

Course Syllabus

INTRODUCTION TO LABOR STUDIES AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

Labor Studies 37:575:100 online: Section 94

Draft subject to change

Fall 2025

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Schedule: *The weeks in the course begin on Monday and end on Sunday evening at 11:59 p.m. You often will have things due on either Thursday evening or Sunday evening, just like any course that meets twice a week. The schedule and the assignments are subject to change.*

This is an online course that is largely asynchronous.

In this section, you will then have a CHOICE as to doing one of two things:

1) an individual paper of about 5 pages, after visiting one professor-approved **labor related museum** (see the Appendix). This might be a better choice if your life makes a group activity difficult or if you do not have a strong internet connection. To be honest, the collective bargaining exercise is probably more fun, but students have also found the museum visits to be very worthwhile.

2) A “You Be the Professor” project for a week in the course assigned to you randomly by the instructors. (Note different students will be assigned different weeks – but the project is not due in the week itself but later at the same time the paper is due). You will need to produce (1) a short video lecture of 5 to 8min. motivating students to learn and explaining the central idea(s) of the week, (2) a power-point explaining how the reading/videos in the week relate to that central theme, and what they each contribute in addition to that main theme. If you choose this option, you will also be asked (3) to recommend at least one new article or video to enhance learning for that week. If your video is excellent, we will make it available to future students as an optional resource (with your permission).

Learning Objectives for this course follow. The student is able to:

Core Curriculum: SCL

- Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems and other forms of social organization. (Goal SCL-1).

- Employ tools of social scientific reasoning to study particular questions or situations, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments. (Goal SCL-2)

School of Management and Labor Relations:

- Demonstrate an understanding of relevant theories and apply them given the background context of a particular work situation. (Goal IV)
- Demonstrate an understanding of how to apply knowledge necessary for effective work performance. (Goal VI)

Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the perspectives, theories and concepts in the field of labor and employment relations. (Goal 1).
- Apply those concepts, and substantive institutional knowledge, to understanding contemporary developments related to work. (Goal 2).

Additional course objective from the instructors:

- Students will be able to apply facts and concepts from the course to argue convincingly against common contemporary fallacies related to employment relations.

Grades:

For purposes of grading, there are multiple components of the course:

- Introductory exercises (Personal choice of exercise; Integrity Review) (1%)
- Threaded Discussions (Forums) (36%)
- Rights check and Movie check at 1% each (2%)
- Paper (10%)
- 3 Quizzes at 12% each (36%)
- Take home final (15%)

The professors reserve the right to determine the division between B and B+ etc., although in many years B+ starts at an overall average of 88. That cutoff is subject to change each semester.

Text: Stephen Sweet and Peter Meiksins. *Changing Contours of Work: Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy*. **4th Edition**. Sage, 2021. (Please note: the second and third editions are similar to the 4th; although latter editions are more up to date. The first is very different – do not use it).

Unit I. The Situation Working People Face Today (Sept. 2 – Oct. 5)

Week 1: Introduction (Sept 2-7)

- Explore what the course is about and make note of what is required of you.
- Post information about the paper for the instructor (worth 2% of your grade –less if you are late)
- Review Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy and submit a personal response.
- Buy or rent the text

Read: Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 1

Assignment for Week 1: Interview at least one parent or grandparent about your family's work history (preferably two). You do not need to write anything about the interview. It will form the basis of an online discussion next week.

Week 2: Work and Our Lives (Sept. 8-14)

- You and your family's history of work
- The contemporary economic/work situation
- Longer term trends in work

Read:

Sidney Ember, “Job Market Slows Significantly, Raising Economic Jitters,” *New York Times*, August 2, 2024.

Stephen Mihm, “Mass Layoffs in Big Tech Are an Old-Guard Mistake,” *Bloomberg*, Nov. 15, 2022.

Katia Dmitrieva and Josh Eidelson, “What Strikes and ‘Quits’ Say about U.S. Labor’s Resolve,” *Bloomberg*, June 17, 2022.

Start to think about longer term changes in the economy...

Watch: Richard Florida, “The Rise of the Creative Service Worker,” on Big Think (link in shell).

Review the Powerpoint from the instructors.

Due week 2: Participate in Forum 1: You need to post at least once by Sun. evening this week, and then another two times by Sunday evening next week (Week 3). Both quantity and quality count so you may want to post beyond this minimum.

Week 3: Corporations & Work in the “New Economy” (Sept. 15-21)

- Old and new forms of work organization
- The rise of contingent work

Read: Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 2, and

Peter Capelli et al. Change at Work (New York: Oxford, 1997), subpart “The Employment System that Died,” and “How the World Began to Change,” pp. 15-29, and “The Restructuring of Organizations,” pp. 44-51.

