

PERSPECTIVES ON LABOR STUDIES
Rutgers University
37:575:395:90

Fall 2026

SYLLABUS

Class Meetings: Rutgers Canvas (<https://canvas.rutgers.edu>).
Mode of Instruction: Asynchronous online.
Weeks start on **Tuesday**.

Instructor: Alysa Hannon (Alysa.hannon@rutgers.edu)
Phone: 570-677-5909
Office hours: Thursdays 11AM-12PM or by appointment.

Note on Office Hours: All office hours are held via appointment and Zoom. As a rule, I will hold Thursdays between 11am-12pm open for 1-on-1 meetings but please email me to confirm you would like to meet on any given week. I have additional flexibility throughout the week so please feel encouraged to reach out to schedule an alternative time to connect.

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 both critically analyzing the main theoretical propositions of the field and covering the field's constitutive intellectual traditions, historical trajectories, and its 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 ultimately theorized and 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 instructors

- 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.

Policy on Generative AI: Strictly Prohibited

The core learning outcomes of this course rely on developing your independent critical thinking, analytical writing, and problem-solving skills. As such, the use of Generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Grammarly Go, or similar text/code generators) is strictly prohibited for all coursework. All work submitted in this course must be generated entirely by you. Representing AI-generated text, ideas, or structures as your own original work violates university academic integrity policies and will result in a zero on the assignment and a report to the Academic Integrity Board. If you have any questions on the AI policy for this course or how it applies, please reach out to me and we can discuss.

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:

Grading Component	Points	Percent of Total Grade
Introductions (week 1)	50	5%
Discussion Forums (7 out of 9 discussion forums in weeks 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14) - 50 points each	350	35%
Quiz (week 5)	50	5%
Podcast Forum (week 6)	50	5%
Midterm Exam (week 7)	250	25%
Final Exam (weeks 15/16)	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.

You should inform the instructor of any serious personal emergencies that arise which prevent you from completing your work – 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 including in Rutgers’ campus computing facilities.

Accommodations for students with disabilities:

Rutgers University welcomes and is prepared to accommodate students with disabilities into all its 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 required with them as early in your course as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site 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; includes thanksgiving break!). 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.

Topics and Assignments:

▪ **UNIT I: THE PROMISE OF LABOR STUDIES & EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS**

WEEK 1: You and Your Major (Sept. 1 – Sept. 7)

1. Democracy Now!. 2022. “200 Starbucks & Counting: Barista Jaz Brisack Says Union Busting Can’t Stop Worker solidarity.” Video.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsa2sQrEXcQ>. (6:30 min.)
2. Jaz Brisack. 2022. “Labor and Freedom.” *Dissent*, Fall. (3 pages)
3. Aj-jen Poo. 2019. “The Work that Makes All Other Work Possible.” Ted Talk.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqcDzptviFw> (16:01 min.)
4. Patrick Litré. 2016. “The Role of the Chief Human Resources Officer in a Transformation.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_vvXKmh8o (1:54 min.)

Assignment: Introductions to Learning Community

FYI: CHANGE IN DESIGNATION OF CLASS DAYS (DOES NOT AFFECT OUR COURSE SCHEDULE):

- TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2026: CHANGED TO MONDAY CLASSES.

WEEK 2: A Contemporary Take on Labor Studies (Sept. 8 – Sept. 14)

1. Tobias Schulze-Cleven and Todd E. Vachon. 2021. “Revaluing Work(ers) for Democracy and Sustainability.” In Schulze-Cleven and Vachon, eds. *Revaluing Work(ers)*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. READ PAGES 3-17 ONLY (i.e., SKIP 18-26).
2. Tobias Schulze-Cleven. 2021. “Beyond Market Fundamentalism: A Labor Studies Perspective on the Future of Work.” In Schulze-Cleven and Vachon, eds. *Revaluing Work(ers)*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. READ PAGES 34-47 ONLY (i.e., SKIP 27-33 and 48-52).

Assignment: Discussion Forum #1

▪ **UNIT II: BIG IDEAS ABOUT THE ECONOMY AND WORK**

WEEK 3: Liberalism and Markets (Sept. 15 – Sept. 21)

1. Robert Heilbroner. 1999. *The Worldly Philosophers* (rev. 7th Ed.). New York: Touchstone, excerpt of chapter on Smith (pp. 50-63).
2. Adam Smith. 1991 [1776]. *The Wealth of Nations*. Buffalo: Prometheus Book, chapters 1-2 (pp. 109-121).
3. John Cassidy. 2011. “The Demand Doctor.” *New Yorker*, October 3. (17 pages)
4. John Lanchester. 2014. *How to Speak Money*. New York: Norton, excerpt (pp. 52-61).

Assignment: Discussion Forum #2

WEEK 4: Marxist Perspectives on Capitalism (Sept. 22 – Sept. 28)

1. PBS. 2005. “Marx and Engels.” Excerpt from Documentary “Heaven on Earth.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPLbjTrHHvA>
2. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. 1848. *The Communist Manifesto*. Very short excerpts (pp. 14-21, p. 34).
3. Leo Panitch. 2009. “Thoroughly Modern Marx.” *Foreign Policy* (May/June): 140-145.

