

INTRODUCTION TO LABOR STUDIES AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

Labor Studies 37:575:100 online, sections 90, 91 and 95

Draft subject to change

Fall 2026

Professors Paula B. Voos, Silvana Craig, and Heather Beson

Please copy all professors when you email about the course. That way one of us can be sure to get back to you.

Contact information for Professor Voos:

Cell phone: 732-261-5958. She is available to speak by phone most mornings but its best to text to be sure. Professor Voos prefers to answer substantive questions about subject matter in the course by phone, rather than email. Email is great for many things: pbvoos@SMLR.rutgers.edu. You can also email her in the internal Canvas message system.

Contact information for Professor Craig:

Emails work best when trying to contact Professor Craig. She can be reached at:

silvanac@rutgers.edu

You can email in Canvas and the system will send a notification to Professor Craig.

Contact information for Professor Beson:

Emails work best for Professor Beson. She can be reached either via the Canvas messaging system or hmb120@smlr.rutgers.edu

***Schedule:** The weeks in the course begin on Monday and end on Sunday evening at 11:59 p.m. You often will have things due on either Thursday evening or Sunday evening, just like any course that meets twice a week. The schedule and the assignments are subject to change. This is an online course that is largely asynchronous.*

In this section, you will then have a CHOICE as to doing one of three things:

1) a **synchronous (live at a particular time)** team-based collective bargaining exercise that requires planning with the team and then bargaining with the opposing union or management team online. We highly recommend this option. But if your internet connection is not fast and reliable or if you live in another country, this probably won't work out well. **You must have a fast internet connection and a good personal computer with a microphone to bargain online – working in a student computing center won't be sufficient. Either....**

Meet ONLINE Wed. Nov. 11: Bargain Nov. 18-- both from 1 to 4pm, OR

Meet ONLINE Fri. Nov. 13 Bargain Fri. Nov. 20 – both from 1-4pm, OR

Meet ONLINE Sat. Nov. 14; Bargain Sat. Nov. 21- both from 10am to 1pm. OR

Meet ONLINE Sun. Nov. 15 Bargain Nov. 22 from 1-4pm.

2) an individual paper of about 4-5 pages, after visiting one professor-approved **labor related museum** (see the Appendix). This might be a better choice if your life makes a group activity

difficult or if you do not have a strong internet connection. To be honest, the collective bargaining exercise is probably more fun, but students have also found the museum visits to be very enjoyable and worthwhile. This paper is due Nov. 30.

3) An “Organizing Analysis” project involving researching a union organizing campaign and then applying concepts about unions from the class in analyzing the campaign in a short paper of about 4 pages. An early deadline exists for detailing the research materials you will use in the paper (Nov. 8) and if you do not meet this research deadline, you will need to switch to one of the other two projects. The final paper is due at the same time the museum paper is due (Nov. 30)

Learning Objectives for this course follow. The student is able to:

Core Curriculum: SCL

- Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems and other forms of social organization. (Goal SCL-1).

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)
- Demonstrate an understanding of how to apply knowledge necessary for effective work performance. (Goal VI)

Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department:

- 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).

Additional course objective from the instructors:

- Students will be able to apply facts and concepts from the course to argue convincingly against common contemporary fallacies related to employment relations.

Grades:

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

- Introductory exercises (Personal choice of exercise; Integrity Review) (1%)
- Threaded Discussions (Forums) (36%)
- Rights check and Movie check at 1% each (2%)
- Bargaining exercise ,paper or project choice (10%)
- 3 Quizzes at 12% each (36%)
- Take home final (15%)

The professors reserve the right to determine the division between B and B+ etc., although in many years B+ starts at an overall average of 88. That cutoff is subject to change each semester.

AI: We promise not to use AI in evaluating your performance. It wastes energy (thereby contributing to climate change) and is less accurate/fair than human judgment in determining the quality of your work.

You are not allowed to use ChatGPT, Grammarly, or other generative AI tools unless the assignment asks you to use it. We also caution you against using such tools to skip readings. Why: They will hinder your development of essential writing and analytical skills, may produce factual errors, and create unoriginal content. Your own ideas are better!

