

Syllabus
Current Labor Problems (Draft)
School of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers University
Spring 2016

Course Number: 37:575:355:01
Day and Time: Mondays 1:40-4:40 pm
Location: Janice H. Levin Bld, Room 003

Professor: Carmen Martino
Office Location: Labor Education Center, 50 Labor Center Way,
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Contact Info: carmenm@rci.rutgers.edu
Cell: 609-513-3504
Office Hours: By appointment

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine current labor problems in the larger context of income and wealth inequality in the U.S. We will analyze the economic and political power of multinational corporations, their neoliberal “better business climate” model, and the extent to which income inequality has ravaged communities and threatens our democratic way of life. We will also take a close look at how the better business climate model undermines the conditions of work in local, regional, national and transnational labor markets. We will conclude with a look at the long-term implications of rising income and wealth inequalities and what needs to be done in order to lead our country back to the path of economic fairness and opportunity for all.

II. EXPECTATIONS

Preparation

We will be covering a lot of ground in a very short time so please read and write a summary before you come to class. And bring the assigned material to each class and take good notes.

Participation

Class sessions will include short lectures, small group discussions and group exercises. The expectation is that everyone will actively participate in the class.

When participating in discussions use your experience and the information you get from the readings. When you take a position try to back it up with facts, data and examples. And above all, be respectful and listen when others are speaking. You do not have to agree but you must give full attention and consideration to other points of view.

Texting, or talking on cell phones and emailing are all prohibited during class.

Attendance

Twenty-eight percent (28%) of your grade will be based on attendance and participation so it is vitally important to attend every class. Failure to sign the sign-in sheet will result in a

loss of attendance points. You can only be excused for an illness, death in the family or other *real* emergencies.

Students who are late to class will lose attendance points so please be punctual. *Also*, if you leave early without permission you will be marked absent for the entire class.

Communications

I will communicate with you via email on a weekly basis. Most of the time I will be providing you with updates, reminders, adjustments and/or reworking of the syllabus so please check your Rutgers email account regularly. Feel free to contact me via email with questions or concerns about the course. I will do my best to get back to you within 24 hours.

When emailing always include “Current Labor Problems in the subject line of your email.

III. EVALUATION

Final grades will be based on the following:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------|
| 1. Class Prep | (12pts) |
| 2. Class attendance/participation | (28pts) |
| 3. Mid-Term | (30pts) |
| 4. Final Exam | (30pts) |

Class Preparation

It is vitally important that you come to class ready to contribute to the discussion. With this in mind, everyone will be required to complete 1-page summaries (approximately 300 words) for each weekly reading assignment—including weeks 2-13. **Each summary is worth 1 point of your final grade (for a total of 12pts)**. One-page summaries must be delivered to the Sakai drop box prior to the start of each class. (**Note: I will read them and keep in touch on an as needed basis.**)

Attendance/Participation

Fourteen points (14pts) of your final grade will be based on attendance so it is vitally important that you come to every class. Failure to sign the sign-in sheet will result in a loss of attendance points. You can only be excused for an illness, death in the family or other *real* emergencies.

Students who are late to class will lose attendance points so please be punctual. *Also*, if you leave early without permission you will be marked absent for the entire class.

Another fourteen points (14pts) of your final grade will be based on your in-class participation. Class sessions will include short lectures, small group discussions, group exercises and large group discussions. The expectation is that everyone will have an opportunity to actively participate in each class.

When participating in discussions use your experience and the information you get from the readings. When you take a position try to back it up with facts, data and examples.

And above all, we must all be respectful and listen when others are speaking. You do not have to agree but you must give full attention and consideration to other points of view.

Mid-Term and Final Exams

The mid term and final will be worth 30pts each and they will be written take-home exams that will cover all course readings, lectures, discussion questions, films, group exercises, etc. You will have one week to complete the mid-term and one week to complete the final exam.

IV. COURSE READINGS

All materials for this course will be available on the course Sakai website. Students can access the course Sakai site by following these directions:

- Go to <http://sakai.rutgers.edu>
- To log on, enter your Rutgers net ID and password in the upper right hand corner.
- Look for the tabs at the top of the next page.
- Click on the tab: **37:575:355:01**
- Click on “resources” on the menu on the left hand side of the next page. You should see a folder for each week of class and inside each folder you will find all of the course readings.

V. SYLLABUS

PART I: THE CORPORATION AND THE BETTER BUSINESS CLIMATE

W1. MONDAY, JANUARY 25TH - COURSE INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Read: The syllabus

In-Class: Introduction: Our expectations for the class and review of the syllabus

For Group Discussion: How much do we know about the gap between the very, very, rich and the rest of us.

W2. MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1ST – THE CORPORATION

Read: Joel Bakan, The Corporation, Chapters 3 and 4

In-Class: Lecture/Discussion on the evolution of the corporation
Group discussion on the role of corporations in society

Documentary: The Corporation

W3. MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8TH – THE BETTER BUSINESS CLIMATE (NEOLIBERALISM)

Read: Les Leopold, Runaway Inequality, Chapter 2: *Wage Theft Comes to America*; Chapter 3: *What Happened*; Chapter 4: *The Financial Strip-Mining of America*

In-Class: Lecture/Group Discussion of The Better Business Climate

PART II: THE IMPACT OF INCOME INEQUALITY IN THE U.S.