Watch: PBS video, “A Job at Fords” from the series, *The Great Depression*

Due week 3: Movie Check (10 point quiz on movie content). Finish Forum 1: You need to post at least twice by Sun. evening. Both quantity and quality count so you may want to post beyond this minimum. You cannot post after 11:59pm on Sunday so do not ask for that or send us posts by email – this is like a class discussion.

Week 4: Economic Inequality Today (Sept. 22-28)

- Class, race, and gender inequality
- Health and other effects of income inequality

Read:

Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 3,

Watch:

Robert Reich, “How Corporations Crush the Working Class”

Richard Wilkinson’s, TED Talk, on the impact of inequality globally.

Read:

David Leonhardt and Yaryna Serkez, “The U.S. is Lagging behind Many Rich Countries. These Charts Show Why,” *New York Times*, July 2, 2020,

Paul Krugman, “Wages, Wealth and Politics,” *New York Times*, August 18, 2006.

Due in week 4 – Participate in Forum 2A and 2B. The first response is due Thursday evening before 11:59pm. The second is due before Sunday evening at the same time. The forums close and you cannot participate after Sunday evening.

Week 5 Social Class in the U.S (Sept. 29-Oct. 5)

- Class and opportunity in the U.S.
- Class and social mobility
- Relationship between wealth and power
- Has class faded in American culture?

Read:

Janny Scott and David Leonhardt, ‘Shadowy Lines That Still Divide’ *New York Times*, May 15, 2005

Watch:

Nicole Sweeney, Host, “Social Class and Poverty in the U.S.: Crash Course in Sociology #24” on YouTube.

Richard Wolff, “Class Struggle is a Fundamental Core of Capitalism,” on YouTube

Professor Francis Ryan, Rutgers Labor Studies & Employment Relations Dept. speak about the history of the ideal of social mobility in the U.S. and the reality today.

Kate Pickett, Big Think Interview, “Why Inequality is Bad for Your Health”
<http://bigthink.com/katepickett>.

Read: Serkez, Yeryna, “Who is Mostly Likely to Die from the Coronavirus,” New York Times,
June 4, 2020.

Take Online Quiz on Unit 1: Sat. Oct. 4 or Sun. Oct. 5

Unit II: Diversity, Work, and Employee Rights (Oct. 6 – Nov. 2)

Week 6: Employment Rights in the U.S. (Oct. 6 - 12)

- Employment at-will
- Exceptions to employment at-will
- The NLRA (Wagner Act) and state bargaining laws
- The Fair Labor Standards Act & the Occupational Safety and Health Act

First: Take the rights check. This is a quiz that you can take and retake over the course of the week until you get a perfect score and the full number of points (10). After the week is over, the rights check ends – so be sure to do it this week.

Read:

Sweet & Meiksins, Chapt. 4

Steven Greenhouse, Low-Wage Workers are Often Cheated. Study Says, September 1, 2009, *New York Times*.

Josh Edelson, “Most Americans Can Be Fired for No Reason at Any Time, But a New Law in New York Could Change That,” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, June 21, 2021.

Lewis Maltby, Can They Do That? (New York: Portfolio, 2009). Chapter 4, “Wrongful Discharge and Employment at Will,” pp. 57-67 and a portion of Chapter 13, “The Rights You Have,” pp. 196-203.

Watch:

3 short Videos on Employment at Will and the common law exceptions from Professor Carla Katz

Due Week 6: Participate in the forum on employment rights (parts 3A and 3B). At a bare minimum post your original contribution on each by Sunday. **To earn more than the minimum passing grade of C, comment on others posts and respond to other student comments.**

Week 7: Work, Race, Ethnicity and Equality: (Oct 13 - 19)

- Race, ethnicity and inequality in the contemporary workplace
- Discrimination and Fairness
- Civil Rights Act of 1964

- The Memphis Garbage Workers Strike and Martin Luther King

Read: Sweet and Meiksins, Chapter 7, "Race, Ethnicity and Work."

David Leonhardt, "The Racial Wage Gap is Shrinking," New York Times, June 19, 2023.

Charlie LeDuff, "At a Slaughterhouse, Some Things Never Die: Who Kills, Who Cuts; Who Bosses Can Depend on Race," *New York Times*, June 16, 2000.

Watch: Three videos

(1) One is an excerpt from the movie, *At the River I Stand*, about the Memphis Garbage workers strike and Dr. Martin Luther King

(2) The second is a YouTube video that continues the story of the Memphis garbage strike.

