

INTRODUCTION TO LABOR STUDIES AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY 37:575:100:02

Tentative- Subject to Change

Spring 2022



Wednesday 5:40p.m. – 8:40p.m.

Room: LEC Auditorium (Room 137)

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Course Overview: The course is designed to give you an overview of various aspects of labor and employment relations, including the perspective of working people and their labor organizations. We will also study the changing nature of work, workers and workers' institutions and organizations; the impact of technological change, the economic cycle, social class, immigration, race, ethnicity and gender; the role of government in labor policy; the history of unions, the role of unions in politics and challenges the labor movement faces today; and collective bargaining and workers' rights issues.

Class will include lectures, small group discussions, simulations, in-class assignments, and media presentations. 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*. 4th Edition. Sage, 2020. (Please note: the Fourth Edition of this book is quite different from the first and second, and third) ISBN-13: 978-1544305691 ISBN-10: 1544305699

All readings, except for the textbook, are available on Rutgers Canvas, which you may access at <https://tlt.rutgers.edu/canvas>. To log on, enter your Rutgers ID and password in the upper right portion of the page.

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)

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

- Family Interview Exercise (5%)
- Class preparation, attendance and participation (15%)
 - Attendance will be taken in class and participation in group activities and discussions will be tracked.
- Written assignments (25%)
 - There are two written assignments for this class. The first is a short response paper on social class and economic inequality (Op Ed) worth 10%. The second is a COVID-19 Paper (15%).
- Collective bargaining exercise (15%). The entire class will participate in a collective bargaining exercise spanning two weeks. Students will be assigned to a union team or to a management team and will be required to negotiate a contract by a set date and time. You will be graded as a team on this exercise.
- Exams (40%)
 - There will be two (2) exams (a midterm and a final) that are predominantly “objective” – a combination of short-answer, objective, and short essay items given in class. Both are closed book. The final exam will be similar in nature to the first exam but cover material since the first exam. The midterm exam is worth 20% of your course grade and the final exam is worth 20% of your course grade.

Unit I. The Situation Working People Face Today (January 18th – February 23rd)

Most people have to work. Work shapes our lives and our conceptions of self, and at the same time it provides us with income. When work is insecure, low-paid, or we are not accorded dignity on the job, we suffer. On the other hand, when work is rewarding, it enlarges our capacities, allows us to connect to others, and enables us to contribute to the community at large.



In this unit, you will have a chance to ponder your family's history of work, consider how work has changed in the last 150 years, and explore the relationship of work and social class. A major topic is the prevalence of economic inequality in the United States today.

Week 1, January 19: Introduction and Course Requirements (Will be held via Zoom)

- Review the syllabus and make note of what is required of you.
- What is a good job?
- What is Labor Studies and how does it pertain to you at work?

Assignment for Week 1:

- Read the syllabus thoroughly. Learn how to use Canvas to retrieve the course readings.
- Interview at least one parent or grandparent about your family's work history (preferably more). Take notes as it will form the basis of a discussion next week.

Week 2, January 26: Work and Our Lives (Will be held via Zoom)

- Lecture and class discussion on the contours of work in the U.S.
- Assign discussion groups
- Report back on family interview
- Family interview assignment due in class

Readings:

- Sweet and Meskins, *Changing Contours of Work* chapter 1
- Paul Krugman, *End This Depression Now*. Chapter 1 (Canvas)

Week 3, February 2: Corporations & Work in the “New Economy”

- Film and discussion: *The Big One* (Michael Moore)
- Discussion- The rise of contingent work

Readings:

- Sweet and Meskins, *Changing Contours of Work* chapter 2
- Peter Capelli et al., excerpts from *Change at Work*, “The Employment System that Died,” and “How the World Began to Change,” (Canvas)

Week 4, February 9: Social Class in the U.S. and Economic Inequality

- Lecture and class discussion on Class and opportunity in the U.S., class and social mobility, relationship between wealth and power, has class faded in American culture?
- Group activity: What would ideal wealth distribution look like and why?
- Review of slides on the rise and consequences in inequality.

Readings:

- Read the following on the *New York Times* website on Social Class (all on Canvas):

<http://www.nytimes.com/pages/national/class/>

1. The Overview article, “Shadowy Lines That Still Divide”
 2. Tamar Lewin “Up from the Holler”
 3. David Leonhardt “The College Dropout Boom”
4. At least two other articles/blogs from the site.

- Sweet and Meskins, *Changing Contours of Work* chapter 3

You should start working on the assignment that is due next week:

Assignment: Write a 500-word Op-Ed. on social class and inequality. You can choose any one of the following three suggestions for a central theme (Op-Eds advocate an idea or a public policy).

- (a) “Social class is real in the United States.” These Op-Eds are typically built around the personal experience of the author, their family, and/or people they know. See the *New York Times* website on social class for several examples.
- (b) “Widening economic inequality is a big problem in the United States.” This type of Op-Ed needs to be built on facts (the Domhoff reading in week 5 has many) but must be written in a way that is readable, convincing, and often illustrated by either personal experience or that of others.
- (c) “We should reduce economic inequality in the United States by passing the following law.” Here you would need to choose a public policy that would help reduce economic inequality and advocate convincingly for its effectiveness. Explain why it would reduce this current problem.

An Op-Ed is an opinion piece (named such because it is usually placed "opposite the editorials" in a publication) designed to offer an alternate position to what the media provides. Typically, an

op-ed is written by an expert in a subject area or in industry. Generally, the goal of an op-ed is to educate the public on an issue. While an op-ed is largely an "opinion" piece, it must be based in fact and should be persuasive in style rather than a simple report. ***Take the time to edit, re-edit and then re-edit again. A clean, concise and compelling op-ed is your goal. Make sure your name is on the assignment, along with what your pick was (a, b, or c). Times New Roman, 12 font, double spaced.***

Week 5, February 16th: Employment Rights in the U.S.

