

Preliminary Draft: Subject to Change

jCurrent Labor Problems (37:575:355:02)
Fall 2017

Professor Tamara Lee
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Class Hours: Thursdays, 3:55 p.m. – 6:55p.m. [Waller Hall (Short Course Building),
Room 210]

Office Hours: By appointment (LEC, Room 170)

COURSE OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Given the title of the course, it is obvious that we will explore current labor problems. But, what is considered current? Who is labor? When do we have a problem? Although at first glance these inquiries appear simplistic, how one answers is complicated by historical, political and ideological contexts, as well as the identity of the actor questioned. By adding theory and historical context to an examination of current events in domestic and global political economies, this course will help you identify contemporary issues in the field of labor studies. As a future worker, employer and/or public servant, then, these are issues that should be of interest to you.

Although I reserve the right to the occasional lecture, it is my hope that the class format and size will naturally lend itself to a more relaxed- though vigorous and informed- exchange of ideas around important concepts. We will fit the syllabus and its contents to the personal, professional and academic interests of the class participants. To meet this goal, it is imperative that we create and maintain a culture of engagement that celebrates diversity and inclusion, and is enhanced by honest and provocative questions, facts and opinions- and an understanding of the fundamental difference between the latter. Hence, we will recognize and give voice to the difficulties in achieving meaningful discussion about sensitive topics, and we will strive to confront and conquer those obstacles in a professional and scholarly way, which is not to say without passion.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: The student will meet the following goals and learning objectives:

Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department:

- ✓ Apply employment relations concepts and substantive institutional knowledge to understanding contemporary developments related to work (Goal 2)
- ✓ Analyze a contemporary global issue in labor & employment relations from a multi-disciplinary perspective (Goal 7)

- ✓ Analyze issues of social justice related to work across local and global contexts (Goal 8)

School of Management and Labor Relations:

- ✓ Evaluate the context of workplace issues, public policies, and management decisions (Goal V)
- ✓ Demonstrate an understanding of how to apply knowledge necessary for effective work performance (Goal VI)

Additional Course Objective(s) from the Instructor:

- ✓ Communicate complex socio-political ideas to a diverse and inclusive audience
- ✓ Effectively listen to, analyze, and respond to opposing viewpoints in a professional manner
- ✓ Work productively in small groups
- ✓ Be an informed consumer of media coverage of current events

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

There is no textbook for the course, though there will be occasional assigned academic reading to ensure that you are receiving the essential social science that forms the basis of our knowledge about labor and employment. We will complement this material with current events, hopefully setting the stage for timely and relevant discussion and debate over actual versus ideal relations between labor, capital and the state. Fun, right? Answer: yes.

Unless otherwise provided, all readings will be made available via Sakai.

PREPARATION AND CLASS ATTENDANCE

With regard to preparation, you should be motivated by your love for knowledge and respect for your classmates to keep up with the reading and fully contribute to the class discussion. However, as a lifelong student, I understand that this is not always true. (Un)fortunately for you, my job is to make sure you walk away from this class a little more knowledgeable than when you came in. Hence...

As a general rule of American work life, professionalism requires timely attendance. That is certainly the case in my classroom. Therefore, consistent and timely class attendance by all participants is **absolutely essential and required**. You should be in class and prepared promptly at 3:55. Repeated absences and tardiness will not go unnoticed, and might affect your overall attendance grade.

Participation is measured by how frequently you engage your classmates in discussion, not whether you agree with the prevailing view in the class. In fact, I encourage everyone to advance the minority view, even if it is not your own. It will make the discussion, and thus your learning, more robust. If you feel inhibited or prohibited from engaging in classroom discussion for any reason, my door is open and you should walk through it.

ASSIGNMENTS

In addition to attendance and participation, there are three (3) main grading components to the course: weekly individual reflection papers, group roundtables and a take-home final examination.