4. David Harvey. 2010. "RSA Animate: Crises of Capitalism."
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOP2V_np2c0

Assignment: Discussion Forum #3

WEEK 5: Tensions in Managing and Organizing Work (Sept. 29 – Oct. 5)

1. Frederick Winslow Taylor. 1947. *Scientific Management*. New York: Harper and Row, 39-73.
2. Harry Braverman. 1974. *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Monthly Review, part of chapter 3 (pp. 78-83) and part of chapter 5 (pp. 124-131).
3. Richard Edwards, Michael Reich, and Thomas Weisskopf. 1978. *The Capitalist System* (2nd Ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 265-268 ("Alienation").
4. Arlie Russell Hochschild. 1983. "Exploring the Managed Heart." In *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 3-12.

Assignment: Quiz on Weeks 3-5

WEEK 6: Political Economy and Social Democracy (Oct. 6 – Oct. 12)

1. Robert Kuttner. 2014. "Karl Polanyi Explains It All." *The American Prospect*, April 15. (14 pages)
2. Karl Polanyi. 2001 [1944]. "The Self-Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities: Labor, Land, and Money." In *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon Press. (7 pages)
3. PBS. 2005. "Eduard Bernstein and a Crisis of Faith." Excerpt from Documentary "Heaven on Earth." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HULP8WHgVs&t=1456s> (3:12 minutes, starting around minute 24 min)

Assignment: Podcast Forum

WEEK 7: Midterm Exam (Oct. 13 – Oct. 19)

Assignment: Midterm Exam

▪ **UNIT III: COMPARING LABOR MOVEMENTS**

WEEK 8: Comparative Labor Relations: What Explains Union Growth and Decline? (Oct. 20 – Oct. 26)

1. Jelle Visser, Susan Hayter, and Rosina Gammarano. 2017. "Trends in Collective Bargaining Coverage: Stability, Erosion or Decline?" *International Labour Organization*, pp. 1-8.
2. John Schmitt and Alexandra Mitukiewicz. 2012. "Politics Matter: Changes in Unionization Rates in Rich Countries, 1960–2010." *Industrial Relations Journal*, pp. 261-277
3. Bruce Western. 1997. *Between Class and Market: Postwar Unionization in the Capitalist Democracies*, pp. 3-9, 66-80.

Assignment: Discussion Forum #4

WEEK 9: US Labor in Comparative Perspective: What Makes the US Exceptional? (Oct. 27 – Nov. 2)

1. Vox. 2022. “The Fall (and Rise?) of Unions in the US.” Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtxITyIE73U>
2. John Godard. 2009. “The Exceptional Decline of the American Labor Movement.” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, pp. 82-103.
3. Barry Eidlin. 2016. “Why Is There No Labor Party in the United States? Political Articulation and the Canadian Comparison, 1932 to 1948.” *American Sociological Review*, pp. 1-20.

Assignment: Discussion Forum #5

WEEK 10: Labor, the State, and Capital in the Global South (Nov. 3 – Nov. 9)

1. Vivek Chibber. 2015. “Development from Below,” *Jacobin*. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/11/development-state-korea-india-nehru-postcolonial-global-south-chibber>
2. Mark Anner. 2015. “Labor Control Regimes and Worker Resistance in Global Supply Chains.”
3. Vidu Badigannavar, John Kelly, and Manik Kumar. 2021. “Turning the Tide? Economic Reforms and Union Revival in India.” *Industrial Relations Journal*, pp. 364-382.

Assignment: Discussion Forum #6

■ **UNIT IV: LABOR (STUDIES) IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

WEEK 11: Gender, Social Reproduction, and Capitalist Crises (Nov. 10 – Nov. 16)

1. Nancy Fraser. 2022. Interview with *Deutschlandfunk* about her Benjamin Lectures. Podcast.
2. Nancy Fraser. 2016. “Contradictions of Capital and Care.” *New Left Review* 100 (July-August): 99-117.
3. Cathy Cohen. 1997. “Punks, Bulldaggers, Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3(4): 437-465. READ PAGES 439-457 ONLY.

Assignment: Discussion Forum #7

WEEK 12: Race and Class (Nov. 17 – Nov. 23)

1. Kara Voght. 2020. “Is It Race or Class? Darrick Hamilton Showed Bernie the Answer.” *Mother Jones*, February 27.
2. Herbert Hill. 1996. “The Problem of Race in American Labor History.” *Reviews in American History* 24(2): 189-208.
3. Robin D.G. Kelley. 2018. “What Is Racial Capitalism and Why Does It Matter?” Katz Distinguished Lecture in the Humanities part of “Capitalism and Comparative Racialization,” a 2017-2018 John E. Sawyer Seminar on the Comparative Study of Cultures. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REo_gHIpvJc

Assignment: Discussion Forum #8

WEEK 13 (Nov. 24 – Nov. 30): THANKSGIVING RECESS

FYI: CHANGE IN DESIGNATION OF CLASS DAYS (DOES NOT AFFECT OUR COURSE SCHEDULE):

- WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2026: CHANGED TO FRIDAY CLASSES.

WEEK 14: Collective Action Today (Dec. 1 – Dec. 7)

1. Marilyn Sneiderman and Stephen Lerner. 2022. “Making Hope and History Rhyme: A New Worker Movement from the Shell of the Old.” *New Labor Forum*, December.
2. Chris Brooks. 2022. “How Amazon and Starbucks Workers Are Upending the Organizing Rules.” *In These Times*, May 31.
3. 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=UkfINQZxw7k>

Assignment: Discussion Forum #9

*CLASSES END THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2026.

FYI: READING DAYS FRIDAY (12/11) & MONDAY (12/14)

WEEK 15/16: Review and Final Exam (Dec. 8 – Dec. 18)

Assignment: Final Exam (Anticipated Final Exam Due Date: 12/18)