

Syllabus
CURRENT LABOR PROBLEMS
Labor Studies and Employment Relations
School of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers University
Spring 2021

Course Number: 37:575:355:01
Day and Time: Thursdays 12 PM – 3 PM

Professor: Carmen Martino

Contact Info: carmenm@smlr.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 and its implications for how we govern ourselves. We will analyze the economic and political power of multinational corporations, neoliberalism and the “better business climate” model and the extent to which income inequality has ravaged our communities and damaged our democratic way of life. We will conclude the course investigating how our personal lives are influenced by our work and in doing so, we will answer some important questions including: What do we want from work? Is there meaning in work beyond the paycheck? Do we want a voice in how the work gets done? And how much of our lives do we want to be associated with work? The hope is that in answering these questions we will gain a deeper understanding of our individual and collective “labor problems” and how we might go about the business of solving them!

II. EXPECTATIONS

Preparation

We will be covering a lot of ground over the course of the semester so please do complete the reading assignments and summaries 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.

Communications

I will communicate with you via email on a weekly basis. Most of the time I will be providing you with “Weekly Message” that will include updates, reminders, adjustments and/or reworking of the syllabus (we will be doing some of that from week to week) so please check your Rutgers email account regularly. Feel free to contact me via email or text 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. Attendance | (70pts...5pts per class) |
| 2. Summaries | (130pts...10pts per summary) |
| 3. Mid-Term | (400pts) |
| 4. Final Exam | (400pts) |

Attendance

Seventy points (70pts) 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. It’s important to note that being excused means that you will have an opportunity to make up the class by answering all of the “Questions to Consider” that were assigned for the class you missed. And just to clarify, in order to qualify for an excused absence, you need to send me an email prior to the class, or in the case of an emergency, no more than 24 hours after the class.

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.

Summaries

It is vitally important that you come to class ready to contribute to the discussion. With this in mind, everyone will be required to **answer two (2) “Questions to Consider”** for each weekly reading assignment—including weeks 2-14. **Each summary is worth 10 points of your final grade (for a total of 130pts)**. Summaries must be uploaded to Canvas prior to the start of each class. Summaries must be a minimum of 300 words and you are encouraged to write more. (**Note:** The total 300-word count will not include repeating the questions you chose to answer and I will read summaries and keep in touch on an as needed basis.)

Mid-Term and Final Exams

The mid term and final will be worth 400pts each and they will be written take-home exams that will cover all course readings, lectures, discussion questions, films, documentaries, group exercises, etc. You will have one week to complete the mid-term and one week to complete the final exam.

IV. RU LEARNING CENTERS

“Rutgers is committed to your success and offers free academic services to all students. The Learning Centers provide tutoring, study groups, and review sessions for your courses. They also host workshops and provide individual academic coaching to help you further develop your study strategies and self-management skills. To learn more about how the LCs can help you succeed, visit rlc.rutgers.edu.”

V. DISABILITY STATEMENT

This course is open to all students who meet the academic requirement for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of disability should refer to the Rutgers Office of Disability Services and then contact the instructor privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible.

VI. STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. This class will introduce an array of sometimes conflicting ideas and interpretations of U.S. history, and all who partake in the course should feel encouraged to express their views in an open, civic forum.

VII. COURSE READINGS

All other materials for this course will be available on Canvas.

VIII. SYLLABUS

PART I: THE CORPORATION AND THE BETTER BUSINESS CLIMATE

W1. THURSDAY, JANUARY 21ST - COURSE INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Read: The syllabus

In-Class: Introduction: Our expectations for the class and review of the syllabus
For Group Discussion: Does “the market” decide what people make?

W2. THURSDAY, JANUARY 28TH – THE CORPORATION

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

The Atlantic: If Corporations Are People, They Should Act Like It

Brian O'Connell, A New Era in Corporate Responsibility, Society for Human Resource Management, January 2020

Ciara Linnane, Maximizing Shareholder Value Can No Longer Be a Company's Main Purpose: Top CEOs, Market Watch, August 24, 2019

Milton Friedman, The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits, NY Times Magazine, September 13, 1970

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

Documentary: The Corporation

W3. THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 4TH – 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*

Jim Tankersley, Peter Eavis and Ben Casselman, NYTimes, *How FedEx Cut Its Tax Bill to Zero*, November 11, 2019

Nicholas, Lemann, Transaction Man: The Rise of The New Deal and the Decline of the American Dream, *Chapter 4: The Time of Transactions: Rising*, pp. 136-182, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 120 Broadway, New York, 10271, 2019.