In short, you will learn more if you don't take shortcuts -- and later on, you will have the ability to spot errors created by AI agents. The latter -- spotting AI errors -- is one thing employers are now asking managers to do. It is especially important not to use AI in threaded discussions -- the whole point of them is to talk with others about ideas in the course -- what you think and what they think.

In this course, the professors reserve the right to replace any quiz or assignment with an oral exam for individual students at any time, including after an initial submission.

Text: Stephen Sweet and Peter Meiksins. *Changing Contours of Work: Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy*. **4th Edition**. Sage, 2021. (Please note: the second and third editions are similar to the 4th; although latter editions are more up to date. The first is very different -- do not use it).

Unit I. The Situation Working People Face Today (Sept. 1- Oct. 4)

Week 1: Introduction (Sept. 1-6)

- Explore what the course is about and make note of what is required of you.
- Post information about whether/when you will do the bargaining exercise or the paper for the instructor (worth 2% of your grade --less if you are late)
- Review Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy and submit a personal response.
- Buy or rent the text

Read: Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 1

Assignment for Week 1: Interview at least one parent or grandparent about your family's work history (preferably two). You do not need to write anything about the interview. It will form the basis of an online discussion next week.

Week 2: Work and Our Lives (Sept. 7-13)

- You and your family's history of work
- The contemporary economic/work situation
- Longer term trends in work

Read:

Ben Casselman, “Wages Are Falling. Wealth is Surging. No Wonder Americans Are Unhappy,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2026.

Lindsay Ellis, “Think Work-Life Balance is Overrated? You’re Hired!” *Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 2025.

Danielle Abril, “Why your job may face a double threat if the economy sours,” *Washington Post*, June 5, 2025; <https://wapo.st/4kNvupY>

Skim Reading for Everyone (to see how things differed a couple years ago) and then Optional Reading:

Katia Dmitrieva and Josh Eidelson, “What Strikes and ‘Quits’ Say about U.S. Labor’s Resolve,” *Bloomberg*, June 17, 2022.

Start to think about longer term changes in the economy...

Watch: Richard Florida, “The Rise of the Creative Service Worker,” on Big Think (link in Canvas).

Review the Power-point from the instructors.

Due week 2: Participate in Forum 1: There are 2 parts. The first is due by Thursday at 11:59pm. Two additional posts on the second part are due on Sunday at 11:59 p.m. To earn more than the minimum passing grade of C, comment on posts from 2 other students and respond to other student questions/comments on your own. You cannot post after 11:59pm on Sunday so do not ask for that or send us posts by email – this is like a class discussion.

Week 3: Corporations & Work in the “New Economy” (Sept. 14-20)

- Old and new forms of work organization
- The rise of contingent work

Read: Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 2, and

Peter Capelli et al. *Change at Work* (New York: Oxford, 1997), subpart “The Employment System that Died,” and “How the World Began to Change,” pp. 15-29, and “The Restructuring of Organizations,” pp. 44-51.

Stephen Mihm, “Mass Layoffs in Big Tech Are an Old-Guard Mistake,” *Bloomberg*, Nov. 15, 2022.

Watch: PBS video, “A Job at Fords” from the series, *The Great Depression*

Due week 3: Movie Check (10 point quiz on movie content).

Week 4: Economic Inequality Today (Sept. 21-27)

- Class, race, and gender inequality
- Health and other effects of income inequality

Read:

Sweet & Meiksins, Chapter 3,

Watch:

Robert Reich, “How Corporations Crush the Working Class”

Richard Wilkinson’s, TED Talk, on the impact of inequality globally.

Read:

David Leonhardt and Yaryna Serkez, “The U.S. is Lagging behind Many Rich Countries. These Charts Show Why,” *New York Times*, July 2, 2020,

Paul Krugman, “Wages, Wealth and Politics,” *New York Times*, August 18, 2006.

Due in week 4 – Participate in Forum 2. The first response is due Thursday evening before 11:59pm. The second is due before Sunday evening at the same time. The forums close and you cannot participate after Sunday evening.

Week 5 Social Class in the U.S (Sept. 28- Oct. 4)

- Class and opportunity in the U.S.
- Class and social mobility
- Relationship between wealth and power
- Has class faded in American culture?

