

## **ECONOMICS OF THE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP**

**37:575:325:90 | Fall 2026**

School of Management and Labor Relations | Rutgers University

Instructor: Laura Beltrán Figueroa, PhD

Course format: Online asynchronous

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Office hours: By appointment via Zoom

### **Course Description**

This course examines the economics of employment relationships and the institutions that shape work. Drawing on economics, employment relations, history, public policy, and related fields, it considers how labor markets and workplaces are organized, how wages and working conditions are determined, and how economic risks and opportunities are distributed.

Topics include the changing forms of employment, wages and job quality, access to work, discrimination, employment transitions, care and family responsibilities, management and workplace authority, employer power, worker voice and ownership, workplace governance, benefits and economic security, employment standards, and artificial intelligence and algorithmic management. Throughout the semester, students will compare different institutional arrangements and evaluate how policies and workplace practices shape the experiences of workers, employers, and communities.

### **Course Learning Objectives**

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Distinguish work, paid work, employment, self-employment, and alternative work arrangements.
- Explain how wages, total compensation, job quality, authority, bargaining power, and risk are determined and distributed.
- Apply economic, institutional, historical, and employment-relations frameworks to workplace cases.
- Evaluate how care, transportation, disability, immigration status, credentials, criminal records, and networks shape employment access.
- Analyze management systems, worker mobility, employer power, discrimination, employment standards, social insurance, unions, worker voice, and worker ownership.
- Compare collective bargaining, employee ownership, and workplace governance as alternative ways workers can influence employment relationships and share in organizational decision-making.
- Assess how artificial intelligence, algorithmic management, surveillance, automation, and other forms of technological change can transform employment relationships, and compare competing institutional responses while acknowledging trade-offs and uncertainty.

### Course Materials

- Course readings and materials are provided through Canvas and include the course text, required readings, podcasts, videos, government data, and primary sources.
- No commercial textbook purchase is required.
- A device capable of accessing Canvas, playing captioned media, and creating Word- or PDF-compatible submissions.

### Asynchronous Course Rhythm

Consistency is essential in an asynchronous course. Modules generally become available approximately two weeks before their due date. The instructional week for each module begins on the date shown in the course calendar. Unless the calendar states otherwise, each module follows this rhythm:

| Step                       | Typical timing                              | Student responsibility                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Module becomes available   | Approximately two weeks before the due date | Preview the module, review deliverables and due dates, and begin early if helpful.                                                         |
| Instructional week         | Dates shown in the course calendar          | Read the chapter and required sources; take notes using the module frameworks; complete the ungraded practice quiz before the Canvas quiz. |
| Discussion initial post    | Thursday by 11:59 p.m.                      | Required only during the five discussion modules.                                                                                          |
| Quiz and weekly submission | Sunday by 11:59 p.m.                        | Complete the Canvas quiz and any worksheet or discussion response due that week.                                                           |
| Feedback and preparation   | Following week                              | Review feedback and connect the module to the next chapter.                                                                                |

Week 1 begins Tuesday, September 1. Week 2 begins Tuesday, September 8 because Rutgers observes Labor Day on Monday, September 7. Module 12 falls across Thanksgiving week; its formal quiz deadline is Sunday, November 29. The final instructional week is reserved for final-project work.

### Assessment and Grading

| Component           | Weight | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Module quizzes (13) | 20%    | Thirteen 15-point, open-note Canvas quizzes focused on core concepts, evidence, and application. Quizzes are generally available before the corresponding module begins. Each quiz allows one attempt. The two lowest quiz scores are dropped automatically, so the highest 11 count. |

|                                            |     |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Applied worksheets (6)                     | 25% | Six structured analyses applying course concepts and frameworks to cases, data, readings, and workplace problems.                                                                 |
| Five substantive discussions               | 20% | Evidence-based discussions requiring an initial post and two substantive replies.                                                                                                 |
| Midterm documentary analysis               | 15% | Written documentary analysis using concepts and frameworks from Modules 1–8.                                                                                                      |
| Final Documentary Analysis                 | 20% | Recorded 12–14 minute full-course documentary analysis with approximately 15–18 substantive slides; 90-point presentation plus 10-point final discussion/peer-response component. |
| Course Orientation & Policy Acknowledgment | 0%  | Required, open-note policy acknowledgment; 9 points in a 0%-weighted assignment group and no effect on the numerical course grade.                                                |

