

Introductory Seminar in Labor and Employment Relations
Course Number: 38:578:500:90
Spring 2026

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Description: This course is designed to introduce master's students to research and findings in the fields of labor studies, employment relations, and human resources and to raise significant philosophical questions that lie at the core of the discipline. It is also designed to help students strengthen their analytical and writing skills. It will provide students with an opportunity to virtually "meet" many SMLR faculty discussing their areas of interest. This course uses Chicago Style for citations.

Our online course week runs from Thursday at 10 a.m. to Wednesday evening at midnight. The syllabus, including assignments, readings, and discussions, is subject to change at the professor's discretion.

Learning Objectives:

Students who successfully complete this course will meet the following official learning objectives of SMLR and MLER:

- Communicate effectively at a level and in modes appropriate to an entry-level professional. (Goal I)
- Demonstrate an understanding of relevant theories and apply them given the background of a particular work situation (Goal IV)

In addition, successful students will also meet the following course-specific goals:

1. Deepen their understanding of key historical and current workplace and social issues through exposure to a variety of research topics and methods; ☐
2. Explore the ethical implications of alternative employment systems and relationships; ☐
3. Develop and improve analytical and writing skills; ☐
4. Be introduced to a number of faculty and through them to the scope of the MLER program so that they can make more informed choices about future course work and research sponsors; ☐

5. Create a culture of open discussion, constructive criticism, and active collaboration between and among faculty and students. ☒

Themes: In addition to the topics to be covered by the online presentations from other Rutgers faculty described below, the course will also address questions and concerns that illuminate key professional issues in the area of labor studies and employment relations. These continuing conversations will help tie the different parts of the course together and accustom students to asking the most searching questions possible about the material under discussion.

Course Materials: Each week, you will have access to the videos, readings, and other materials on the Canvas site. Please note that occasional additional readings and/or other materials may also be posted that will help ground our exploration of key topics in labor and management relations.

Weekly Course Schedule:

Week 1: Thursday, January 22-28 Introduction to the Intro Seminar Course

View

- Welcome Video by Prof. Katz
- Introductory Video by Prof. Eaton
- Bio of Prof. Katz
- Bio of Prof. Eaton
- Information literacy and avoiding plagiarism by Librarian Julie Peters
- Prof. Ryan Greenbaum on writing expectations
- Bio of Prof. Greenbaum

Read

- “Are we really willing to become dumber?” David Brooks, *New York Times*

Assignment

- Review Syllabus
- Forum 1 Discussion: Introduce yourself to the class and discuss the biggest current labor problem you believe we face

Week 2: Thursday, January 29-February 4 Industrial Relations Framework and Employment Relations’ Intellectual Approach

View

- Profs. Paula Voos and Adrienne Eaton videos
- Bio of Prof. Paula Voos
- Neoliberalism Explained

Read

- John W. Budd and Stefan Zagelmeyer, "Excerpt from 'Public Policy and Employee Participation,' in The Oxford Handbook of Participation in Organizations, edited by Adrian Wilkinson, Paul Gollan, David Marsden, and David Lewin, 2007, pp. 1-6.
- Paula B. Voos "An IR Perspective on Collective Bargaining," Human Resource Management Review, Vol. 11 (2001), pp. 487-503.
- John Lanchester, "Neoliberalism" excerpt, How to Speak Money. New York: W. W. Norton, 2014, pp. 52-61.
- Sarwat Jahan, "What is Keynesian Economics?," Finance and Development International Monetary Fund, September 2014, pp. 53-54.

Assignment

- Forum 2 Discussion

Week 3: Thursday, February 4-11 **Rising Inequality**

View

- Prof. Doug Kruse on Rising Inequality--Video with PowerPoint
- Bio of Prof. Doug Kruse
- Thomas Piketty, TED talk, "New Thoughts on Capital in the 21st Century," (21 minutes)
- Robert Reich, "Inequality is Bad for Everyone," (6 minutes)
- Richard Wilkinson, TED talk, "How Economic Inequality Harms Societies," (16 minutes)

Read

- Richard Freeman, America Works, Chapter 3.
- Wilkinson and Pickett, The Spirit Level, Chapter 3.