W4. MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15TH – WE'RE #1...IN INEQUALITY

Read: Les Leopold, Runaway Inequality, Chapter 5: *We're Number One! (or are we?)* and Chapter 6: *We're No Longer Number One*

Robert D. Putnam, Our Kids, Chapter 1: *The American Dream: Myths and Realities* and Chapter 2: *Families*

In-Class: For Group Discussion: Assessing where we stand on the question income and wealth inequality in the U.S.

W5. MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22ND – INEQUALITY DIVIDING COMMUNITIES

Read: Robert D. Putnam, Our Kids, Chapter 5: *Community*

Chris Hedges, Joe Sacco, Days of Destruction; Days of Revolt, Chapter 2: *Days of Siege, Camden New Jersey*, pp. 59-113, 2012.

In-Class: Lecture/Group Discussions on the impact of income and wealth inequality on communities

PBS: What's Splitting a New Generation of Haves and Have Nots

W6. MONDAY, FEBRUARY 29TH – INEQUALITY, INCARCERATION AND IMMIGRATION

Read: Les Leopold, Runaway Inequality, Chapter 9: *Incarceration Nation*; Chapter 10: *The Color-coding of Wealth in America*; Chapter 11: *Immigration*

Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow, Chapter 1: *The Rebirth of Caste*, The New Press, 2012.

In-Class: Lecture/Discussion on race, ethnicity, immigration and inequality

W7. MONDAY, MARCH 7TH – INEQUALITY AND EDUCATION

Read: Robert D. Putnam, Our Kids, Chapter 4: *Schooling*

Les Leopold, Runaway Inequality, Chapter 17: *The Hedge Fund Attack on Public Education*

In-Class: Lecture/Group Discussions on the impact of income and wealth inequality on schools

MID-TERM: ASSIGNED

PART III: Work and Inequality

W8. MONDAY, MARCH 21ST – LOW WAGE WORK AND THE GIG ECONOMY

Read: Barbara Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed, *Serving in Florida*

Gabriel Thompson, Working In the Shadows, *Speaking Quiche in the Heart of Dixie*, 2010

Erik Sherman, Forbes, *Uber, TaskRabbit And Sharing Economy Giveth To Workers, But Also Taketh Away*, August 4, 2015

In-Class: Lecture/Discussion on dead-end conditions of work in low-wage labor markets

Documentary: *Waging a Living*

MID-TERM: DUE

PART IV: The Better Business Climate and Global Inequality

W9. MONDAY, MARCH 28TH - WAL MART, CHINA, GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS, THE CHEATING SYSTEM (PART 1)

Read: Nelson Lichtenstein, The Retail Revolution, How Wal-Mart Created a Brave New World of Business, Chapters 3, and 5, 2009

Richard P. McIntyre, Are Worker Rights Human Rights? Chapter 4, 2011.

In-Class: Lecture/Discussion and small group discussion on Wal-Mart, supply chains and the Cheating (sweating) System

PBS Documentary: *Is Wal-Mart Good for America?*

W10. MONDAY, APRIL 4TH - WAL MART, CHINA, GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS, THE CHEATING SYSTEM (PART 2)

Read: Nelson Lichtenstein, The Retail Revolution, How Wal-Mart Created a Brave New World of Business, Chapter 6: *Wal-Mart's Long March to China*, 2009

In-Class: Lecture/small group discussions on China's impact on the global economy

Documentary: China Blue

W11. MONDAY, APRIL 11TH - TEMPS AND THE CHEATING SYSTEM IN NEW BRUNSWICK NJ

Read: *Chain of Greed, How Walmart's Domestic Outsourcing Produces Everyday Low Wages and Poor Working Conditions for Warehouse Workers*, National Employment Law Project, June 2012.

In-Class: Lecture/group discussions on organizing low wage temps in New Brunswick

Guest Speaker: Lou Kimmel, Executive Director, New Labor

PART III: WORKERS, ORGANIZING AND THE PATH TO A JUST ECONOMY

W12. MONDAY, APRIL 18TH – WORKER RIGHTS at Home and Abroad

Read: Richard P. McIntyre, Are Worker Rights Human Rights? Chapter 4: *Are Worker Rights Human Rights? (And does it matter if they are?)*; Chapter 5: *The International Organization of Worker Rights and Labor Standards*; and Chapter 6: *The United States and Core Worker Rights—Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining*

Ellen Dannin, Why At-Will Employment Is Bad for Employers and Just Cause Is Good For Them

In-Class: Lecture/group discussions on Worker Rights and At-Will Employment in the U.S.

W13. MONDAY, APRIL 25TH – UNIONS, WORKER CENTERS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Read: Les Leopold, Runaway Inequality, Chapter 21: *The Maximum Wage, Minimum Wage, Free Higher Education and Full Employment* Chapter 22: *When Unions Decline Inequality Soars and We All Lose*

In-Class: To Be Announced

W14. MONDAY, MAY 2ND – AND MAYBE ANOTHER WAY...WORKER OWNERSHIP

Read: Marina Kabat, *Argentinean Worker-Taken Factories*, in Ours to Master and to Own, Workers Control From the Commune to the Present, Haymarket Books, Chicago Illinois, 2011, pp 365-381.

Documentary: The Take <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/the-take/>

Final Exam