

**INTRODUCTION TO LABOR STUDIES AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY 37:575:100:01
Fall 2026**



Classroom: MURRAY HALL, Room MU-208
Course schedule: Wednesdays, 10:20 a.m. to 1:20 p.m.
Final Exam: TBD

Instructors:

Professor: Dr. Tamara L. Lee, Esq.

Email: tl466@smlr.rutgers.edu

Office: Levin Hall, 2nd floor

Office hours: via Zoom by appointment at Professor Lee's Personal Room:

<https://rutgers.zoom.us/j/71466?pwd=ZHBvaHRRSldJVTJWVWtOdTZLdE1tZz09>

Disability and Accommodations:

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.

Course Overview:

The course is designed to give you an overview of various aspects of labor and employment relations, rooted in the perspectives of working people and their labor organizations.

Class will include lectures, small group discussions, simulations and in-class assignments. While students are encouraged to freely express their views, respect for the appreciation of different viewpoints will be a guiding principle in this course.

Note: this syllabus may be changed or modified as the course proceeds.

Textbook: Stephen Sweet and Peter Meiksins. *Changing Contours of Work: Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy*

You do Not need to purchase the textbook. All readings are available on Canvas, which you may access at: <https://canvas.rutgers.edu/>

The syllabus, schedule, and assignments are subject to change as the course evolves.

Course Requirements

1. **Read the entire syllabus** and make sure you understand it. This is your contract with the instructor.
2. **Be prepared for class.** Always read the material assigned for a class before the class. Check your Rutgers email and Canvas messages regularly for class announcements.
3. **Be present and be on time.** Students are expected to attend all classes; if you expect to miss one or two classes, **please contact the professor.**
4. **Participate in discussions and group activities.** Explain your views. Ask questions. Listen – don't monopolize the discussion or ignore other views. Do your share of the work in simulations and in-class group activities.
5. **Take careful lecture notes.** I will provide power point lecture presentations AFTER class.
6. **Academic Integrity:** Academic integrity requires that all academic work be the product of an identified individual or individuals. Joint efforts are legitimate only when the assistance of others is explicitly acknowledged and permitted by the assignment. Ethical conduct is the obligation of every member of the university community, and breaches of academic integrity constitute serious offenses. Students must assume responsibility for maintaining honesty in all work submitted for credit and in any other work designated by the instructor of this course. Students are also expected to report incidents of academic dishonesty to the instructor or dean of the instructional unit.

Students may not copy or distribute lecture slides, discussion questions, exams, and assignments without the permission of the instructor. Unauthorized distributions of course materials are serious offenses.

Evaluation

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

- **Family Interview Exercise (5%)**
- **Class preparation, homework, attendance, and participation (20%)**
 - Attendance will be taken in class. Completion of homework and class assignments will be recorded via Canvas.
- **Written assignments (20%)**
 - There are two written assignments for this class. The first is a short response paper based on your family interview exercise and the second is a final reflection paper on course themes. Each paper is worth 10% of your course grade.
- **Collective bargaining simulation (10%)**
 - The entire class will participate in a collective bargaining simulation. You will be graded individually and as a team on this exercise.
- **Exams (45%)**
 - There will be two exams

Learning Objectives

Students in this course should achieve the following SAS, SMLR, and LSER learning objectives:

School of Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum objectives met by this course: SCL (social analysis)

- Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems and other forms of social organization. (Goal m).
- Employ tools of social scientific reasoning to study particular questions or situations, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments. (Goal n).

School of Management and Labor Relations curriculum objectives met by this course:

- 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 objectives met by this course:

- 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).

Unit I: The Situations Facing Working People

Week 1, September 2: Introduction and Course Requirements

- Review syllabus and discuss course expectations, assignments, and goals.
- What is a good job? What is a bad job?
- What jobs have you held? What are your hopes for the future?
- What is Labor Studies and how does it help us understand issues around work?

Read Before Class:

- Read the syllabus thoroughly. Learn how to use Canvas and locate readings.
- Read the **Family Member Interview** assignment instructions (posted on Canvas; Due **Week 2, September 9 before class***)

Week 2, September 9: Work and Our Lives

- Lecture and class discussion on Culture, Structure and Agency.
- Group discussions on your family interview assignments and how they relate to course themes.

Read Before Class:

- Sweet and Meiksins, *Changing Contours of Work*, chapter 1.
- Studs Terkel, “Introduction,” “Mike Lefevre: Steelworker,” and “Dolores Dante: Waitress” from *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (1972) and *Studs Terkel’s Working: A Graphic Adaptation*, adapted by Harvey Pekar and edited by Paul Buhle (2009) (Canvas).

Assignments Due:

- Upload completed Family Interview to appropriate location in on the Canvas site before class.

Week 3, September 16: Class Politics in the United States

- Discuss Written Assignment #1 (**due in class Week 5, September 30**).
- Lecture and class discussion on Class Politics

Read Before Class:

- Michael Zweig, “The Class Structure of the United States,” *The Working Class Majority: America’s Best Kept Secret* (2000) (Canvas).
- G.W. Domhoff, “Wealth, Income, and Power (April 2005)

- 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 (Canvas).

Week 4, September 23: Income and Social Mobility

- Film: *The Divide*
- Lecture and class discussion on class, economic inequality, and its effects on social mobility.

Read Before Class:

- Sweet and Meiksins, *Changing Contours of Work*, chapter 2
- Heather Boushey and Shawn Fremstad, “The Wages of Exclusion: Low-Wage Work and Inequality,” *New Labor Forum* 17 (2) 9-19 (Canvas).
- Michael Zweig, “Looking at the Underclass,” *The Working Class Majority: America’s Best Kept Secret* (2000) (Canvas).