Assignment:

- Forum 3 Discussion: Robert Frank hypotheticals on inequality

Week 4: Thursday, February 12-18

Public Sector Unions

View

- Prof. Adrienne Eaton on the Public Sector Defined
- Prof. Fran Ryan on the Public Sector Unions, Patronage and the Civil Service, and Historical Moments in the Public Sector
- Bios of Profs Ryan

Read

- The UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education, "Work, Money, and Power: Unions in the 21st Century."
- Heather Gies, "Disaster Averted: How Unions Have Dodged the Blow of Janus (So Far)," In These Times, January 2019.
- Robert P. Beschel, Jr. Republicans and the Civil Service, National Affairs, Fall 2025
- Eric Blanc, "The Federal Unionists Network Resists Trump," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2026
- Sarah Lazare, "What it Means When Federal Union Contracts Disappear," The American Prospect, September 2025.

Assignment

- Short Paper #1-Reflective Essay: Prepare a short 2–3-page paper exploring how one of the problems identified in week one would be viewed differently from an IR or HR perspective. Expand on what you considered in the first forum post.
- Paper Due: By March 4

Week 5: Thursday, February 19-25

Employment and Anti-Discrimination Law: Race, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Religion, and Disability

View

- Prof. Lisa Schur on Law and Discrimination in the Workplace

- “How Does Race Affect Employer Interest in Hiring Workers?” PowerPoint summarizing Bertrand and Mullainathan, and Pager
- Bio of Prof. Lisa Schur

Read

- Jordan Weissman, “Why Are Women Paid Less? Interview with Francine Blau,” The Atlantic, November 28, 2012.
- Noam Scheiber, “Fake Cover Letters Expose Discrimination Against Disabled,” New York Times, November 2, 2015.
- Lisa Schur, “Economic inclusion,” “Discrimination models and evidence,” People with Disabilities: Sidelined or Mainstreamed.
- T. Telford, “Why Trump’s EEOC Wants to Talk to White Men About Discrimination,” Washington Post, Dec 20, 2025.

Assignment

- Forum 4 Discussion: Is it illegal discrimination? Discuss the hypothetical and tell us what should be done to address the situation.

Week 6: Thursday, February 26- March 4

History of Working-Class Activism and Social Movements

View

- Prof. Naomi R Williams on Working-Class Activism
- Bio of Prof. Naomi R Williams

Read

- William P. Jones, “Working-Class Hero,” The Nation, January 11, 2006. (online edition)

Assignment

- No additional assignment this week.
- Paper due this week

Week 7: March 5-11

Globalization: A Comparative Perspective

View

- Prof. Tobias Schulze-Cleven on Globalization
- Bio of Prof. Tobias Schulze-Cleven

Read

- Schulze-Cleven, Tobias. 2018. "A Continent in Crisis: European Labor and the Fate of Social Democracy." *Labor Studies Journal*.
- Schulze-Cleven, Tobias. 2017. "German Labor Relations in International Perspective: A Model Reconsidered." *German Politics & Society* 35(4): 46-76.
- Adam Dean "Unions Raise Wages. Tariffs Don't. Economic Policy Institute, September 3, 2025.
- United Auto Workers post: "In A Victory of Autoworkers, Auto Tariffs Mark the Beginning of the End of NAFTA and the 'Free Trade' Disaster", March 26,2025.

Assignment

- Forum 5 Discussion

Spring Break Week is March 14-22

Week 8: Thursday, March 19-25

Labor and Environmentalism

View

- Prof. Todd Vachon on Labor and Environmentalism
- Bio of Prof. Todd Vachon

Read

- Todd Vachon and Jeremy Brecher, "Are Union Members More or Less Likely to Be Environmentalists? Some Evidence from Two National Surveys," *Labor Studies Journal* 1-19, UALE 2016.
- "Just Transition"-Just What Is It?, Labor Network for Sustainability and Strategic Practice Joint Project, 2016.
- Allen Hyde & Todd E. Vachon (2018): Running with or against the treadmill? Labor unions, institutional contexts, and greenhouse gas emissions in a comparative perspective, *Environmental Sociology*, DOI: 10.1080/23251042.2018.1544107

Assignment

- Short Paper #2-Persuasive Policy Essay-Due April 1

Week 9: Thursday, March 26-April 1

Labor and the Intersectionality of Race and other Social Identities

View

- Video of Prof. Tamara Lee, Esq
- Bio Prof. Tami Lee
- Prof. Lee, 2022 CRIMT Keynote Speech, 20 mins. Prof. Lee explains the approach to “better work” and centering most vulnerable.
- WUSA9 Roundtable Discussion on intersectionality of race and gender in workplace, recorded on Black women's equal pay day.
- Future Hindsight 2021, Racial Justice and Unions (35 minutes) How we can define equity and justice in these times.

