

Introduction to Labor Studies and Employment Relations
Rutgers University, School of Management and Labor Relations
37:575:100:01: Fall 2025

Instructor: Professor Francis Ryan

Class Time and Place: Thursday, 2-5, Frelinghuysen Hall A5

Email: fr156@smlr.rutgers.edu

Course Overview: This course gives a basic introduction to the field of Labor Studies and Employment Relations, focusing on an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the nature of work from both national and global perspectives. Incorporating sociology, management systems, labor and working class history, human resources, legal studies, literature, art, media and employment relations, we will analyze the ways that work has evolved from the industrial revolution to the twenty-first century. In this course, we will also focus on the experiences and perspectives of working people and their institutions, as well as those of management and human resources to learn a diverse range of perspectives on the contemporary workplace and how it has evolved over time.

This course addresses the Social Analysis (SCL) Learning Objectives of SAS:

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

Your progress toward understanding how work, workers, and forms of worker organization fit into these social science goals will be assessed through rubrics applied to written assignments and items on exams.

Required Book. The following required book is available for purchase at the Rutgers University Bookstore, operated by Barnes and Noble. It may also be purchased online.

Stephen Sweet and Peter Meiksins. *Changing Contours of Work: Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy*. Pine Forge Press. **4th edition**. Sage, 2021.

(Note: The second and third editions are similar to the fourth and may be used. The first edition is very different—please do not use it)

Selected readings, except for the text, are available on the class Rutgers Canvas site. Other readings will be sent to you the week they are assigned via Canvas email.

The syllabus, schedule and assignments are subject to change as the course evolves, and sometimes due to unforeseen schedule changes due to weather, and other

potential emergencies. *Please note: additional sets of readings that highlight contemporary issues developing during the semester will be added from time to time.*

Course Requirements

Class attendance: You are expected to attend each class session, and to be on time. An attendance sheet will be passed out during each class; it is your responsibility to sign the sheet. Be punctual and plan to stay for the entire class. Students who repeatedly arrive late and leave at break will have their grades lowered. If you need to leave early, let me know; otherwise, you are expected to remain until the class is over. As the class is three hours long, we will have periodic breaks built into the scheduled time.

Participation: This class will utilize a variety of formats, with weekly discussion sessions one of the more important of these. You are expected to have completed the readings assigned before coming to class each week and be ready to take an active role in these discussions. Class participation includes active, respectful listening and well as talking. If you have a laptop computer, please feel free to bring it to class as a useful tool to augment in class readings and You Tube clips. You may not use any recording devices in this class.

Missed Exams: All students are expected to take the scheduled in-class exams (midterm and final) at the designated times. Documented emergencies and personal matters will be taken into account for possible cases of rescheduling that arise.

The writing assignment should be submitted to me via Word document as an email attachment before class the day it is due. Out of respect to those who meet this expectation, all late papers will be subject to downgrading.

Use of “AI” is Strictly Prohibited: The use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, etc., is not permitted at any stage of the writing process during exams or on any assignment. Any written assignment or exam answer that is flagged for AI use will be scored as a “0.”

Disability Statement: This course is open to all students who meet the academic requirement for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of disability should refer to the Rutgers Office of Disability Services and then contact the instructor privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible.

Grading Breakdown:

Class Participation and attendance (15%)

Written Assignment (15%)

Midterm Exam (35%)

Final Exam (not culminative) (35%)

Weekly Class Summaries:

Week 1: September 4: Introduction and Course Requirements

In this first meeting, we will have a chance to introduce ourselves, and to get a sense of what this semester's class will entail. We will discuss our past experiences as workers, and talk about our hopes for satisfying employment. What is a good job? What types of issues currently center on work in America today? How does labor studies, as field, contribute to and help us understand these issues?

Week 2: September 11: Exploring American Working Life: The "Old Economy" and Industrialism.

Readings: Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 1, Mapping the Contours of Work, 1-27.

Lauren Hough, "I was a Cable Guy. I Saw the Worst of America," *HuffPost.com*, December 30, 2018.

In class exercise: Mapping and Defining Generational Differences:

Gen Z in the Workplace: How Should Companies Adapt?

What do Gen Z workers want at work?

In class reading: Michael Dimock, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z Begins," *Pew Research Center*, January 17, 2019.

Week 3: September 18: Class Politics in the United States

Readings: Zweig, Michael (2000) *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret*, ILR Press, 9-37. (The Class Structures of the United States)

Scott, J. and Leonhardt, D. (2005), "Shadowy Lines That Still Divide," in *Class Matters*, Henry Holt and Company, 1-26.