(3) Mr. Wade Henderson, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, Testimony to U.S. Senate Subcommittee, 2009 about the relationship between union rights and civil rights.

Due Week: Participate in the forum on HRM policy (parts 3C and 3D). At a bare minimum post your original contribution on each by Sunday. **To earn more than the minimum passing grade, comment on others posts and respond to other student comments.**

Week 8: The New Immigration (Oct. 20-26)

- Effects of immigration on wages and work

- Public policy debates regarding immigration policy for the U.S.

Read:

New York Times, 1/27/2007, “Study of Immigrants Links Lighter Skin and Higher Income, and

Immanuel Ness, Immigrants, Unions, and the New U.S. Labor Market (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005). Chapter 2, “The Political Economy of Transnational Labor in New York City: The Context for Immigrant Worker Militancy,” pp. 13-39.

Watch:

Professor Janice Fine, LSER Department, Rutgers, speaking about immigration issues.

Due in Week 8: Participate in Forum 4 – there are 2 parts. The first is due by Thursday at 11:59pm. The second is due on Sunday at 11:59 p.m. After that, you cannot participate in Forum 4.

Week 9: Gender, Work and Family (Oct. 22 – Nov. 2)

- Women’s participation in the paid labor force
- Gender inequalities and discrimination
- Work/family policies and the law

Review powerpoint lectures.

Read: Sweet and Meiksins, Chapters 5 and 6,

Take Online Quiz on Unit II: Sat. Nov. 1 or Sun. Nov. 2

Unit III Improving Working People's Lives (Nov. 3 – Dec 7)

Week 10 The Legacy: The New Deal & Labor (Nov 3 -9)

- A new relationship between government and working Americans in the 1930s
- Union growth and consolidation in the 1930s-40s
- The CIO and the sit-down strike
- The “New Deal System’s” achievements and limitations

Read:

Andrew Leonard, “Lessons for Obama from the New Deal,” *Salon*, 2011.

Jack Metzgar, Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000). “Getting to 1959,” first part pp. 17-39.

Those participating in the bargaining exercise should read the materials for the exercise starting this week. Next week you can begin meeting with your team to plan your strategy.

Watch: Various videos.

(1) Professor Paula Voos, Speaking about the New Deal, WWII and Labor (3 sections)

(2) A feature video (54 min.), “Mean Things Happening: The Great Depression, Part 5” from PBS also on You-Tube. Please pay particular attention to the second half of the video on steelworkers in Western Pennsylvania.

(3) Optional: A short You-Tube video regarding the early 1930s and the San Francisco General Strike:

(4) Optional: A short You-Tube video on the sit-down strike and its use by the CIO Autoworkers union in the 1930s:

Due week 10: Participate in Forum 5A. The first post is due by Thursday evening; additional posts are due Sunday evening.

Week 11: Unions Today in the U.S., Part 3 (Nov. 10-16)

- What do unions do?
- Collective bargaining
- Are unions good or bad for the economy?

Review: Power-point on what American unions do.

Read:

Kim Kelly, “What a Labor Union is and How it Works,” *Teen Vogue*, March 12, 2018.

Steven Greenhouse, “Broken U.S. Labor Laws Could Hamper Union Wins for Workers, Experts Warn” *The Guardian*. Dec. 27, 2023.

Watch:

Emma Neely and Timothy Valk, “Unionization,” *Econofact*, June 24, 2022

Watch:

(1) Reverend Jim Wallis, Sojourners, Testifying on unions and economic inequality, before a Senate subcommittee, 2009.

(2) Professor Paula Voos, Rutgers, Testifying about the economic effects of unions, before a Senate subcommittee, 2009.

(3) Professor Carla Katz, Rutgers, “Unions and Individual Voice”

Optional: Read/look at Tables....Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Union Members 2023.”

Due in week 11 – Participate in Forum 5B. If participating in the Collective Bargaining activity you will meet with your team to plan your strategy this week. Be sure to have read the scenario and secret information before the session.

Week 12: (Nov. 17-23) Unions Today Part 2: Union Organizing & Membership

- How unions are formed
- Union membership trends over time
- New tactics of contemporary unions – example, the Fight for \$15

Read:

Noam Scheiber, “The Revolt of the College-Educated Working Class,” *New York Times*, April 28, 2022.

“The Fight for \$15,” from Steven Greenhouse, Beaten Down, Worked Up. NY: Knopf, 2019, pp. 232-248.

