

**\*\*\*\*Call for Proposals (CfP): The RU Global Future of Workers Grant Opportunity\*\*\*\***

Due: August 1, 2021

**EXTENDED DUE DATE: September 30, 2021**

**PhD Student Organizing Committee:** Jacob Barnes, Alysa Hannon, Jiyeon Park, Justin Vinton, Phela Townsend; *Faculty Advisor:* Prof. Tobias Schulze-Cleven

**Submit proposals (and any questions) to:** [CGWE.RUGlobalGrant@gmail.com](mailto:CGWE.RUGlobalGrant@gmail.com)

*[Scroll down for instructions re. submitting a proposal or [click here to view online](#)]*

**Summary:** The Center for Global Work and Employment (CGWE) at the Rutgers University's School of Management and Labor Relations (SMLR) is accepting proposals for small innovation grants (~\$1000) from PhD students pursuing research on work that includes one or more of the following dimensions and has the potential to include the others: relevance to global dynamics or systems and/or underrepresented regions/voices in labor research; interdisciplinary framing and accessible language; application to practice; and, broad relevance to the Future of Work(ers) discourse. Selected applicants will join a global, interdisciplinary, PhD student cohort and will be required to participate in four programmatic (virtual) capacity-building and community-building activities described below (3 virtual convenings; provision of comments on 1 paper).

**Motivating Context:**

As the Future of Work (FoW) discourse has matured, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers have interrogated its parameters, assumptions, and scope, uncovering crucial blind spots in what has become an overly narrow debate characterized by technological and market determinism. Leveraging the now popular rhetorical move from a "Future of Work" to a "Future of Workers [FoW(ers)]," this grant seeks both to promote a more inclusive FoW(ers) discourse by centering workers' perspectives and to democratize access to it so that a greater diversity of scholars may shape it (Gupta, S., Lerner, S., & McCartin, J.A., 2018; Schulze-Cleven, T. & Vachon, T.E., eds., forthcoming 2021; Schulze-Cleven, T., 2021).

The framing of the FoW discourse has dramatic consequences for all stakeholders inside and outside of academia interested in addressing the challenges and exploiting the opportunities of the next era of work. The "Future of Workers" perspective strives to bring agency back into the equation, showcasing the many political, social, and economic decisions we make which shape our collective future. It also demands that we articulate our assumptions and provide historical context around what is meant by the Future of Work and its frequent topics of debate (Lee & Tapia, 2021). Important to the FoW(ers) approach is an interrogation of both implicit and explicit interests, as well as a denaturalization of market mechanisms, including accounting for whom the current foci of the FoW discourse are a priority and/or reality and by whom economic phenomena, technological and otherwise, are made possible.

In particular, these grant activities are intended to investigate (1) the global parameters of the FoW(ers) debate and (2) its interdisciplinary dimensions; both elements are further elaborated below.

***A Global FoW(ers):*** As workers, firms, and consumers navigate international supply chains and globalized labor, consumer, and product markets, the academic arena dedicated to the study of work has struggled to keep pace. Comparative lenses often predicated on the predictability of persistent national differences have also failed to capture the increasingly global, cross-national, and transnational nature of work and of the challenges facing workers. Broadly, this grant seeks to address two shortcomings of the FoW discourse as it pertains to its global dimensions: (1) the overemphasis on Anglo-American and European nations including the sustained neglect of the rest of the world in FoW research (Lee & Tapia, 2021); and (2) the insufficient understanding of global systems and dynamics including the treatment of national case studies (frequently of Anglo-European countries) as closed ecosystems (Tapia, Ibsen, & Kochan, 2015).

***Interdisciplinary inquiry for a relevant FoW Discourse & Academy:*** While many in academia call for more interdisciplinary scholarship, there remain few good examples of interdisciplinary work (Schulze-Cleven, T., Herrigel, G., Lichtenstein, N., and Seidman, G, 2017). In labor research in particular, the demand for a more holistic understanding of both workers' identities and the intersecting realms of worker power has increased the stakes of interdisciplinarity, pushing scholars to stretch beyond their disciplinary homes and acknowledge the complicated world in which workers live. Additionally, if the goal of labor research is in part to understand and ask relevant questions regarding as full a range of workers' perspectives as possible, then labor researchers must move beyond myopic, narrow, and internal conversations within their disciplinary journals and find ways of more clearly communicating with people who not only live the experience many scholars seek to analyze but necessarily understand it best. Finally, for social scientists wishing to see their work have impact beyond a particular scholarly community, a single discipline, or the academy, the superficial barrier of disciplinary, esoteric language must be overcome.

***The Role for IR scholars and institutions:*** As Industrial Relations (IR) scholars in training, we believe there is an important role to be played in shaping the FoW(ers) discourse by the scholarly community which has been focused on labor research for the last century; and, we believe that now is a pivotal moment for IR to play it. While some of the historical targets of IR research like formal unions have declined in significance in recent decades (though with important recent upticks in activity), questions about work have arguably not loomed larger since the founding of IR in the early 20th century. Not only in the academy, but also in the realms of politics, policy, and culture urgent questions about work abound and a wide variety of stakeholders are interested in innovative answers to them.