### Grading Scale

| Grade | Range  | Grade | Range  |
|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| A     | 90–100 | B+    | 84–<90 |
| B     | 80–<84 | C+    | 74–<80 |
| C     | 70–<74 | D     | 60–<70 |
| F     | <60    |       |        |

### Assignments

#### Module Quizzes

Thirteen module quizzes are offered during the semester. Each quiz is worth 15 points, is open-note, and focuses on core concepts, evidence, and application. Quizzes are generally available approximately two weeks before their due date and allow one attempt. The two lowest quiz scores are dropped automatically; only the highest 11 count toward the quiz category. Module quizzes are due Sunday by 11:59 p.m. Module 12 uses a compressed instructional schedule before Thanksgiving, but Quiz 12 remains formally due Sunday, November 29 at 11:59 p.m.

#### Applied Worksheets

Six worksheets ask students to apply course concepts and frameworks to cases, data, readings, or workplace problems. These assignments emphasize interpretation, evidence, and institutional analysis rather than memorization. During weeks when a worksheet is assigned, the worksheet is due Sunday by 11:59 p.m., unless otherwise noted in the course calendar.

#### Discussions

Five discussions require an initial evidence-based post and two substantive replies to classmates. Students are expected to engage with course materials, compare interpretations, and explain their reasoning rather than simply state opinions or agreement. During weeks when a discussion is assigned, initial posts are due Thursday by 11:59 p.m., and both replies are due Sunday by 11:59 p.m.

### **Midterm: Documentary Analysis**

For the midterm, students choose one instructor-approved documentary listed in Canvas and analyze the employment relationships depicted in the film using material from Modules 1–8. The analysis is approximately 1,500–1,800 words and uses the Module 1 Employment Relationship Framework plus at least three additional concepts, theories, or frameworks from Modules 2–8. Students support claims with at least four specific documentary moments and approximate timestamps, explain economic and institutional mechanisms, address at least one meaningful tradeoff, alternative explanation, or limitation, and distinguish what the evidence shows from what cannot be determined. No outside research is required; if outside sources are used, they must be cited consistently.

### **Final Documentary Analysis**

For the final project, students may continue with the documentary used for the midterm or select a different instructor-approved documentary. The final is a full-course documentary analysis presented through a recorded presentation of approximately 12–14 minutes using approximately 15–18 substantive slides, plus a title slide and references/credits slide. Students apply at least three substantive concepts, theories, or frameworks from Modules 1–8 and at least three from Modules 9–13, analyze at least five specific documentary moments with approximate timestamps, explain economic and institutional mechanisms, address uncertainty and at least one meaningful tradeoff, alternative explanation, or limitation, and reach a bounded conclusion. No outside research is required; if outside sources are used, they must be cited consistently. The recorded presentation and PowerPoint are submitted through the Final Documentary Analysis assignment, and the same recorded presentation is also posted to the Final Documentary Analysis Discussion for peer viewing.

Recorded presentation and PowerPoint due Thursday, December 17 at 11:59 p.m. Eastern. The same recorded presentation must also be posted to the Final Documentary Analysis Discussion by that deadline. Two substantive classmate replies are due Sunday, December 20 at 11:59 p.m. Eastern. The final project is 100 points internally: 90 points for the presentation and 10 points for the final discussion/peer-response component.

Students complete a required Course Orientation and Policy Acknowledgment at the beginning of the semester. It is open-note, may be attempted as many times as needed, is worth 9 points, and is placed in a separate 0% assignment group so it does not affect the numerical course grade.

AI tools may be used as learning supports when they help students understand course material, brainstorm possible approaches, improve organization, or receive feedback on work they have developed. AI may not substitute for the intellectual work an assignment is designed to assess. Unless an assignment explicitly states otherwise, students may not submit AI-generated analysis, argumentation, interpretations of documentary evidence, quiz answers, worksheet responses, or

discussion posts as though they were their own work. Students remain responsible for verifying factual claims, citations, quotations, data, and timestamps and for being able to explain and defend everything they submit. If AI materially contributes to graded work, students must disclose that use when requested by the assignment or instructor. Misrepresenting AI-generated work as one's own may be addressed under the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy.