- Lecture and discussion of major workplace labor laws and regulations, including the at-will doctrine and its exceptions
- Is it a violation? Group activity on the Fair Labor Standards Act. The NLRA (Wagner Act) and state bargaining laws
- MIDTERM REVIEW

Readings

- Sweet and Meskins, *Changing Contours of Work*, chapter 4
- Steven Greenhouse, "Low-Wage Workers are Often Cheated. Study Says", September 1, 2009, *New York Times*.
- Excerpts from Lewis Maltby, *Can They Do That?* on "Wrongful Discharge and Employment at Will" and "The Rights You Have," pp. 196-203.
- Center for American Progress, "10 Things to Know about the Employment Non-Discrimination Act,"

Due: 500-word (more is not better) Op. Ed. Bring a hardcopy of your Op. Ed. to class. You must also upload and submit your Op. Ed. assignment under the 'Assignments' tab. You will need to email me if there are any issues uploading the document so I can correct it. Make sure you put your name topic you chose on the top of the page.

See week 4 (above) for details on the assignment.

Week 6, February 23rd: MIDTERM EXAM (IN-CLASS)

Unit II: Diversity, Work, and Employee Rights (March 2nd- March 23rd)

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.



Employment law is mutable—it has changed in the past and may change in the future. One of the biggest changes in American employment law occurred in the 1960s in the face of demands for greater equality by race, color, national origin, religion and gender. Employment opportunities for people of different races and national origins have become more equal under the law since then, but racial and ethnic divisions and discrimination still persist throughout the workforce.

Gender also matters for employment outcomes, although again, the workplace is much more equal today than it was in 1964 when the Civil Rights Act was passed. As more women have entered the workplace on a full-time basis, families are increasingly juggling the demands of two (or more) jobs along with the need to care for their families.

Week 7, March 2nd: Work, Race, Ethnicity and Equality

- Watch and discuss, *At the River I Stand* (directed by David Appleby, Allison Graham, and Steven Ross, 1993).
- Discuss Race, ethnicity and inequality in the contemporary workplace
- Discuss the topic for writing assignment #2

Readings and audio story:

- Sweet and Meskins, *Changing Contours of Work*, chapter 7
- 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.
- 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-andblack-jobs-matter-too>
- Listen: National Public Radio, “Job Searching While Black: What’s Behind the Unemployment Gap?”

Week 8, March 9th: The New Immigration

- Discussion of immigration in the United States
- Effects of immigration on wages and work
- Public policy debates regarding immigration policy for the U.S.

Readings:

- 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)
- Submit Writing Assignment #2

Spring Recess March 12- March 20. Enjoy!

Week 9, March 23rd: Gender, Work and Family

- Women’s participation in the paid labor force.
- Gender inequalities and discrimination.
- Work/family policies and the law.
- Writing assignment #2 due.

Readings:

- Sweet and Meskins, *Changing Contours of Work*, chapters 5 and 6
- “Nearly 40 Percent of Mothers Are Now the Family Breadwinners”, *Washington Post*, May 28, 2014
- “Working Anything But 9 to 5,” *New York Times*, August 13, 2014:
<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/13/us/starbucks-workersscheduling-hours.html>

Unit III Improving Working People’s Lives (March 24th - May 11th)

Union membership grew rapidly in the 1930s-1950s. Collective bargaining between unions and employers in major industries helped raise the standard of living not only for union members, but also for the entire workforce. For the past 35 years, however, the labor movement has been in steep decline in the U.S.



In this final unit for the course, we will try our hand at collective bargaining during an in-class simulation. We will also explore the reasons why the labor movement has been in decline, 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 10, March 30th: The Legacy: The New Deal and Labor

- 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.
- Unions today, with the recent SCOTUS Janus decision.

Readings:

- Jack Metzgar, Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000). “Getting to 1959,” first part pp. 17-39.
- The Supreme Court just dealt the unions a big blow in Janus. (Canvas)

Watch:

- 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.

Week 11, April 6th: Unions Today, Union Organizing and Union Membership

- “Union knowledge” in class quiz and discussion.
- What do unions do?
- Collective bargaining.
- Are unions good or bad for the economy?
- How unions are formed.
- Collective Bargaining exercise material.
- In-class preparation with your team.

Readings:

- Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Union Members 2016.”
- Excerpts from Michael D. Yates, *Why Unions Matter*. (Canvas)
- “The Process of Establishing Collective Bargaining,” pp. 65-66 of Fact Finding Report, Commission on the Future of Worker-Management Relations, May 1994. (Canvas)
- “Learn about Unions” on the AFL-CIO website. See various pull-down items, but be sure to review “Collective Bargaining,” and “The Union Difference” at the bottom of the bargaining page. (Canvas)

Week 12, April 13th: Collective Bargaining Exercise

Due: You have been assigned a role (union or management team) and should read the background materials you need to read for the exercise. Your team should be in contact this week, discussing talking points and strategy.

Week 13, April 20th: Collective Bargaining Exercise

Week 14, April 27th: Collective Bargaining Exercise Continued

Due: Summary of final contract settlement; your evaluation of all team members by Monday, December 10th

Week 15, May 4th: Public Policy and the Future of Work, Wrap up and Review

- Final Review

Readings:

- Sweet and Meskins, *Changing Contours of Work*, chapter 8

Week 16, May 11th: Final Exam