Read:

Janny Scott and David Leonhardt, ‘Shadowy Lines That Still Divide’ *New York Times*, May 15, 2005

Watch:

Nicole Sweeney, Host, “Social Class and Poverty in the U.S.: Crash Course in Sociology #24” on YouTube.

Richard Wolff, “Class Struggle is a Fundamental Core of Capitalism,” on YouTube

Professor Francis Ryan, Rutgers Labor Studies & Employment Relations Dept. speak about the history of the ideal of social mobility in the U.S. and the reality today.

Kate Pickett, Big Think Interview, “Why Inequality is Bad for Your Health”
<http://bigthink.com/katepickett>.

Read: Serkez, Yeryna, “Who is Mostly Likely to Die from the Coronavirus,” *New York Times*, June 4, 2020.

Take Online Quiz on Unit 1: Sat. Oct. 3 or Sun. Oct. 4.

Unit II: Diversity, Work, and Employee Rights (Oct. 5- Nov. 1)

Week 6: Employment Rights in the U.S. (Oct. 5-11)

- Employment at-will
- Exceptions to employment at-will
- The NLRA (Wagner Act) and state bargaining laws
- The Fair Labor Standards Act & the Occupational Safety and Health Act

First: Take the rights check. This is a quiz that you can take and retake over the course of the week until you get a perfect score and the full number of points (10). After the week is over, the rights check ends – so be sure to do it this week.

Read:

Sweet & Meiksins, Chapt. 4

Steven Greenhouse, Low-Wage Workers are Often Cheated. Study Says, September 1, 2009, *New York Times*.

Josh Edelson, “Most Americans Can Be Fired for No Reason at Any Time, but a New Law in New York Could Change That,” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, June 21, 2021.

Lewis Maltby, Can They Do That? (New York: Portfolio, 2009). Chapter 4, “Wrongful Discharge and Employment at Will,” pp. 57-67 and a portion of Chapter 13, “The Rights You Have,” pp. 196-203.

Watch:

3 short Videos on Employment at Will and the common law exceptions from Professor Carla Katz

Due Week 6: Participate in the forum on employment rights (Forum 3). The first part is due on Thurs at 11:59pm; the second at the same time on Sunday. **To earn more than the minimum passing grade of C, comment on others posts and respond to other student comments.**

Week 7: Work, Race, Ethnicity and Equality: (Oct. 12-18)

- Race, ethnicity and inequality in the contemporary workplace
- Discrimination and Fairness
- Civil Rights Act of 1964
- The Memphis Garbage Workers Strike and Martin Luther King

Read: Sweet and Meiksins, Chapter 7, “Race, Ethnicity and Work.”

Justin Fox, “Black Employment is on a Worrying Decline,” *Bloomberg*, July 9, 2025.

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.

Watch: Three videos

(1) One is an excerpt from the movie, *At the River I Stand*, about the Memphis Garbage workers strike and Dr. Martin Luther King

(2) The second is a YouTube video that continues the story of the Memphis garbage strike.

(3) Mr. Wade Henderson, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, Testimony to U.S. Senate Subcommittee, 2009 about the relationship between union rights and civil rights

(Spring Break is March 14-22)

Week 8: Gender, Work and Family (Oct. 19-25)

- Women’s participation in the paid labor force
- Gender inequalities and discrimination
- Work/family policies and the law

Review power-point lecture on gender, work, and family.

Read:

Sweet and Meiksins, Chapter 5

Caitlin Harrington, “Interview with Heejung Chung: Flexible Hours' Often Mean More Work—Especially for Women,” *Wired*, Feb. 13, 2022.

Watch:

(1) The Culture of Overwork Hurts Everyone (Quick Study) [5:11]

Optional reading:

Sweet and Meiksins, Chapter 6.

Due in Week 8: Participate in Forum 4 – there are 2 parts. The first is due by Thursday at 11:59pm. The second is due on Sunday at 11:59 p.m.

Week 9: The New Immigration (Oct. 26-Nov. 1)

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

Read:

New York Times, 1/27/2007, “Study of Immigrants Links Lighter Skin and Higher Income, and

Immanuel Ness, *Immigrants, Unions, and the New U.S. Labor Market* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005). Chapter 2, “The Political Economy of Transnational Labor in New York City: The Context for Immigrant Worker Militancy,” pp. 13-39. **Read pp. 13- 27.** The rest is optional.