### **Participation and Discussion Standards**

Asynchronous participation means completing intellectual work on time, using specific evidence, and engaging substantively with peers. Discussion responses must do more than agree or compliment. They should identify a strong point, test it against another concept or source, and explain whether the comparison changes or qualifies the responder's conclusion. The course addresses inequality, discrimination, immigration, disability, unions, care, and conflict. Critique ideas and institutions without demeaning classmates or groups of people.

### **Late Work and Flexibility**

- Unless an assignment page states otherwise, graded work submitted after the posted deadline is subject to a 10% deduction for each day late. Students are responsible for confirming that Canvas shows a successful submission. Approved accommodations and University policies supersede the standard late rule where applicable.
- Discussions depend on timely interaction. Initial posts and peer responses submitted late are subject to the course late-work policy and may also lose the opportunity for meaningful peer interaction once the discussion window has closed. The Final Documentary Analysis Discussion is time-sensitive because classmates need access to presentations before the peer-response deadline.
- Extensions should be requested as early as possible. Emergencies, disability-related needs, religious observance, caregiving crises, and significant disruptions will be handled with reasonable flexibility consistent with University policy.
- Thirteen module quizzes are offered during the semester. Each quiz allows one attempt. The two lowest quiz scores are dropped automatically, and only the highest 11 quiz scores count toward the quiz category; no explanation is required to use a dropped quiz.
- Final discussion eligibility: To earn any of the 10 Final Documentary Analysis discussion points, a student must post the recorded presentation to the Final Documentary Analysis Discussion by the presentation-post deadline. A student who does not post the presentation receives 0/10 for that final discussion component, even if peer replies are submitted.

### **Communication and Feedback**

- Use Rutgers email for personal or sensitive matters and Canvas announcements/discussions for course-wide questions.

- Expect a response to email within two business days. Messages sent late Friday or over the weekend may be answered Monday.
- Feedback on routine assignments is normally provided within seven days; major assignments may require up to fourteen days.
- Questions that would benefit the whole class may be answered through a Canvas announcement or clarification.

For Canvas or technology-access problems, contact [Rutgers IT Help and Support](#) and notify the instructor promptly if the problem affects a deadline. Documented Rutgers/Canvas outages will be handled reasonably.

### **Accessibility and Inclusive Learning**

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into its educational programs. The Office of Disability Services (ODS) determines appropriate accommodations. Students seeking accommodations should complete the ODS process and request a Letter of Accommodation as early as possible; once the letter is issued, contact the instructor to discuss implementation. Course materials are designed for online access, and students should report inaccessible documents, media, or activities promptly. [Rutgers Office of Disability Services](#)

Pregnancy, temporary conditions, caregiving emergencies, and other access needs may also require support or flexibility. Contact the instructor early when possible; students do not need to disclose unnecessary medical details to request a conversation about course access.

### **Religious Observance**

Rutgers policy excuses students without penalty when course requirements conflict with religious observance and permits make-up work. Students should notify the instructor as early as possible so an alternative deadline or arrangement can be agreed upon. [Rutgers religious-observance policy](#)

### **Student Support**

Unexpected personal, financial, medical, family, or other circumstances can affect academic work. Rutgers Dean of Students - Advocacy, Outreach and Support can help students identify resources and navigate complex circumstances. Students are encouraged to contact the instructor early when course participation or deadlines are affected. [Rutgers Student Support and Referral](#)

### **Academic Integrity and Community Standards**

Students are expected to follow the Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy. Academic integrity includes accurate citation, honest representation of individual and collaborative work, truthful reporting of data and media evidence, and compliance with the course AI policy. Students are also expected to follow the Rutgers Code of Student Conduct and the discussion/community standards in this syllabus. [Academic Integrity Policy](#) | [Code of Student Conduct](#)

**Course Calendar: Fall 2026**

Rutgers Fall 2026 classes begin Tuesday, September 1 and regular classes end Thursday, December 10. Thanksgiving recess is November 26-29; final exams run December 15-22.

