PERSPECTIVES ON LABOR STUDIES

Rutgers University

Spring 2024

SYLLABUS

Class Meetings: Rutgers Canvas (https://canvas.rutgers.edu).

Mode of Instruction: Asynchronous online.

   Weeks start on Tuesday.

Office Hours: I’m always happy to do office hours if you have an extra question or want to talk about the course content. Send me an email with a couple times that would work for you and we’ll set a time. The zoom link we’d use for the office hours is here.

Instructor:

   • Eric Blanc (eric.blanc@rutgers.edu)

Phone: 848-932-1742

Course Overview:

This course plays a central role in the labor studies and employment relations major as the only required advanced class. It engages students in critically analyzing the main theoretical propositions of the field, covering constitutive intellectual traditions, historical trajectories, and cutting-edge literature.

In line with the title of the course, the field draws from a variety of perspectives, ranging from classics on political economy to the modern social sciences, such as sociology, political science, and economics. This course examines how the field of labor studies and employment relations brings these different lines of inquiry together around a set of core thematic concerns, analytical commitments, and normative convictions. Class discussions interrogate social theories in their historical contexts and evaluate their impact, revealing them as central drivers of how the world of work is governed.

As students in this class examine some of the big questions of the field, they will gain increased proficiency in important skills: reading for analytical insight, debating ideas, and communicating with others. From the theoretical to the practical, students should be able to use what they learn in this class for whatever their next steps might be, including making valuable contributions across workplaces, leading change in society, and pursuing further academic study.
Learning Objectives: The student is able to…

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)

Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations

- Demonstrate an understanding of the perspectives, theories, and concepts in the field of labor and employment relations. (Goal 1)

Additional course objectives from the instructor

Identify core concepts of the field of labor studies & employment relations.

- Apply those concepts to understanding contemporary developments in work.
- Synthesize information from multiple sources to generate new insights.

How will you learn in this online course?

Most weeks you will:

- Review text, PowerPoint slides, and videos provided by the instructor(s) on the page in the online shell. These are like lectures but much shorter.
- Read, view, and listen to theorists and analyses offering a variety of perspectives. There will be an emphasis on reading, but in many weeks you will also have the opportunity to review a video or videos, or listen to an audio file.
- Participate in threaded discussions with other students, posting at least 3 times a week. Alternatively, you might be asked to complete a writing assignment, group project, quiz, or exam.
- Read a weekly message from the professor (posted in Announcements).

Evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Percent of Total Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductions (week 1)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion Forums (7 out of 9 discussion forums in weeks 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13) - 50 points each
Quiz (week 5) 50 5%
Podcast Forum (week 6) 50 5%
Midterm Exam (week 6) 250 25%
Final Exam (weeks 14 & 15) 250 25%
Total 1000 100%

Points have no “absolute meaning,” – in the end, the professor will use judgment in translating points into grades for the course. For example, typically a B+ is 87-89.9 points, but the professors may decide to use some other range of points.

Keep current – avoid being late!

This is an interactive class – you need to keep current in the reading and forums so that you can interact with others in the class. An online class is somewhat flexible to fit your schedule, but you are responsible for managing your time and for getting online each week no matter what else is going on in your life.

You should inform the professor of serious personal emergencies that arise – for instance, hospitalization that makes it impossible to get online. A trip associated with your job is not such an emergency, nor is a problem with your personal computer. There are many ways to get online in hotels and in campus computing facilities.

Disability:

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all 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 instructor and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses
as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS website at: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form.

Course Organization:

The course is set up in four units.

- **Unit I: The Promise of Labor Studies & Employment Relations** (weeks 1-2). This unit interrogates the “value proposition” of the field, clarifying core thematic concerns and central theoretical propositions.
- **Unit II: Big Ideas about the Economy and Work** (weeks 3-7). This unit tracks the development of thinking about the economy and work by exploring classic ideas and the historical contexts that gave rise to them.
- **Unit III: Ideas and Institutions** (weeks 8-10). This unit more closely explores the interplay between theorizing on employment relations and the governance of work.
- **Unit IV: Labor (Studies) in Contemporary Society** (weeks 11-14). This unit engages contemporary questions in labor studies to provide further depth to earlier discussions and encourage student to reflect on ways they might be able to leverage the lessons from the course in their respective lives.