1. Weekly Reflection Paper
2. Group RoundTable
3. Take-home Final Examination

Weekly Reflection Paper

Almost every contemporary news event can be framed as an issue that involves or impacts humans in their relationship to work and/or the institutions that regulate labor and capital. The weekly reflection paper requirement is designed to get you in the practice of reading current events from a labor perspective. Each week you must submit a one-page paper in which you:

- Identify a current event
- Explain its relation to labor and employment
- Reflect on how the issue impacts you personally, or American and/or global society broadly

Email your 1-page summary to Prof. Lee by **Tuesday, midnight, each week.**

Group RoundTable

In groups of 2 or 3, pick one of the weekly themes for which you are passionate or have some interest or curiosity. Requirements are as follows:

- Each group is required to select up to 2 pieces of scholarly research (i.e. chapters of books, journal articles) to assign to the class for reading or preparation the week before your presentation. The articles should represent all sides of the debate over any controversial issue. You may also elect to show a film to the class that elaborates the theme. All readings/films must receive my pre-approval. **Because the groups will be adding reading to the class, I reserve the right to amend the original syllabus to lighten or diversify your readings for any particular week.**

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- Each group will lead/facilitate the discussion covering the assigned readings and/or film. A formal presentation is not required, but is acceptable as long as you create space for group participation and discussion of the issue(s).

Take-home Final Examination

The take-home final will cover the major themes of the course. You may use any web or class resources in completion of the final, which will be distributed on December 7, and must be turned in to Professor Lee by email on/or before midnight December 17.

GRADING

Your final grade in the course will be distributed as follows:

Attendance	10%
Participation	10%
Weekly Reflection Paper	20%
Group RoundTable	25%
Final Examination	35%

CLASS SCHEDULE

(*Subject to change. Although I will try to keep Sakai updated with content changes, please check with me or your colleagues if you miss a class and are unsure of the reading assignments.)

What Is Considered Current?

Week 1: September 7 (Introduction and Course Overview)

Read: Syllabus

In class: Who are you, and what do you want?
What is a “current labor problem”?
Who are the actors in an industrial relations system?

Week 2: September 14: Field Assignment (Do NOT Meet in Class)

Read: -Make sure you are familiar with Sakai
-“Amazon’s Brutal Workplace is an Indicator of an Inhumane Economy”
-“Stop Touting the Crazy Hours You Work”
-“Seattle Proposal Tackles Erratic Schedules for Hourly Workers”

Assignment: Write a 1-2 page summary addressing the following:
1. How did each define a current labor problem?
2. Which actor(s) did they identify as causing the problem?
3. Which actor(s) did they identify as experiencing the problem?

In class: Just kidding! Do NOT meet in the classroom. This week I would like you to spend the afternoon interviewing five (5) people about what they think is a current labor problem.

Who is Labor?

Week 3: September 21 (Technology and Work)

Read: -“What Happens When We All Become our Own Bosses?”
-“The State of American Labor: Deindustrialization and the ‘gig economy’ can’t explain the weakness of the American working class”
-“Why Are Police Unions Blocking Reform?”
-“Labor Unions, Waning Nationwide, Stay Robust in New York”

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

In class: -Review: What is considered current?
-Why Humans Must Collaborate, Not Compete, with Robots (podcast)
-Let’s form groups!

Week 4: September 28 (Non-traditional Bargaining Units and Contingent Labor)

Read: -“L.I.U.-Brooklyn Locks Out Professors Amid Contract Dispute”
-“The Plight of the Overworked Nonprofit Employee”
-“Unpaid Interns Fare Worse in the Job Market”
-“The Legal and Social Movement Against Unpaid Internships”
-“Graduate Students, the Laborers of Academia”

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

In class: -Graduate Students Win the Right to Form Unions (podcast)

When Do We Have a Problem?

Week 5: October 5 (Class and Inequality)

Read: -“The Decline of Unions and the Rise of Trump”
-“The Myth of Job Polarization”
-“Union Decline Lowers the Wages of Nonunion Workers”
-“CEOs Make 276 Times More than Typical Workers”
-“Fighting for Seats at the Table: a Poor People’s Movement in a Rust Belt Town”
-“Income Inequality has Squeezed the Middle Class Out of the Majority”
-“Building a Better America- One Wealth Quintile at a Time”

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Optional:

- The Origin of 'White Trash,' and Why Class is Still an Issue in the U.S. (video)
- State of the Union: Where Labor Goes from Here (podcast)

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

In class:

- Wealth Inequality in America
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPKKQnijnsM>)
- Does Money Make You Mean? Paul Piff
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJ8Kq1wucsk>)

Week 6: October 12 (Identity and Labor Market Discrimination: Race and Gender)

- Read:
- “Black Workers, Unions, and Inequality”
 - “Black-white wage gaps expand with rising wage inequality”
 - “Women’s Wage Theft: Explaining Gender Differences in Violations of Wage and Hour Laws”
 - “Why Las Vegas is a Great Place for Working-Class Women”

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

In class: -13th (film, 2016)

Week 7: October 19 (Identity and Labor Market Discrimination: Religion, National Origin, Immigrant Workers)

- Read:
- “H1-B Visas, Outsourcing and Body Shops: A Continuum of Exploitation for High Tech Workers”
 - “The Truth About Undocumented Immigrants and Taxes”
 - “Religious Harassment in the Workplace: An Examination of Observer Intervention”
 - “What You Should Know About Religious and National Origin Discrimination against Those Who Are, or Are Perceived to Be, Muslim or Middle Eastern”

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

In class: TBD

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Week 8: October 26 (Identity and Labor Market Discrimination: LGBTQ+)

Read: -“What You Should Know about EEOC and the Enforcement Protections for LGBT Workers”
 -“Intersections: The Simultaneity of Race, Gender and Class in Organization Studies.”
 -“Key Findings about Americans’ Views on Religious Liberty and Nondiscrimination”
 -“Many States Already Bar Workplace Discrimination Against Gays”

Optional: -Episode of Atlanta: B.N.A. (trigger warning: racial and gender language)
 -“Atlanta recap: Black Action Network” (available at: <http://www.vulture.com/2016/10/atlanta-recap-season-1-episode-7.html>) (We will watch this episode in class to discuss the intersections and fluidity of the social constructs of race and gender).

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

In class: TBD

Week 9: November 2 (Freedom of Association and the Right to Organize: the NLRA, Decline of Unionization)

Read: -“The Labor Movement as We Know it is Dying”
 -“New Forms of Organizing”
 -“Why Union Membership is Declining”
 -“Globalization, Labor Market Transformation, and Union Decline in U.S. Metropolitan Areas”

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

In class: Film: Inequality for All (2013)
 Accessible at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-MmIV_JBRg or for viewing on DVD in the SMLR library

Week 10: November 9 (Freedom of Association and the Right to Organize: National Labor Relations Act-New Forms of Work and Current Issues)

Read: -“Organizing the Corner: How Williamsburg’s Female Housecleaners are Fighting for Higher Wages”
 -“McDonald’s to pay \$3.75 Million in 1st Settlement with Franchise Workers”
 -“The Gig Economy & the Future of Employment and Labor Law”

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Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

In class: Guest Lecture: Cassady Fendley, Activist

Week 11: November 16 (Freedom of Association and the Right to Organize: National Labor Relations Board)

Read: -“Vacancies and Partisan Fighting Put Labor Relations Agency in Legal Limbo”
-“The NLRB: Then and Now”
--“Who’s the Boss When You Work for a Franchise or Contractor?”
(Read all 4 debaters’ opinions)

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

In class: Round Table

Week 12: November 21 (Our class meets on Tuesday this week due to holiday!) (Challenges and Solutions: Diversity and Inclusion)

Read: -“When Women Become Men at Wellesley”
-“Corporate Diversity Programs and Gender Inequality in the Oil and Gas Industry”

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

In class: Film: Pride

Week 13: November 30 (Challenges and Solutions: Diversity and Inclusion)

Read: No pre-assigned reading, see links in the Sakai Announcement

Assignment: Weekly Reflection Paper

In class: RoundTable

Week 14: December 7 Final Exam distributed (Due: on or before midnight December 17)

Read: -“Immigration Advocacy as Labor Advocacy”
-“How to Do a Better Job of Searching for Diversity”

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- “Best Practices or Best Guesses? Assessing the Efficacy of Corporate Affirmative Action and Diversity Policies”
- “Entertainers or Education Researchers? The Challenges Associated with Presenting While Black”

In class: Lecture
 Course Surveys

Assignment: **Take Home Exam due midnight December 17**