Certainly, the field of Industrial Relations also reflects the challenges discussed above. IR research has generally focused on the Anglo-European experience and its lens has been overwhelmingly national in scope (Lee & Tapia, 2021). Additionally, though the field was founded as explicitly multidisciplinary in nature, many of IR's leading scholars believe it must more actively re-engage its interdisciplinary roots in order to successfully reimagine itself at this important moment for work, workers, and for IR (Schulze-Cleven, T., Herrigel, G., Lichtenstein, N., and Seidman, G, 2017).

In the last decade, scholars across a diversity of disciplines, from sociology and political science to anthropology and business, have expressed growing interest in questions about work. And for decades prior without overwhelming attention, scholars of work have been gathering under the umbrellas of fields like Industrial Relations, incubating a dynamic community and a unique orientation to the study of work and labor. Now is an opportune time for IR scholars to welcome others into that community and exchange insights as well as frameworks for inquiry.

***Grant Partners:*** Rutgers University's School for Management and Labor Relations is well-positioned to lead this conversation, as it has for decades served as an important home to scholars hailing from a wide range of disciplines but united by a shared proverbial laboratory for social science research: the world of work. That academic home has provided an incredible resource to SMLR's faculty and students, a resource many scholars of work, scattered across disciplines without a peer group of labor scholars, lack. This grant aims to make that resource available to an international, multi-disciplinary cohort of PhD students and at the same time learn from them to reinvigorate IR. SMLR's Center for Global Work and Employment (CGWE) has also made notable efforts to internationalize the study of labor and employment relations at SMLR and this initiative, hosted at the CGWE, builds on that work.

In periods of disjuncture, gaps must be actively bridged and dots connected, translating old frameworks into new ones so that knowledge and expertise is not lost in the transition but instead leveraged to traverse new landscapes, avoiding mistakes and recognizing early opportunities. Ultimately, this grant seeks to do just that: build a bridge that connects young innovative scholars of work to a rich hub of accrued insights for a global, interdisciplinary, and informed conversation about work and workers that reflects the realities of the 21st century.

### **Project Goals**

With this grant, we hope **(1)** to reframe the FoW discourse so that workers are put at the center of the conversation and that the agency of actors to shape markets is directly confronted; **(2)** to cultivate a conversation not just in an international and comparative context but in a truly global one, centrally incorporating non-Anglo/European voices and cases; and, finally **(3)** to engage scholarship that asks real-world, necessarily interdisciplinary questions whose application is designed to be useful to realms outside of the academy.

Our primary objective is the creation of an interdisciplinary, global forum of exchange and personal-professional connection for PhD students, with particular focus on connecting with students outside of the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Australia and/or who center non-Eurocentric voices in their research.

To an extent, these goals reflect some of the most critical challenges in academia writ large. The grant's organizers are therefore eager to support PhD students who are willing to ask difficult questions of themselves and of research and then operationalize innovative answers to them through their research projects.

Additionally, in light of the myriad crises upon which the COVID-19 pandemic has shed light, the organizing committee has reaffirmed its original foci in two important respects and made an effort to take each a step further in responding to the political urgency of the last year: (1) In terms of an interdisciplinary approach, the committee went further to indicate that interdisciplinary approaches and language should ultimately translate not just across academic silos but outside the academy and be mutually intelligible to a cross-section of experts not just academics (e.g., practitioners); and, (2) In reaffirming a global focus, the committee seeks to reassert the need for non-Eurocentric perspectives on issues of work. This includes the choir of voices representing minority, immigrant, and diaspora communities from within Anglo-European states as well.

Under the thematic banner of the "Future of Work(ers)" in an intimate setting intentionally designed to be global in scope, interdisciplinary in language, and practice-oriented in nature, this grant hopes to cultivate a community of scholars of work.

***Summary of Activities:*** Selected cohort members must commit to a set of 4 activities: (1) a half day virtual roundtable facilitated by CGWE/SMLR (virtual attendance required); (2) a 1 day virtual midpoint workshop (virtual attendance required); (3) a 1 day virtual convening (or potentially in-person, pending COVID-19 developments\*) designed for a wider audience and participation in at least one panel (virtual attendance required); and, (4) review and provision of comments on 1 paper authored by another cohort member.

\*The brief event descriptions are outlined below with the assumption that in-person convenings remain unfeasible. If the COVID-19 pandemic is mitigated such that in-person or semi-virtual convenings are possible, the committee may choose to explore semi-virtual or in-person options, in particular the final convening (Activity 3). The committee will continue to monitor the situation as well as Rutgers University's guidance and follow recommendations accordingly; in addition, the committee will at all times err on the side of caution and be respectful of all participants' variable situations (personal and national) as well as varying levels of risk tolerance.