Jefferson Cowie and Lauren Boehm, "Dead Man's Town: "Born in the U.S.A.," Social History, and Working Class Identity," *American Quarterly* (June 2006): 353-378.

In-class Presentation: Bruce Springsteen: Finding the New Jersey experience in Working Class Culture.

Week 4: September 25: Income and Social Mobility

Readings: Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 3, Economic Inequality, Social Mobility, and the New Economy, 63-95.

Andrew J. Cherlin, (2014) "The Fall of the Working Class Family: 1975-2010," from *Labor's Love Lost: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class Family in America*.

Selected readings from *New York Times* on Child Labor in the United States.

In Class Focus: The Return of Child Labor? Policy and Disruption in the New Economy

Videos: *Fingers to the Bone: Child Farmworkers in the U.S.* and other short films.

Paper Assignment due

Week 5: October 2: Power Dynamics, the New Economy, and the Future of Work

Readings: Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 2, New Products, New Ways of Working and the New Economy, 29-61.

"What Jobs Will AI Replace and What Can You Do About It?" Rachel Pelta, *Forage*, December 1, 2023

Michael Lerner, "Worried About AI in the Workplace? You're Not Alone," September 7, 2023, American Psychological Association.

Rakesh Kochhar, Which U.S. Workers are More Exposed to AI on Their Jobs?, Pew Research Center, July 26, 2023

Steven Greenhouse, "Constantly Monitored: The Pushback to Against AI Surveillance at Work," *The Guardian*, January 9, 2024.

Week 6: October 9: Midterm Exam (In Class)

Week 7: October 16: The Role and Function of Unions

Readings: Michael Yates, *Why Unions Matter* pp. 11-82.

Suresh Naidu, "Is There Any Future for a U.S. Labor Movement?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* Vol. 36, No. 4 Fall 2022

Other selected articles on recent labor actions will also be provided.

In class exercise: Workplace Hazard Mapping Training

Week 8: October 23: Work, Race, Ethnicity and Equality

Readings: Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 7, Race, Ethnicity and Work: Legacies of the Past, Problems of the Present. 205-244.

Daniel Costa, et. al, "Immigrants and the Economy," *Economic Policy Institute*, April 15, 2025

"What Immigration Reform Should Look Like," *The Heritage Foundation* (2025)

Kelli Maria Korducki, "Great People Shortage: U.S. Economy Will Get Walloped by Population Drop," *Business Insider*, August 21, 2025.

Week 9: October 30 Work, Gender, Equality

Readings: Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 6, Gender Chasms in the New Economy, 159-203.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000): Selling in Minnesota.

Think Progress.org, "There's Even a Gender Gap in Children's Allowances"
<http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2014/04/23/3430025/gender-gap-allowance/>

Week 10: November 6: Work and Family

Readings: Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 5, A Fair Day's Work?, 129-157.

Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All," *The Atlantic*, (July/August 2012): 85-102

Francis Ryan, "You'll Never Walk Alone:" School Crossing Guards Associations and Labor Feminism in the Postwar United States," *Labor* 20 (1) (2023): 49-84.

In class screening: *I Love Lucy*, "Job Switching." (1952)

Week 11: November 13: New Frontiers of Work: Service Workers on the Front Lines of the Economy.

Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 4, Whose Jobs Are Secure? 97-128.

Readings: Bryant Simon, "Consuming Lattes and Labor, or Working at Starbucks," *International Labor and Working-Class History* (Fall 2008): 193-211.

Week 12: November 20: New Frontiers of Work: Social Change and Workplace Policy Challenges

Readings: Stephen A. Sweet and Peter Meiksins, Chapter 8, Reshaping the Contours of the New Economy, 245-281.

Mia C. Hazie, Kevin P. Hill, Laurence M. Westreich, "Workplace Cannabis Policies: A Moving Target," *Cannabis and Cannabinoid Research* 7 (1) (February 2022): 16-23.

"Attorney's Guide to Cannabis and the Workplace," *Bloomberg Law*, December 18, 2024.

Week 13: November 25: Work and Sexuality

Readings: "Cracking the Gen Z Code: Attracting and Retaining Gen Z's LGBTQ+ Talent, Bank of America, 2023.

Sydney Cone, Kate Gold, Atoyia Harris, and Sehreen Ladak, "Workplace Conduct Still Needs Improvement After #MeToo," *Bloomberg Law*, October 24, 2022.

Week 14: December 4: Final Overview

