

## Current Labor Problems (37:575:355)

Fall 2021

Professor Tamara Lee, Esq.

[tl466@smlr.rutgers.edu](mailto:tl466@smlr.rutgers.edu)



Class Hours: Mondays 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. (online: synchronous)

Office Hours: By appointment (zoom)

### **Disability and Accommodations:**

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order 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>.

### **Course Overview:**

Given the title of the course, it is obvious that we will explore current labor problems. But, what is considered current? Who is labor? When do we have a problem? Although at first glance

these inquiries appear simplistic, how one answers is complicated by historical, political and ideological contexts, as well as the identity of the actor questioned. By adding theory and historical context to an examination of current events in domestic and global political economies, this course will help you identify contemporary issues in the field of labor studies. As a future worker, employer and/or public servant, then, these are issues that should be of interest to you.

Although I reserve the right to the occasional lecture, it is my hope that the class format and size will naturally lend itself to a more relaxed- though vigorous and informed- exchange of ideas around important concepts. We will fit the syllabus and its contents to the personal, professional and academic interests of the class participants. To meet this goal, it is imperative that we create and maintain a culture of engagement that celebrates diversity and inclusion, and is enhanced by honest and provocative questions, opinions and beliefs. In other words, we will recognize and give voice to the difficulties in achieving a meaningful discussion about sensitive topics, and we will strive to confront and conquer those obstacles in a professional and scholarly way, which is not to say without passion or conflict.

### **INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS**

There is no textbook for the course, though there will be occasional assigned academic reading to ensure you are getting at least the minimal amount of social science that forms the basis of what we understand about labor and employment. We will complement this material with current events, hopefully setting the stage for timely and relevant discussion and debate over actual versus ideal relations between labor, capital and the state. Fun, right? Answer: yes.

Unless otherwise provided, all readings will be made available via Canvas.

### **PREPARATION AND CLASS ATTENDANCE**

With regard to preparation, you should be motivated by your love for knowledge and your respect for your classmates to keep up with the reading and fully contribute to the class discussion. However, as a lifelong student, I understand that this is not always true. (Un)fortunately for you, my job is to make sure you walk away from this class a little more knowledgeable than when you came in. Hence...

As a general rule of American work life, professionalism requires timely attendance.

Participation is measured by how frequently you engage your classmates in discussion, not whether you agree with the prevailing view in the class. In fact, I encourage everyone to advance the minority view, even if it is not your own. It will make the discussion, and thus your learning, more robust. If you feel inhibited or prohibited from engaging in classroom discussion for any reason, my virtual door is open.

## ASSIGNMENTS

In addition to attendance and participation, there are three (3) main grading components to the course: weekly individual reflection papers, group roundtables and a take-home final examination.

1. Weekly Reflection Paper
2. Group RoundTable
3. Take-home Final Examination

### *Weekly Reflection Paper*

Almost every contemporary news event can be framed as an issue that involves or impacts humans in their relationship to work and/or the institutions that regulate labor and capital. The weekly reflection paper requirement is designed to get you in the practice of reading current events from a labor perspective. Each week you must submit a one-page paper in which you:

- Identify the issue
- Explain its relation to labor and employment
- Reflect on how the issue impacts you personally, or American and/or global society broadly

Upload your 1-page summary to the appropriate location in Canvas before class by **Friday, midnight, each week.**

### *Group RoundTable*

In groups of 2 or 3, pick one of the weekly themes for which you are passionate or have some interest or curiosity. Requirements are as follows:

- Each group is required to select up to 2 pieces of scholarly research (i.e. chapters of books, journal articles) to assign to the class for reading or preparation the week before your presentation. The articles should represent all sides of any controversial issue. **Because the groups will be adding reading to the class, I reserve the right to amend the original syllabus to lighten or diversify your readings for any particular week.**
- Each group will lead/facilitate the discussion covering the assigned material. A formal presentation is not required, but is acceptable as long as you create space for group participation and discussion of the issue(s).

## Take-home Final Examination

The take-home final will cover the major themes of the course. You may use any web or class resources in completion of the final, which will be distributed on **December 13, and must be uploaded to Canvas on/or before midnight December 15.**

## GRADING

Your final grade in the course will be distributed as follows:

Attendance	10%
Participation	10%
Weekly Reflection Paper	20%
Group RoundTable	25%
Final Examination	35%

## CLASS SCHEDULE

(\*Subject to change. Although I will try to keep Canvas updated with content changes, please check with me or your colleagues if you miss a class and are unsure of the reading assignments.)

### What Is Considered Current?

#### **Week 1: WED September 8 (Introduction and Course Overview)**

Preparation: Review Syllabus and Canvas site

In class: Who are you, and what do you want?  
What is a “current labor problem”?  
Who are the actors in an industrial relations system?

Let’s Form Groups!

#### **Week 2: September 13 (Field Assignment: Do NOT meet via Zoom!)**

Preparation: Read:

1. [“Amazon’s Brutal Workplace is an Indicator of an Inhumane Economy”](#)
2. [The Remote Trend of Working Two Jobs at the Same Time without Both Companies Knowing](#)

Assignment:

In addition to your Weekly Reflection Paper, this week I would like you to spend the afternoon interviewing five (3) people about what they think is a current labor problem. Then write a 1-2 page summary addressing the following:

1. How did each define a current labor problem?
2. Which actor(s) did they identify as causing the problem?
3. Which actor(s) did they identify as experiencing the problem?

Submit via Canvas email to Professor Lee, upload your Weekly Reflection Paper separately to the appropriate location in Canvas.

Who is Labor?

**Week 3: September 20 (Technology and Work)**

Preparation: Read:

1. [“What Happens When We All Become our Own Bosses?”](#)
2. [“The State of American Labor: Deindustrialization and the ‘gig economy’ can’t explain the weakness of the American working class”](#)
3. [“Why the ‘Great Remote Work Experiment’ may be flawed”](#)

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

**Week 4: September 27 (Non-traditional Bargaining Units and Contingent Labor)**

Preparation: Read:

1. “The Legal and Social Movement Against Unpaid Internships”
2. [“Graduate Students, the Laborers of Academia”](#)
3. [“The Plight of the Overworked Nonprofit Employee”](#)

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

When Do We Have a Problem?

**Week 5: October 4 (Class and Inequality)**

Preparation: **Read:**

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

**Week 6: October 11 (Identity and Labor Market Discrimination: Race and Gender)**

Preparation: Read:

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

**Week 7: October 18 (Identity and Labor Market Discrimination: Religion, National Origin, Immigrant Workers)**

Preparation: Read:

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

**Week 8: October 25 (Identity and Labor Market Discrimination: LGBTQ+)**

Preparation: Read:

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

**Week 9: November 1 (Freedom of Association and the Right to Organize: the NLRA, Decline of Unionization)**

Preparation: Read:

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

**Week 10: November 8 (Freedom of Association and the Right to Organize: National Labor Relations Act-New Forms of Work and Current Issues)**

Preparation: Read:

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

**Week 11: November 15 (Freedom of Association and the Right to Organize: National Labor Relations Board)**

Preparation: **Read:**

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

**Week 12: November 22 (Freedom of Association and the Right to Organize: Police Unions and the Labor Movement)**

Preparation: **Read:**

1. [Why Are Police Unions Blocking Reform?"](#)
- 2.

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

**Week 13: November 29 (No Class)**

**Week 14: December 6 (Challenges and Solutions: Diversity and Inclusion)**

Preparation: **Read:**

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

**Week 15: December 13 Final Exam distributed (Due: on or before midnight December 15)**