| <b>Week</b> | <b>Dates</b>   | <b>Module and central topic</b>                                     | <b>Graded work</b>                                                          | <b>Due</b>   |
|-------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1           | Sep. 1–6       | Module 1: What Is an Employment Relationship?                       | Quiz 1; Worksheet 1; Course Orientation & Policy Acknowledgment             | Sun. Sep. 6  |
| 2           | Sep. 8–13      | Module 2: Who Gets to Be Employed?                                  | Quiz 2; Worksheet 2 – Who Gets to Work? Access and Structural Constraints   | Sun. Sep. 13 |
| 3           | Sep. 14–20     | Module 3: Entering Employment: Work Arrangements and Classification | Quiz 3; Discussion 1 initial post Thu., responses Sun.                      | Sun. Sep. 20 |
| 4           | Sep. 21–27     | Module 4: Jobs, Wages, and Job Quality                              | Quiz 4; Discussion 2 initial post Thu., responses Sun.                      | Sun. Sep. 27 |
| 5           | Sep. 28–Oct. 4 | Module 5: Employment Transitions and Career Paths                   | Quiz 5; Worksheet 3                                                         | Sun. Oct. 4  |
| 6           | Oct. 5–11      | Module 6: Benefits, Risk, and Economic Security                     | Quiz 6; Worksheet 4                                                         | Sun. Oct. 11 |
| 7           | Oct. 12–18     | Module 7: Discrimination and Unequal Employment Outcomes            | Quiz 7                                                                      | Sun. Oct. 18 |
| 8           | Oct. 19–25     | Module 8: Care, Families, and the Hidden Economy                    | Quiz 8; Discussion 3 initial post Thu., responses Sun.; midterm window open | Sun. Oct. 25 |
| 9           | Oct. 26–Nov. 1 | Midterm Documentary Analysis Completion Week                        | Midterm Documentary Analysis                                                | Sun. Nov. 1  |
| 10          | Nov. 2–8       | Module 9: Managing People                                           | Quiz 9; Worksheet 5                                                         | Sun. Nov. 8  |
| 11          | Nov. 9–15      | Module 10: Employer Power: Monopsony, Mobility, and Bargaining      | Quiz 10; Discussion 4 initial post Thu., responses Sun.                     | Sun. Nov. 15 |

| Week  | Dates          | Module and central topic                                            | Graded work                                                                                                                              | Due          |
|-------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| 12    | Nov. 16–22     | Module 11: Worker Voice, Ownership, and Workplace Governance        | Quiz 11; Discussion 5 initial post Thu., responses Sun.                                                                                  | Sun. Nov. 22 |
| 13    | Nov. 23–29     | Module 12: Government and Employment Standards                      | Quiz 12                                                                                                                                  | Sun. Nov. 29 |
| 14    | Nov. 30–Dec. 6 | Module 13: AI, Algorithmic Management, and the Future of Employment | Quiz 13; Worksheet 6                                                                                                                     | Sun. Dec. 6  |
| 15    | Dec. 7–10      | Final Project Week                                                  | No new module, quiz, discussion, or worksheet; final-project work time                                                                   | —            |
| Final | Dec. 15–22     | Final Documentary Analysis                                          | Recorded presentation + PowerPoint due Thu. Dec. 17; same recording posted to discussion Thu. Dec. 17; two peer replies due Sun. Dec. 20 | Sun. Dec. 20 |

### Course Calendar Notes

- Module 12 runs across Thanksgiving week and is titled Government and Employment Standards. Quiz 12 is the only graded weekly item and is formally due Sunday, November 29 at 11:59 p.m. Eastern.
- The final instructional week, December 7–10, is reserved for final-project work. No new module, quiz, discussion, or worksheet is assigned. The Final Documentary Analysis recording and PowerPoint are due Thursday, December 17; the same recording must also be posted to the Final Documentary Analysis Discussion that day. Two substantive peer replies are due Sunday, December 20.

### University Calendar and Policy Sources

Official Rutgers academic calendar: [Academic Scheduling and Instructional Space](#)

Academic integrity: [Rutgers University Academic Integrity](#)

Disability accommodations: [Rutgers Office of Disability Services](#)

Religious observance: [Rutgers Dean of Students policy](#)

Student conduct: [Rutgers Code of Student Conduct](#)