Read

- T. Lee, “An Injury to One is Not Felt the Same by All”, *Boston Review*, June 5, 2019.
- T. Lee and M. Tapia, “A Critical Industrial Relations Approach to Understanding Contemporary Worker Uprising”, *Work and Occupations* 50 (3), 393-399, 2023.
- Oxfam Report: At Work and Under Watch: Surveillance and Suffering at Amazon and Walmart Warehouses

Assignment:

- Persuasive Policy Essay Paper #2 due this week

Week 10: April 2-8

Alternative Forms of Worker Voice

View

- Video of Interview with Prof. Carmen Martino about Worker Centers
- Bio of Prof. Carmen Martino
- Video of Prof. Danielle Phillips-Cunningham on Black Women’s Labor Organizations in Historical Perspective
- Bio of Prof. Phillips-Cunningham
- NJ/NY Center for Employee Ownership, Worker Cooperative Module 1: What is a Worker Cooperative
- Interview with Trebor Scholz on “Platform Cooperativism vs. The Sharing Economy,” April 17, 2015.

Read

- Kochan et al., “An Overview of US Workers Current Organizing Efforts and Collective Actions”, *Work and Occupations*, Vol. 50(3), 2023.

- Janice Fine, “Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the American Dream”
- Danielle Phillips-Cunningham, “The World Will Get a Correct Estimate of the Negro Woman’: The Intellectual Work of Early Black Women Labor Organizers,” in *A Racial Reckoning in Industrial Relations*, Ed by T. Lee, S. Davis-Faulkner, N.R. Williams, and M. Tapia, LERA Research Volume, Cornell Univ. Press, 2022
- Joseph Blasi, Richard Freeman, and Douglas Kruse, *The Citizens’ Share: Reducing Inequality in the 21st Century*, [Introduction](#) and [Chapter 3](#)

Assignment

- Forum Discussion (Claim/Evidence/Reasoning)

Week 11: Thursday, April 9-15

- **Unions in Healthcare and Higher Education**

View

- Bio of Prof. Becky Givan
- Prof. Becky Givan: Video on doctor unions
- Prof. Adrienne Eaton on graduate student unions

Read

- Avgar, Eaton, Givan and Litwin, “Labor Relations in the Healthcare Industry: A Portrait of Contradictions,” in *Union Organizing and Collective Bargaining at a Critical Moment: Opportunities for Renewal or Continued Decline*,” eds. H.R. Stanger, P.F. Clark and J.T. Delaney, LERA/Cornell University Press, 2024.
- Givan, Rebecca and Tobias Schulze-Cleven. “Precarious Professions? Knowledge Work in American Healthcare and Higher Education.”
- Nicholas DiGiovanni, "Graduate Student Unionization," from *Collective Bargaining in Higher Education: Best Practices for the Promotion of Collaboration, Equity and Measurable Outcomes*,” ed. Dan Julius. Routledge, 2022,
- M. Novicoff, “The Logical End Point of College Sports: If Players are Workers, Schools Will Have to Pay Them,” *The Atlantic*, April 4, 2024.

Assignment

- No New Assignment

Week 12: Thursday, April 16-22

The Future of Work and Work Organization

View

- Prof. Charles Heckscher on the Future of Work and Work Organization (Part 1)
- ILO Video: The Gig Economy: Challenges and Opportunities
- Video on AI, Tristan Harris, Daily Show
- Bio of Prof. Charles Heckscher
- Prof. Charles Heckscher on the Future of Work and Work Organization (Part 3 - Worker Responses (Skip final slide))
- Prof. Helen Liu on AI and HR
- Bio of Prof. Helen Liu

Read

- Eight Futures of Work, World Economic Forum White Paper, January 2018.
- Sarita Gupta, Stephen Lerner, and Joseph A. McCartin, "It's Not the 'Future of Work' but the Future of Workers That's in Doubt," <https://prospect.org/article/its-not-future-work-its-future-workers-doubt>
- Liu, Eaton, Vachon and Zhang, "Shaping the Future of Recruitment: A Survey of AI-Enabled Hiring Tools." Unpublished research report, SMLR, Rutgers University. 2023.