- **Activity 1 [Cohort Roundtable (virtual), ½ day, October 2021]:** The workshop will include introductions & brief presentations by cohort members; an overview of funding restrictions; Q&A; a CGWE-SMLR panel on the “Future of Work(ers)” and practice-oriented research; and a small group exercise.
- **Activity 2 [Mid-point Workshop (virtual), 1 day, April 2022]:** The mid-point workshop will be focused on structured exchange of the researchers’ experience as it pertains to the 3 primary project goals: (1) articulating implications for Future of Work(ers) framework; (2) identifying relevance of research questions for global context; (3) translation of academic research into practical application. CGWE/SMLR Faculty will help facilitate this event.
- **Activity 3 [Final Convening, 1-2 day, October 2022]:** The final convening will be hosted by the CGWE and focused on sharing the lessons learned and insights of the cohort with a wider audience. Cohort members will be expected to participate in at least one panel.
- **Activity 4 [Review/Comments on 1 Paper]:** Cohort members will be paired to provide comment on and review one paper of another cohort member.
- [Post-mortem] Cohort members will be asked to join for a final post-mortem virtual discussion (1 hour) on the program so that committee organizers can improve the program in future years.

In addition to cohort membership and the in-kind resources in the form of structured programming described above, cohort members will be provided microgrants of ~\$1000. Funding will be dispersed in two installments (November 2021 & April 2022). Grant organizers hope the community forged by the cohort will be the most important benefit offered by the program; if opportunities arise for cohort members to work together in a formal capacity (e.g., on a publication), additional funding may be available to support such collaboration. Comparative researchers seeking a broader spectrum of cases would be good candidates for this program.

### **Instructions for Submitting a Proposal**

**Eligibility:** All enrolled PhD students are encouraged to apply. Students interested are not required to have already identified the global dimensions (as described herein) of their work, but they must indicate in their proposal submissions how they plan to identify and articulate them through the grant activities.

Please provide the following:

1. Summary of your research project (no more than 500 words)
2. Personal statement (no more than 250 words)
3. Responses to the following questions (no more than 250 words for each response)

- a. (1) What are the global dimensions of your research project and how does your research project amplify underrepresented voices or regions in labor research? If you are not sure, what may those dimensions be?
  - b. (2) In what specific ways do you envision an interdisciplinary forum being helpful to your research project?
  - c. (3) How does your research project help enrich the FoW(ers) discourse?
4. Explain in detail how you would use the ~\$1000 of funding toward your research project (no more than 500 words). General restrictions on the use of funds are indicated below.\*

Cohort members will be selected with geographical diversity and a diversity of voices in mind; they will also be selected based on assessed synergies among the projects for optimal exchange and cross-project insight.

**All proposal submissions will be due by August 1, 2021 and notification of acceptance will be announced no later than August 31, 2021.**

***\*Funding Restrictions re. Allowable and Unallowable Expenses:*** Allowable expenses include expenses specific to and required by the research project described in the funded proposal. They might include specific expendable supplies and materials; rental fees for required equipment, tools, and instruments; the hourly services of a specialized technician (other than the researcher) including the hourly compensation of interviewees. Unallowable Expenses include any expenses and activities not directly related to the specific project described in the funded proposal or related to the specific project but which occur outside of the term of engagement. This includes expenses related to general scholarly purposes but not directly and specifically required for the described research project (For example, the purchase of software that is not specific to the described project; memberships in professional societies; journal subscriptions; or book purchases). Other unallowable expenses include salary payments for researchers or faculty; student aid, student tuition, or any student fees or subsidies; reoccurring costs like telephone services, rental or lease costs; any costs associated with the purchase of general equipment, software, and/or any capital expense or permanent upgrade.

**Questions regarding allowable expenses or any other element of this project and the call for proposals can be directed to: [CGWE.RUGlobalGrant@gmail.com](mailto:CGWE.RUGlobalGrant@gmail.com)**

## **References**

Gupta, S., Lerner, S., and McCartin, J.A. 2018 (Aug. 31). "It's Not the 'Future of Work,' It's the Future of Workers That's in Doubt." The American Prospect.  
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Lee TL, Tapia M. 2021. Confronting Race and Other Social Identity Erasures: The Case for Critical Industrial Relations Theory. *ILR Review*;74(3):637-662. doi:10.1177/0019793921992080

Schulze-Cleven, Tobias, Gary Herrigel, Nelson Lichtenstein and Gay Seidman. 2017. "Beyond Disciplinary Boundaries: Leveraging Complementary Perspectives on Global Labour." *Journal of Industrial Relations* 59(4): 510–537.

Schulze-Cleven, Tobias and Todd E. Vachon, eds. 2021. *Revaluing Work(ers): Toward a Democratic and Sustainable Future* (LERA Research Volume Series). Champaign, IL: Labor and Employment Research Association (distributed by Cornell University Press).

Schulze-Cleven, Tobias. 2021. "Beyond Market Fundamentalism: A Labor Studies Perspective on the Future of Work." Working Paper 2021-1, Center for Women and Work, SMLR, Rutgers University-New Brunswick.

Tapia, M., C. Ibsen, and T. Kochan. 2015. "Mapping the Frontier of Theory in Industrial Relations: The Contested Role of Worker Representation." *Socio-Economic Review* 13 (1): 157–184. doi:10.1093/ser/mwu036.