines for student participation in the class:

- Students are expected to read the material assigned for each class and be prepared to discuss it. For each class, there will be questions on the reading assignment posted on Sakai. We will have group discussions in most of the classes.
- Check Sakai and your email several days before the class to see if there are any changes in the class schedule or requirements.
- Take careful lecture notes. Material from the lectures will be included in the exams.

**LEARNING OUTCOME GOALS IN THE COURSE**

The following learning outcome goals in the course are based on Rutgers University's "Permanent Core Curriculum Learning Outcome Goals" (May 2008).

B: Social Science and History

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

## **ON-LINE ACCESS TO READING ASSIGNMENTS**

All of readings can be accessed and downloaded through Rutgers' "Sakai" web site. Here are the steps for accessing this material:

1. Go to <http://sakai.rutgers.edu>
2. Enter your Rutgers' email account UserID and password at the top right corner
3. Click tab 37:575:100:80 Fall 2011
4. Click resources – the list of reading materials will appear
5. For specific readings, click on the date and reading listed
6. You will need Adobe Acrobat or a similar program to download and print the material

## **DESCRIPTION OF CLASSES AND ASSIGNMENTS DUE**

### **Class #1 – September 6, 2011**

#### **Introductory Discussion/Course Requirements:**

In the first class, we discuss how Labor Studies, as an academic discipline, examines the world of work, the organizations that working people have formed to protect and advance their interests, and the key challenges facing working people. We initially explore why these issues are both personally relevant to students, as well as socially significant. Finally, we review the syllabus and the course requirements.

## **PART ONE – EXPLORING THE WORLD OF WORK**

### **Class #2 – September 13, 2011**

#### **An Exploration of Our Work Experiences: What Makes a Job “Good” or “Bad”?**

Almost everybody works, but, unfortunately, many people do not have good work experiences, whether they are employed as blue- or white-collar workers. After reviewing some basic features of the economy and the U.S. workforce, we discuss our own and others' work experiences. We will identify what makes work enjoyable and fulfilling, and what makes work a drudgery that has to be endured.

#### **Readings:**

- Ehrenreich, B. (2001), Nickel and Dimed: Or Not Getting By in America, Henry Holt and Company, pp.11-49.
- Fraser, J.A. (2001), White-Collar Sweatshop: The Deterioration of Work and Its Rewards in Corporate America, W.W. Norton & Company, pp. 3-11.
- Sweet, S. and Meiksins, P. (2008), Changing Contours of Work: Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy, Pine Forge Press, An Imprint of Sage Publications, Inc., pp. 23-38

**\*\*\*\*Response Paper Due via Sakai**

### **Class #3 – September 20, 2011**

#### **Vulnerable Workers: At-will Employment, Low Wages, & Income Inequality**

Over 70% of U.S. workers are at-will employees who can be legally fired or laid off by their employer for almost any reason. At the same time, even though the United States is known as the land of opportunity, low wage, dead-end jobs constitute a significant part of our economy, and the U.S. has the highest level of income inequality among all developed countries. We examine the negative impact of at-will employment, income inequality, and low wages on working people. Students will view Waging a Living, a PBS documentary on the struggle of low-wage workers to survive in the U.S.

#### Readings:

- Boushey, H. and Fremstad, S. (2008), “The Wages of Exclusion: Low-wage Work and Inequality,” New Labor Forum, 17 (2), pp. 9-19.
- Maltby, L. (2009), Can They Do That?, Portfolio Press, pp. 57-67. (“Wrongful Discharge and Employment Will”)
- Sherman, A. and Stone, C. (2010), “Income Gaps Between Very Rich and Everyone Else More Than Tripled in Last Three Decades, New Data Show,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, pp. 1-7.
- Zweig (2000), The Working Class Majority: America’s Best Kept Secret, ILR Press, pp. 77-93. (“Looking at the ‘Underclass’”)

### **Class #4 – September 27, 2011**

#### **Why Social Class Matters**

Social class has an extremely significant impact on all aspects of our lives, including our work experiences. Our social class largely determines whether work is good or bad, and what our career opportunities are. In this class, we will discuss several perspectives on social class, including Michael Zweig’s view that class is primarily a function of power differences between different groups (capitalist class, middle class, and working class) within the economy.

#### Readings:

- Zweig, Michael (2000), The Working Class Majority: America’s Best Kept Secret, ILR Press, pp. 9-37. (“The Class Structure of the United States”)
- Scott, J. and Leonhardt, D. (2005), “Shadowy Lines That Still Divide,” in Class Matters, Henry Holt and Company, pp. 1-26.

#### **\*\*\*\*Assignment: Paper on your family’s economic and class history – Due 9/27/11**

**Interview your parents** (or another person who has raised you) about their work history and work life. Then, write a 5 pages paper relating their experiences to the reading assignments and class discussions. Some key questions to ask are: What jobs have they had (paid and unpaid)? Would they choose to do these jobs again? Were these jobs “good” or “bad”? Were they in a union or employee organization? Did they receive fair treatment and adequate wages and

benefits? Have their experiences in the workplace been determined more by their individual abilities and efforts or by their social network and social class? Based on Michael Zweig's theory of social class (assigned reading for for Class #4), what social class is your family in?