Assignment

- No new assignment

Week 13: Thursday, April 23-29

Final Exam Study Week

Week 14: Thursday, April 30-May 6

Final Exam

- The Final Exam will be a timed essay exam using the Claim, Evidence, Reasoning structure. Students will answer 3 of 4 essay questions. It is an open book exam, and you will have 90 minutes to complete the exam. Once you begin the exam, you must complete it and cannot pause.

Course Expectations, Grading, and Assignments:

Introduction:	20 points
Forum Discussion 1:	40 points
Forum Discussion 2:	40 points
Forum Discussion 3:	40 points
Forum Discussion 4:	40 points
Forum Discussion 5:	40 points
Forum Discussion 6:	40 points
Short Paper #1:	200 points
Short Paper #2:	200 points
Final Exam:	340 points

Total Points Available: 1000 points

1) Forum Discussion Posts

Follow the instructions for each Forum Discussion Post as they will vary. You may write a brief reflection on the assigned readings, complete a hypothetical, or answer the question/s posed. You must also write a couple of paragraphs that raise questions and respond to the comments previously raised by others in the seminar.

Forty points are available for each Forum Discussion. Twenty for your original post, due by Sunday at midnight, and 20 points for your responsive posts to other students due by Wednesday at midnight.

2) Written Assignments:

Short Paper #1: Reflective Essay You will prepare a short 2-3 page paper exploring how one of the problems identified in Week One would be viewed differently from an IR or HR perspective. Make sure to identify the problem clearly and discuss why it is a problem. Please use proper citations.

Short Paper #2: Persuasive Policy Essay A 3–4-page short written speech (as if to the membership of an organization), or written testimony (as if to a legislative committee), the purpose of which is to secure support for a specific policy proposal. You should choose an issue that you feel strongly about, but it must be relevant to our field and draw upon materials from this course.

You must go beyond your own experience to support your proposal with credible scientific research or similar authority. The essay or testimony needs to: (a) define the problem that the proposed policy or program is supposed to

address; (b) describe the proposed solution; and (c) provide factual evidence to support the claims that your proposal warrants the group's attention and support.

Think of this assignment as testimony to a legislative committee, a union, a corporate lobbying firm, or a public interest organization. Define your audience for this essay. This essay must include a bibliography and relevant citations.

3) Final Exam

The final exam will be a timed essay exam drawn from all of the topics for the course. Students will answer three out of four essay questions. You will receive credit for only the first three answers. The exam uses Turnitin. While we do not expect full citations in the exam, you should use references to any material you cite.

Caveat for Change. The instructors reserve the right to modify the syllabus, including but not limited to the course schedule, assignments, exams, and policies, as needed throughout the semester. It is the student's responsibility to stay updated on the course requirements.

Plagiarism: The extensive use of another person's ideas without proper citation is plagiarism and unacceptable. It can result in a failing grade and disciplinary action through university channels. The same is true for any other form of cheating. For information about the proper citation of written and web-based material, please read "Documenting Sources" and "Correct Forms for Citation," available on the Canvas site for this course. For this class, we will use the Chicago Style.

Academic Integrity

You are responsible for understanding and following the Rutgers University Policy on Academic Integrity. Information on the policy is available here:

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not permitted in this course

Use of AI, including but not limited to ChatGPT, is not permitted in any stages of the writing process on any assignment. All work submitted in this course must be the student's own and created with the aid of impermissible technologies (such as AI), materials, or collaborations.

Regarding AI: The Rutgers University Code of Conduct specifies as follows:

<https://policies.rutgers.edu/10213-currentpdf>

Some assignments in this course will be processed through Turnitin.

Students with Disabilities: Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. To receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>.

If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

Portfolios: All participants in this seminar will oversee an individual portfolio project where early drafts and assignments are posted to Canvas. This will allow you to note progress in terms of your mastery of key topics and skills sets as you continue through the MLER program.