Discussion Posts:

Discussion posts are a big part of your grade and it’s important to take them seriously! This is the main way I can tell you’ve actually done the readings. It’s pretty obvious when you’ve just skimmed the readings or googled (or Chat GPT’ed) the topic online, so it’s important to be as specific as possible in your posts by **citing separately at least two different page numbers** (or, in videos/podcasts, two different times) to back up your discussion post and to show me you’ve done the readings.

Topics and Assignments:

**Unit I: The Promise of Labor Studies & Employment Relations**

**Week 1: You and Your Major (Jan 16 – 22)**

Jaz Brisack. 2022. “Labor and Freedom.” Dissent, Fall. (3 pages)


**Assignment:** Introductions to Learning Community

**Week 2: A Contemporary Take on Labor Studies (Jan 23 – 29)**


**Assignment:** Discussion Forum #1

**Unit II: Big Ideas About the Economy and Work**

**Week 3: Liberalism and Markets (Jan 30 – Feb 5)**


**Assignment:** Discussion Forum #2

**Week 4: Marxist Perspectives on Capitalism (Feb 6 – Feb 12)**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPLbjTrHHvA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPLbjTrHHvA)


David Harvey. 2010. “RSA Animate: Crises of Capitalism.”
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOP2V_np2e0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOP2V_np2e0)

**Assignment:** Discussion Forum #3

**Week 5: Tensions in Managing and Organizing Work (Feb 13 – Feb 19)**


Assignment: Quiz on Weeks 3-5

Week 6: Political Economy and Social Democracy (Feb 20 – Feb 26)

Robert Kuttner. 2014. “Karl Polanyi Explains It All.” The American Prospect, April 15. (14 pages)


PBS. 2005. “Eduard Bernstein and a Crisis of Faith.” Excerpt from Documentary “Heaven on Earth.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHULP8WHgVs&t=1456s (3:12 minutes, starting around minute 24 min)

Assignment: Podcast Forum

Week 7: Midterm Exam (Feb 27 – March 4)

Assignment: Midterm Exam

Unit III: Comparing Labor Movements

Week 8: Comparative Labor Relations: What Explains Union Growth and Decline? (March 5 – March 18)
(NOTE: You have two weeks to finish this because of Spring Break)


**Assignment:** Discussion Forum #4


Vox. 2022. “The Fall (and Rise?) of Unions in the US.” Video. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtxITylE73U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtxITylE73U)


**Assignment:** Discussion Forum #5

**Week 10: Labor, the State, and Capital in the Global South (March 26– Apr 1)**


Mark Anner. 2015. “Labor Control Regimes and Worker Resistance in Global Supply Chains.”

**Assignment:** Discussion Forum #6

**Unit IV: Labor (Studies) in Contemporary Society**

**Week 11: Gender, Social Reproduction, and Capitalist Crises (Apr 2 - Apr 8)**

Nancy Fraser. 2022. Interview with Deutschlandfunk about her Benjamin Lectures. Podcast.


**Assignment:** Discussion Forum #7

**Week 12: Race and Class (Apr 9 – Apr 15)**


**Assignment:** Discussion Forum #8

**Week 13: Collective Action Today (Apr 16 - Apr 22)**


Erica Smiley & Sarita Gupta. 2022. “Closing Fireside: The Future We Need with Sarita Gupta & Erica Smiley.” Center for Transformative Action. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkflNQZxw7k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkflNQZxw7k)

**Assignment:** Discussion Forum #9

**Week 14/15: Review and Final Exam (Apr 23 - May 8)**

**Assignment:** Final Exam