Week 5, September 30: Power Dynamics, the New Economy, and the Future of Work

- Film and discussion: *American Factory* (Netflix)

Read Before Class:

- Sweet and Meiksins, *Changing Contours of Work*, chapter 4
- Bryant Simon, “Consuming Lattes and Labor, or Working at Starbucks,” *International Labor and Working Class History* (Fall 2008): 193-211.
- Francis Ryan, “Journal of a Retail Worker” (1996-1997).

Assignments Due:

- Upload completed Writing Assignment #1 to appropriate location in Canvas site.



Unit II: Diversity, Work, and Employee Rights

Employment law is the fundamental law of the workplace. It is essential for you to know something about your rights at work, or lack thereof. And obviously, future managers need to recognize their own rights and how they can, and cannot, treat employees.

Week 6, October 7: Employment Rights and Job Security in the United States

- “Know Your Rights” – in class quiz and discussion.
- Lecture and class discussion on major workplace labor laws and regulations, including the “at-will doctrine” and its exceptions, anti-discrimination, and wage and hour laws.

Read Before Class:

- Excerpts from Lewis Maltby, “Wrongful Discharge and Employment at Will” and “The Rights You Have” from *Can They Do That?* (2009) (Canvas).
- Thomas MacMillan, “More Employees Sue Restaurants in Wage Disputes,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 17, 2015: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/more-employees-sue-restaurants-in-wage-disputes-1439856006>
- Winnie Stachelberg and Crosby Burns, “10 Things to Know About the Employment Non-Discrimination Act,” Center for American Progress website: <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2013/04/24/61294/10-things-to-know-about-the-employment-non-discrimination-act/>

Week 7, October 14: Class Does Not Meet

Week 8, October 21: MIDTERM

Week 9, October 28: Work, Race, Ethnicity, and Equality

- Film: [The Eugenics Crusade](#)
- Lecture and class discussion on historical and contemporary issues surrounding race and employment

Read Before Class:

- Sweet and Meiksins, *Changing Contours of Work*, chapter 7.
- Sonali Kolhatkar, “Black Lives Matter... and Black Jobs Matter, Too,” Common Dreams/Truth Dig, April 6, 2015: <http://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/04/17/black-lives-matter-and-black-jobs-matter-too>
- Listen to “Job Searching While Black: What’s Behind the Unemployment Gap?” NPR news story, May 25, 2013: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2013/05/25/186609052/for-black-americans-finding-work-an-uphill-battle>

Extra Credit:

- Watch: *At the River I Stand* (directed by David Appleby, Allison Graham, and Steven Ross, 1993). directed by David Appleby, Allison Graham, and Steven Ross, 1993: View online via [Rutgers Library](#))

Week 10, Nov 4: Gender, Work, and Family

Read Before Class:

- Sweet and Meiksins, *Changing Contours of Work*, chapters 5 and 6.
- “Working Anything But 9 to 5,” *New York Times*, August 13, 2014: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/13/us/starbucks-workers-scheduling-hours.html>

Week 11, November 11: BARGAINING EXERCISE

Week 12, November 18: Immigration and Labor

- Lecture and discussion on the relationships between gender, working conditions, and employment opportunities.
- Lecture and class discussion on immigration and labor issues in the U.S.
- Discuss Written Assignment #2* (***due in class Week 15, December 9**)

Read Before Class:

- Immanuel Ness, *Immigrants, Unions, and the New U.S. Labor Market*, chapter 2 (Canvas)
- Waldinger et al., “Helots No More: A Case Study for the Justice For Janitors Campaign in Los Angeles,” Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies Working Paper #15 (Canvas)
- Documentary: Dolores (Available with your NetID: <https://video-alexanderstreet-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/watch/dolores>)

Week 13, November 25: Classes Do Not Meet (Holiday)

Unit III: Improving Working People's Lives: Collective Bargaining, New Forms of Organizing and Activism, and the Future of Work



In this final unit for the course, we will explore issues around the decline in unionization, as well as some of the newest and most innovative efforts on the part of unions, worker centers, and community organizations to organize workers in the ever-changing economy. The course will end with a discussion of public policies that could reshape the future of work.

Week 14, December 2: Unions and Collective Bargaining (Part 1)

- Lecture and class discussion on the structure of the labor movement in the U.S. and New Jersey, the basics of collective bargaining under private and public-sector labor laws, mediation, arbitration, lockouts, and strikes.

Read Before Class:

- “The Union Difference,” AFL-CIO website: <http://www.aflcio.org/Learn-About-Unions/What-Unions-Do/The-Union-Difference>
- “Union Members – 2013,” Bureau of Labor Statistics website: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>
- Excerpts from the National Labor Relations Act (Canvas).
- Sweet and Meiksins, *Changing Contours of Work*, chapter 8
- Olivia Rosane, “Nursing Home Workers Strike Against Givebacks,” *Labor Notes*, July 16, 2012: <http://www.labornotes.org/blogs/2012/07/seiu-1199-nursing-home-workers-strike-against-givebacks>
- Adolph Reed, “Doubling Down in Atlantic City,” *Jacobin*, August 11, 2016: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/08/atlantic-city-trump-icahn-union-strike-bankruptcy/>
- Harold Meyerson, “If Labor Dies, What Next?,” *The American Prospect*, September 13, 2012: <http://prospect.org/article/if-labor-dies-whats-next>

Week 15, December 9: Unions and Collective Bargaining (Part 2)

- Lecture: Process of Collective Bargaining
- Film: Final Offer

- available via YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYNwc0KuGTc&t=1s>

Assignments Due:

- Writing Assignment #2 Due
- Complete Course Survey

Final Exam: TBD