## **PART TWO – LABOR UNIONS: A COLLECTIVE RESPONSE TO “BAD” JOBS**

### **Class #5 – October 4, 2011**

#### **What Are Labor Unions? How Have They Changed?**

One response of working people to “bad” jobs is to come together and form a labor union to advance their economic interests, gain protection against unfair treatment, and to equalize the power differences between themselves and their employers. In this class we will discuss what a labor union is and how unions benefit working people. We will also discuss the ways in which labor unions have changed in response to social, economic, and legal trends in U.S. history. Students will view a documentary, Sit Down and Fight – Walter Reuther and the Rise of the UAW, which focuses on the GM sit-down strike in 1936/37.

#### Readings:

- Schmitt, J. and Warner, K. (2010), “The Changing Face of U.S. Labor, 1983-2008,” Working USA: The Journal of Labor and Society, 13(2), pp. 263-279.
- Slott and Voos, “U.S. Labor History”
- Yates, Michael (2009), Why Unions Matter, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Monthly Review Press, pp. 31-46 (“Why Unions?”).

### **Class #6 – October 11, 2011**

#### **Key Activities of Labor Unions**

To defend and advance the interest of working people vis-à-vis their employers, labor unions engage in several key activities. First, labor unions negotiate contracts with employers regarding the wages, benefits, and working conditions of employees. Once a contract has been negotiated, a labor union enforces the provisions of the contract through the “grievance and arbitration procedure” and other membership representation activities. However, a union’s ability to negotiate good contracts and effectively represent its members is crucially dependent on whether the union can organize (i.e. recruit) new members and advance its agenda in the political arena. In this class, we examine unions’ membership representation, organizing, and political activities.

#### Readings:

- Maurer, Michael (2001). The Union Member’s Complete Guide, Union Communication Services, Inc., pp. 67-85.
- Strom, A. (2006). “U.S. Labor Law,” in Current Economic Issues, edited by the Dollars and Sense Collective, Economic Affairs Bureau, pp. 17-21.

- Yates, Michael (2009), Why Unions Matter, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Monthly Review Press pp. 47-49, 52-59, 63-67 (“How Unions Form”); pp. 111-25. (“Unions and Politics”)
- United Electrical Workers. (2005). “Using the Seven Tests,” in UE Steward, (November).

**Class #7 – October 18, 2011**

**\*\*\*\*Take home Mid-term exam (Covers material from Class #1 to #6) is due + in-class viewing of movie, followed by essay question**

**PART THREE - GAINING A VOICE IN THE WORK PLACE: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

**Class #8 – October 25, 2011**

**The Bargaining Process**

How does collective bargaining work? In this class we examine the legal and procedural aspects of bargaining, key provisions of a contract, and dispute resolution procedures. Then, we will prepare for the collective bargaining simulation that will occur during the next two classes.

Reading:

- Maurer, Michael (2001). The Union Member’s Complete Guide, Union Communication Services, Inc., pp. 41-65.
- Slott, M. (2011), “Collective Bargaining Simulation Material”

**\*\*\*\*Response Paper Due via Sakai**

**Class #9 – November 1, 2011**

**Collective Bargaining Simulation Continued**

Teams of students will negotiate with each other as part of a collective bargaining simulation.

**Class #10 – November 8, 2011**

**Collective Bargaining Simulation Completed**

The collective bargaining simulation will be completed during the class. Then, we will discuss the results. (An analysis of the simulation will be due November 15.)

**PART FOUR - DEBATES AND CONTROVERSIES**

**Class # 11 – November 15, 2011**

## **Gender, Race, and the World of Work**

Over the last fifty years, women and people of color have joined the workforce in large numbers. Although the workforce has become more diverse, racism and sexism continue to be serious problems both within the labor movement and the economy as a whole. In this class, we will examine the role of women and people of color in the workforce and the impediments to full equality in employment relations. In this context, we will explore the labor movement's "mixed" record with respect to the struggles of women and people of color for justice on the job, as well as the arguments for and against affirmative action. Students will view At the River I Stand, a documentary on the strike of African-American sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee in 1968, a strike supported by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

### Readings:

- Sweet, S. and Meiksins, P. (2008), Changing Contours of Work: Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy, Pine Forge Press, An Imprint of Sage Publications, Inc., pp.53-78, 87-112.
- Yates, Michael (2009), Why Unions Matter, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Monthly Review Press, pp. 141-67 ("Race, Gender, Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation").

**\*\*\*\*Assignment Due– Analysis of the Collective Bargaining Final Settlement or Last Offers**

<b>THANKSGIVING BREAK – <u>NO</u> CLASS ON NOVEMBER 22</b>
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## **Class #12 – November 29, 2011**

### **Is Globalization Good for Working People?**

One of the most important and controversial developments affecting working people has been the globalization of the economy. Globalization has had a significant impact on labor standards, working conditions, the level of employment, and the relationship between unions and employers. We will examine the debate over globalization, including labor's responses to globalization and free trade.