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Watch Q&A videos on union organizing:

3 Videos, Professor Carla Katz

Watch for an example of how employers combat union organizing campaigns:

Target anti-union employee orientation video on YouTube

Review: Power-point on union membership

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Due in Week 12: Those students doing bargaining only: Meet with team at assigned time for bargaining. Summary of CBA (Collective Bargaining Agreement) and ratings of Team members due on Sunday.

Museum Visit/Paper is due on Sunday.

You Be the Professor Project is Due on Sunday.

Week 13 (Nov. 24-Nov. 30)

No new reading/assignments Get caught up if needed! Enjoy your Thanksgiving break.

Week 14: Public Policy and the Future of Work (Dec. 1-7).

Read:

Sweet and Meiskins, Chapter 8.

Noam Scheiber, "California Senate Passes Bill to Regulate the Fast Food Industry," *New York Times*, Aug. 22, 2022.

Watch the following videos:

(1) *Wall Street Journal* video, "The Robots Are Now Hiring"

(2) Robert Reich on the need for public investment, “The Biggest Deficit is the One You Never Heard of,” YouTube, 2001.

(3) Dr. Teresa Boyer, Executive Director, Center for Women and Work, Rutgers, on Work and Family policy

Take Online Quiz on Unit III: Sat. Dec. 6 or Sunday Dec. 7

Week 15 and Final Exam Period: WRAP UP:

A take-home final exam will be distributed Mon. Dec.8 It is due Sun. Dec. 14 at 11:59pm.

Appendix. Labor-related museum visit and paper.

1. Visit one of the following locations listed below. **Take a picture of yourself at the location or scanned program from the location to document you were physically there. You will upload this separately.**
2. Write a five-page (double spaced) paper in which you describe your experience and the content of the museum exhibit. In your essay address some of the following questions:

Why did you choose to visit that place?

What did you learn from your visit?

What did you like most about the museum?

What did you like most about the exhibits? What would you have changed if you could?

How is the location connected to this course or a specific part of the course? This is very IMPORTANT!

DETAILS!

How did your knowledge and background of labor studies change the lens in which you viewed the exhibits?

What readings from this course were helpful for viewing and understanding the exhibits? **AGAIN THIS IS IMPORTANT.**

Would you recommend visiting to other students in the class? Why or why not?

Please feel free to comment on other aspects of the visit that may not be addressed in the above questions.

Locations to visit (choose any one):

1. The Tenement Museum in NYC. Go to <http://www.tenement.org/>(Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. for information. There are a variety of tours and you may need to sign up in advance.
2. The American Labor Museum at the Botto House in Patterson, NJ. Go to <http://www.labormuseum.net/>(Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. for information. There are also good walking tours in Patterson.
3. Ellis Island. Go to http://www.ellisland.org/genealogy/ellis_island_visiting.asp(Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. for information.
4. Roebling Museum in Burlington County -- <http://roeblingmuseum.org/>(Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. If you go to this one be sure to also investigate the big strikes that occurred in this company town.
5. Seabrook Museum -- in far South Jersey near Vineland - <http://www.seabrookeducation.org/>(Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. The history of Seabrook includes a united black/white Communist-influenced 1934 strike, battles with the Klan, the owner's use of every group possible to keep down labor costs (Japanese internees, Estonian refugees, German POWs, etc.).
6. Philadelphia History Museum (formerly the Atwater-Kent) in downtown Philly - <http://www.philadelphiahistory.org/>(Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. -- A general history museum, but includes ethnic and worker-related

exhibits. They have a lot of the material objects (most not displayed) from the late great Balch Ethnic Institute and some suggested walking tours of city neighborhoods. Visit a part of the museum related to labor studies. (This museum may be closed... see #8 and #9 for other museums close to Philadelphia).

7. Nearer to the Lehigh Valley Area, Pennsylvania, the Bethlehem Steel Stacks, in Pennsylvania, runs tours. If you do this one, also investigate the history of the union there. Go to <http://www.historicbethlehem.org>(Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. for information.
8. Camden Shipyard Maritime Museum is promising: <https://www.camdenshipyardmuseum.org/exhibits>(Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.. The Camden museum seems to have limited hours, but it should be open (it is a relatively new museum): <https://www.camdenshipyardmuseum.org/exhibits> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.
9. The Smithsonian, National Museum of African American History and Culture, in Washington, DC is an excellent choice if you are able to travel farther to investigate this important group of American workers.
10. The African American Museum in Philadelphia also has a permanent exhibit on African Americans in Philadelphia from 1776-1876, which would of course touch on the themes of race, civil rights, and social class: <https://www.aampmuseum.org/current-exhibitions.html>Links to an external site.