Tara Watson, “The Impact of Immigrants on the U.S. Economy,” Brookings March 2026.
website <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-impact-of-immigrants-on-the-us-economy/>

Watch:

Professor Janice Fine, LSER Department, Rutgers, speaking about NJ immigration.

Take Online Quiz on Unit II: Sat. Oct. 31 or Sun. Nov. 1

Unit III Improving Working People’s Lives (Nov. 2-Dec. 6)

Week 10 The Legacy: The New Deal & Labor (Nov. 2- 8)

- 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

Read:

Andrew Leonard, “Lessons for Obama from the New Deal,” *Salon*, 2011.

Jack Metzgar, *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000). “Getting to 1959,” first part pp. 17-39.

Watch: Various videos.

- (1) Professor Paula Voos, Speaking about the New Deal, WWII and Labor (3 sections)
- (2) 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.
- (3) Optional: A short You-Tube video regarding the early 1930s and the San Francisco General Strike:
- (4) Optional: A short You-Tube video on the sit-down strike and its use by the CIO Autoworkers union in the 1930s:

Due week 10: Participate in Forum 5A. The first post is due by Thursday evening; additional posts are due Sunday evening.

Due Nov. 8: Organizing Analysis Project Proposal (only for those choosing this project).

Week 11: Unions Today in the U.S., Part 1 (Nov.. 9-15)

- What do unions do?
- Collective bargaining
- Are unions good or bad for the economy?

Review: Power-point on what American unions do.

Read:

Kim Kelly, “What a Labor Union is and How it Works,” *Teen Vogue*, March 12, 2018.

Steven Greenhouse, “Broken U.S. Labor Laws Could Hamper Union Wins for Workers, Experts Warn” *The Guardian*. Dec. 27, 2023.

Watch:

Emma Neely and Timothy Valk, “Unionization,” *Econofact*, June 24, 2022

Watch:

(1) Reverend Jim Wallis, Sojourners, Testifying on unions and economic inequality, before a Senate subcommittee, 2009.

(2) Professor Paula Voos, Rutgers, Testifying about the economic effects of unions, before a Senate subcommittee, 2009.

(3) Professor Carla Katz, Rutgers, “Unions and Individual Voice”

Optional: Read/look at Tables Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Union Members 2025.”

Due in week 11 – All should participate in Forum 5B. Those doing the Collective Bargaining Exercise will meet with their team to create a strategic plan for the coming negotiations on the day/time assigned to the team. The meeting will be in “Big Blue Button” in the course shell.

Week 12: (Nov. 16-22) Unions Today Part 2: Union Organizing & Membership

- How unions are formed
- Union membership trends over time
- New tactics of contemporary unions – example, the Fight for \$15

Read:

Noam Scheiber, "The Revolt of the College-Educated Working Class," *New York Times*, April 28, 2022.

"The Fight for \$15," from Steven Greenhouse, *Beaten Down, Worked Up*, NY: Knopf, 2019, pp. 232-248.

Those participating in the bargaining exercise only should read the materials for the exercise this week. You must do this before you begin meeting with your team to plan your strategy. Part of the grade in the exercise will be how prepared you are to answer questions about the scenario.

Watch Q&A videos on union organizing:

3 Videos, Professor Carla Katz

Watch for an example of how employers combat union organizing campaigns:

Target anti-union employee orientation video on YouTube

Review: Power-point on union membership

Due in week 12 -- Those students doing bargaining only: Meet with team at assigned time for bargaining. Summary of CBA (Collective Bargaining Agreement) and ratings of Team members due on Monday night following this week (Nov. 23).

Week 13 (Nov. 23-29)

No new reading/viewing. Time to catch up and finish your paper/project. Enjoy Thanksgiving!

Due at end Week 13 and beginning of Week 14: Monday November 30: All projects.

Week 14: Public Policy and the Future of Work (Nov. 30-Dec. 6).

Read:

Sweet and Meiskins, Chapter 8.