### Readings:

- International Monetary Fund. (2008), "Globalization: A Brief Overview," Issues Brief, May, pp. 1-12.
- Macewan, A. (2006). "The Gospel of Free Trade," in Real World Globalization, edited by the Dollars & Sense Collective, Boston, MA: Economic Affairs Bureau, pp. 1-8.
- Zweig, Michael (2000), The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret, ILR Press, pp. 141-151 ("Power and Globalization").

**\*\*\*\*Response Paper Due via Sakai**

## **Class #13 – December 6, 2011**

## **What Is the Appropriate Public Policy Regarding Immigration?**

Throughout our history, immigration has had a significant impact on the economy, workplace conditions, and union activity. As immigrant workers (both documented and undocumented) have become an increasingly greater presence in the work force during the last twenty years, the issue of immigration has become extremely controversial. For many years, the AFL-CIO – the largest national labor organization - opposed immigration in order to protect “American jobs.” Recently, however, the AFL-CIO and the other national labor federation – Change to Win - have taken a position in strong support of immigrant workers’ rights. On the other hand, anti-immigrant groups have gained popularity. In this class, we will examine the impact of immigrant workers on the workforce and organized labor’s stance toward immigrant workers. We will explore what is the most appropriate public policy response to immigration.

### Readings:

- AFL-CIO. (2006). “Responsible Reform of Immigration Laws Must Protect Working Conditions for all Workers in the U.S.,” [www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheaficio/ecouncil/ec02272006e.cfm](http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheaficio/ecouncil/ec02272006e.cfm), pp. 1-4.
- Lowenstein, R. (2006). “The Immigration Equation,” New York Times, July 9, [www.nytimes.com/2006/07/09/magazine/09IMM.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/09/magazine/09IMM.html), pp. 1-14.
- Sweet, S. and Meiksins, P. (2008), Changing Contours of Work: Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy, Pine Forge Press, An Imprint of Sage Publications, Inc., pp.113-117.
- Wong, K & Munoz, C. (2004). “Don’t Miss the Bus: The Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride,” New Labor Forum, Summer, pp. 61-66.

## **Class #14– December 13, 2011**

### **Which Way for Labor?**

The decline of unions in the private sector and the attack on unions in the public sector have stimulated both debate and internal conflict over the appropriate strategies for rebuilding an ailing labor movement. Disagreements among national union leaders led to a split in the AFL-CIO and the formation of a rival national labor federation, Change to Win, in 2005. Beyond this organizational dispute among existing unions, there have been proposals to create new types of labor organizations to meet the needs of workers who are difficult to organize into “conventional trade unionism.” In the final class of the semester, we will examine which strategies and approaches have the most potential for revitalizing the labor movement.

### Readings:

- Fine, J. (2007). “Why Labor Needs a Plan B: Alternatives to Conventional Trade Unionism,” New Labor Forum, 16(2), pp. 35-44.
- Freeman, R. & Rogers, J. (2002). “A Proposal to American Labor,” The Nation, June 6, pp. 1-6. <http://www.thenation.com/doc/2002624/rogers/print>
- Slott, M. (2004, 2008). “Labor’s Revitalization: Restructuring & Internal Democracy,” pp. 1-10.

**December 19, 2011 – Take home Exam submitted by this date**

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## **Course Requirements**

For the purpose of grading, there are five components of the class.

### **Component #1 – Response papers submitted via Sakai**

For each class, there will be one or several questions posted on Sakai regarding the reading assignments. For Class #2 (9/13), #8 (10/25), and #12 (11/29), students will submit a 2 pages<sup>1</sup> response paper via Sakai. **10% of the grade.**

### **Component #2 – Paper on Your Family’s Class and Economic History – Due September 27, 2011**

Based on the discussion and reading assignments for Class #1 through Class #4, each student will submit a 5 pages paper on their family’s class and economic history. (See p. 4 for a description of the paper and the questions to be answered. **20% of the grade**

### **Component #3 – Take home Mid-term Exam – October 18, 2011**

The take home exam will be based on the reading assignments, class discussions, and lectures from Class #1 through Class #6. Students will complete the take home exam after writing a short essay regarding a video that will be shown in class on 10/18/11. **25% of the grade.**

### **Component #4 – Collective Bargaining Simulation Analysis – November 15, 2011**

As part of a team (either union or management), students will bargain a contract based on material provided by the instructor. Each student will submit individually an analysis of the final settlement (or final offers). **20% of the grade**

### **Component #5 – Second Mid-term Exam – Take home - Due December 19, 2011**

The take home exam will be based on the material from Class #8 through Class #14. **25% of the grade.**

### **Absenteeism – Impact on Grade:**

Students are expected to attend all classes; if you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence.

Please note: My policy is that a student who has two or more unexcused absences during the semester will have their grade reduced.

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<sup>1</sup> The number of pages is based on double-spacing, 8.5 x 11 paper, and 1 inch margins.