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

PART II: ECONOMIC INEQUALITY IN THE U.S.

W4. THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11TH – 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* Chapter 2: *Families*

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

Documentary: Inequality for All

W5. THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18TH – INEQUALITY DIVIDING COMMUNITIES

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

Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, NY Times, *Who Killed the Knapp Family?* January 9, 2020.

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

Distressed Communities Index 2018
<https://eig.org/dci>

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

Documentary: Rich Hill

20/20: Waiting on the World to Change

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

W6. THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25TH – 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*

Isabel Wilkerson, Caste, The Origins of Our Discontents
(to be announced)

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

Mother Jones: Trump's Immigration Crackdown Is a Boom Time for Private Prisons

<https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/05/trumps-immigration-crackdown-is-a-boom-time-for-private-prisons/>

NY Times: For Private Prisons, Detaining Immigrants Is Big Business

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/01/us/prisons-immigration-detention.html>

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

Documentary: Broken On All Sides

W7. THURSDAY, MARCH 4TH – 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*

Morgan and Steinbaum, *The Student Debt Crisis, Labor Market Credentialization, and Racial Inequality: How the Current Student Debt Debate Gets the Economics Wrong*, Roosevelt Institute Reimagine the Rules, Oct. 2018.

Joe Pinsker, The Atlantic, The 'Hidden Mechanisms' That Help Those Born Rich to Excel in Elite Jobs, February 29, 2019

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/02/class-ceiling-laurison-friedman-elite-jobs/582175/>

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

PART III: WORK AND INEQUALITY

W8. THURSDAY, MARCH 11TH – WORK, WORKER RIGHTS AND “PRIVATE GOVERNMENT”

Read: Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government*, Chapter 1: *When the Market Was “Left;”* and Chapter 2: *Private Government*

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*

In-Class: Lecture/Discussion on why you leave your Constitutional Rights at the door everyday when you enter the workplace

MID-TERM: ASSIGNED

Spring Break – March 14th – 21st

W9. MONDAY, MARCH 25TH – LOW WAGE WORK AND THE GIG ECONOMY

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

The Atlantic: *The Internet Is Enabling a New Kind of Poorly Paid Hell*

PBS: *The Internet’s Hidden Science Factory*

ILO, Conditions of Work and Employment Series No. 94: *Organizing On-Demand: Representation, Voice, and Collective Bargaining in the Gig Economy*

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

Documentary: *Waging a Living or Paycheck to Paycheck*

MID-TERM: DUE

W10. MONDAY, APRIL 1ST – LOW WAGE WORK, TEMPS AND FISSURED WORKPLACE

Read: David Weil, The Fissured Workplace: Why Work Became So Bad for So Many and What Can Be Done to Improve It, Chapter 1: *The Fissured Workplace and Its Consequences*, pp. 7-27, Harvard University Press, 2017.

Low Wage Work Is More Pervasive Than You Think
www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2019/11/21/low-wage-work-is-more-pervasive-than-you-think-and-there-arent-enough-good-jobs-to-go-around/

Temp Work, Permanent Abuse. (see file: [Temp Work FINAL email.pdf](#))

Documentary: BBC - The Truth Behind the Click and/or Vice:
Permanently Temporary Front Line: Amazon

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

Guest Speaker: Lou Kimmel, Executive Director, New Labor

W11. MONDAY, APRIL 8TH – TECHNOLOGY AND WORK – AMAZON AND GOOGLE

Readings: Emily Guendelsberger, *On the Clock: What Low-Wage Work Did to Me and How It Drives America Insane*, Part I Amazon p.15-106, Little Brown and Company, 2019

NJ Star Ledger, The Invisible Workforce

Documentary: City Rising: The Informal Economy
<https://www.kcet.org/shows/city-rising-the-informal-economy/episodes/city-rising-the-informal-economy>

PART IV: WHAT DO WE WANT FROM WORK?

W12. MONDAY, APRIL 15TH – THE CRAFTSMEN

Read: To Be Announced

In-Class: Lecture/group discussions...

W13. MONDAY, APRIL 22ND – THE CRAFTSMEN (CONTINUED)

Read: To Be Announced

In-Class: Lecture/group discussion

W14. MONDAY, APRIL 29TH – WHY WE DRIVE

Read: To Be Announced...

In-Class: Lecture/group discussion...
Final Exam