Karen Weise, "Video Game Union Reaches Deal on Industry-First Contract at Microsoft," *New York Times*, May 30, 2025.

Noam Scheiber, "California Senate Passes Bill to Regulate the Fast Food Industry," *New York Times*, Aug. 22, 2022.

Watch the following videos:

- (1) *Wall Street Journal* video, “The Robots Are Now Hiring”
- (2) Video Amazon's Sexist Recruitment AI [3:35]
- (3) Robert Reich on the need for public investment, “The Biggest Deficit is the One You Never Heard of,” YouTube, 2001.
- (4) Dr. Teresa Boyer, former Executive Director, Center for Women and Work, Rutgers, on Work and Family policy.

Take Online Quiz on Unit III: Sat. Dec. 5 or Sun. Dec. 6

Week 15 and Final Exam Period: WRAP UP:

A take-home final exam will be distributed on Mon. Dec. 7. It is due Tues Dec. 15 at the usual time, 11:59pm.

Appendix. Labor-related Museum visit and paper.

1. Visit one of the following locations listed below. **Take a picture of yourself at the location or scanned program from the location to document you were physically there. You will upload this separately.**
2. Write a five-page (double spaced) paper in which you describe your experience and the content of the museum exhibit. In your essay address some of the following questions:

Why did you choose to visit that place?

What did you learn from your visit?

What did you like most about the museum?

What did you like most about the exhibits? What would you have changed if you could?

How is the location connected to this course or a specific part of the course? THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT !! DETAILS!

How did your knowledge and background of labor studies change the lens in which you viewed the exhibits?

What readings from this course were helpful for viewing and understanding the exhibits? **AGAIN, THIS IS IMPORTANT.**

Would you recommend visiting to other students in the class? Why or why not?

Please feel free to comment on other aspects of the visit that may not be addressed in the above questions.

Locations to visit (choose any one):

1. The Tenement Museum in NYC. Go to <http://www.tenement.org/> (Links to an external site.) for information. There are a variety of tours and you may need to sign up in advance.
2. The American Labor Museum at the Botto House in Patterson, NJ. Go to <http://www.labormuseum.net/> (Links to an external site.) for information. There are also good walking tours in Patterson.
3. Ellis Island. Go to http://www.ellisland.org/genealogy/ellis_island_visiting.asp (Links to an external site.) for information.
4. Roebling Museum in Burlington County -- <http://roeblingmuseum.org/> (Links to an external site.) If you go to this one be sure to also investigate the big strikes that occurred in this company town.
5. Seabrook Museum -- in far South Jersey near Vineland - <http://www.seabrookeducation.org/> (Links to an external site.). The history of Seabrook includes a united black/white Communist-influenced 1934 strike, battles

with the Klan, the owner's use of every group possible to keep down labor costs (Japanese internees, Estonian refugees, German POWs, etc.).

6. Philadelphia History Museum (formerly the Atwater-Kent) in downtown Philly - <http://www.philadelphiahistory.org/> (Links to an external site.) -- A general history museum, but includes ethnic and worker-related exhibits. They have a lot of the material objects (most not displayed) from the late great Balch Ethnic Institute and some suggested walking tours of city neighborhoods. Visit a part of the museum related to labor studies. (This museum may be closed... see #8 and #9 for other museums close to Philadelphia).
7. Nearer to the Lehigh Valley Area, Pennsylvania, the Bethlehem Steel Stacks, in Pennsylvania, runs tours. If you do this one, also investigate the history of the union there. Go to <http://www.historicbethlehem.org> (Links to an external site.) for information.
8. Camden Shipyard Maritime Museum is promising: <https://www.camdenshipyardmuseum.org/exhibits> (Links to an external site.). The Camden museum seems to have limited hours, but it should be open (it is a relatively new museum): <https://www.camdenshipyardmuseum.org/exhibits> (Links to an external site.)
9. The Smithsonian, National Museum of African American History and Culture, in Washington, DC is an excellent choice if you are able to travel farther to investigate this important group of American workers.
10. The African American Museum in Philadelphia also has a permanent exhibit on African Americans in Philadelphia from 1776-1876, which would of course touch on the themes of race, civil rights, and social class: <https://www.aampmuseum.org/current-exhibitions.html>