Economics 330: Labor in the American Economy
Spring 2020 Syllabus
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Tuesday/Thursdays 1:00-2:15pm Machmer Hall E-33

Instructor Information: Carly McCann
Office: 201A Gordon Hall
Office Hours: Thursdays 10am-12pm and by appointment
Email: cmccann@umass.edu

Course Description:
This course provides students with perspectives on theories, issues, debates, histories, and concerns for and about labor and working in America. Major conflicting theories will be considered, and they will be contrasted with both statistical and qualitative studies of working (and not working) in the United States, a major capitalist economy. Race, gender and class analysis of the theories and reality of working and wages in the U.S. will be central to the discussion. Labor topics such as low wages, unemployment, migrant labor, prison labor and unpaid labor will be discussed along with policies and safety nets such as minimum wages and unions.

Prerequisite: Students should have successfully completed ECN 103 or RES-ECON 102

Required Course Material:

Optional Course Material:

Other readings for this course will be made available on Moodle. Check Moodle frequently as I may change the short readings to keep current with the issues.

Assignments and Grades:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percent of Grade</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance/Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brief Assignments (6)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>See dates below</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>March 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Report Outline</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>March 12</td>
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<td>Exam 2</td>
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<td>Group Report</td>
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<td>Group Presentation</td>
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<td>April 21-28</td>
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**Attendance/Participation:**
Attendance and participation in all sessions is required for succeeding in this course. You are responsible for coming to the lectures prepared to discuss the assigned readings and exercises. A grade in the A range is gained participating in all classroom exercises and contributing to class discussions in a sustained and thoughtful manner. Good contributions help move the discussion forward, build on other comments, include some evidence, etc. A good comment doesn’t have to be “correct”.

Regular attendance and occasional questions/comments related to course reading will merit a grade in the B range. The grade will be lowered for repeatedly arriving late, or leaving early.

We abide by the University policy on excused absences, which you can find at http://www.umass.edu/registrar/sites/default/files/academicregs.pdf.

**Brief Assignments:**
These assignments consist of conceptual exercises to further understanding of course material and to help in preparation for exams. They may take the form of brief essays, reflection notes and interviews. The exact due date, as well as specifics of the assignment and expectations regarding formatting will be posted on Moodle. You might be asked to briefly report back on your findings in class. Note that late assignments are not accepted.

**Exams:**
There will be two exams in this course, each covering about half of the course material. A list of questions will be provided prior to the exam date. The questions on the exam will be drawn from this list, and you will be asked to choose a subset to answer. The exam will be closed-note. Please note that absence from the exam will be excused ONLY for a serious illness or family emergency, otherwise a grade of zero will be assigned.

**Group Reports and Presentations:**
Groups of 3-4 students will be formed randomly at the beginning of the semester and will produce and present a report on a labor-related topic from the following list:
- Family leave policies
- Labor in the gig economy
- Artificial intelligence/automation and labor
- Federal job guarantee programs/ Universal Basic Income (UBI)
- Labor and the environment
- Labor and the global economy
- Job mobility
- Unemployment Insurance/Social Security
- Employee ownership policies
- . . . other topics upon approval

As you develop your research as a group, it is useful to keep in mind some basic questions: how does this topic relate to work and working conditions (e.g. find investigative journalism pieces on work in the industry)? Who are the workers engaged in this particular type of work (e.g. look
at data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics or the Census)? How does this topic affect the interests of workers and employers (for example look at statements by unions vs. employer organizations)? How are workers, employers or the government attempting to shape what goes on in this field (e.g. look at attempts to organize workers in this industry/area)?

A good report is about 15-20 pages, double-spaced, and contains the following elements: introduction, a discussion of the literature, a clear statement of the research question, some empirical data from a primary source if appropriate, an analysis of the data given what you have learned from the literature review, a conclusion and a complete bibliography of all works cited in the text. Reports need to be submitted both in hard-copy (in class, or left at my office in mailbox in Gordon Hall) and on Moodle.

About half-way through the semester (see date above), each group will submit an outline of the proposed report in class. The outline, between 1-2 pages, will show evidence that the group has undertaken significant work to 1.) clarify their research question, 2.) identify some of the relevant literature on the topic, 3.) identify possible data sources.

In the last three classes of the semester, each group will present their work to the entire class. The presentations will be around 15 minutes (no less than 12, no more than 18), followed by about 5 minutes of Q&A from the audience. Each student in the group is required to speak, and will be evaluated on individual presentation style (speaking clearly and to the whole audience, little use of notes). The group presentation as a whole will be evaluated based on structure, clarity and duration. Presentation slides are required. A detailed grading rubric will be available online.

**Classroom Etiquette and Other Expectations:**
Your participation is important, as is your ability to listen and respect your peers. It is important to build an inclusive and welcoming discussion environment in our classroom. Some students prefer to talk more often than others, but you should try to be as self aware as possible of whether or not you’ve taken too much or too little of the classroom discussion space.

In class, we’ll use different methods to structure our discussion and make sure everyone has an opportunity to participate. As we cover some areas that may be “hot topics” for debate, it is also crucial that we discuss in a respectful manner and try to use language in a way that’s accessible to everyone in the classroom. Etiquette is important not just in person, but also online. Remember to always be courteous and professional in emails or discussion boards, and to avoid ambiguity.

**Accommodations:** If you are a student with a documented disability on record at UMass and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements.

**Academic Honesty:** You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see https://www.umass.edu/honesty/). Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Academic Honesty Office. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated.
**Course Schedule:**

**Introduction and Review (1/21 – 1/23)**

**January 21:** Course Introduction

**January 23:** Neoclassical Economics and Political Economy Approach Review

- *Unlevel Playing Fields*, Chapters 3 and 6

**Wages and hours worked (1/28 – 1/30)**

**January 28:** Neoclassical Explanations


**Optional:**

**January 30:** Political Economy Approach

- Watch the following videos:
  - David Autor TEDx talk “Will automation take away all our jobs?” [https://www.ted.com/talks/david_autor_will_automation_take_away_all_our_jobs?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/david_autor_will_automation_take_away_all_our_jobs?language=en)
  - Juliet Schor “Why do we work so hard?”, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrIhloNEwT8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrIhloNEwT8)
Optional:


**Low Wages, Minimum Wage, and Living Wage (2/4 – 2/6)**

**February 4: Low Wages and Minimum Wage**


**Optional:**


**February 6: Minimum Wages and Living Wage**

*Assignment 1 Due*


Optional:

**Poverty and Unemployment: (2/11 – 2/13)**

**February 11: Poverty**

Optional:

**February 13: Unemployment**

**Discrimination: (2/18 – 2/27)**

NO CLASS FEBRUARY 18—UMASS MONDAY

**February 20:** Theories of Discrimination and Measuring Discrimination

- *Unlevel Playing Fields*, Pages 76-92 and 159-169

Optional:


**February 25:** Persistence of Discrimination

- *Unlevel Playing Fields*, Pages 92-97 and 169-175

**February 27:** Policies and Systems to Address Discrimination

- *Unlevel Playing Fields*, Pages 97-98 and 175-183
- Fernandex Campbell, Alexia “The Harvard admissions case that could end affirmative action, explained.” *Vox*, October 2, 2019.
Jameel, Maryam “More and more workplace discrimination cases are being closed before they’re even investigated.” *Vox*, June 14, 2019.


McCann, Carly and Tomaskovic-Devey, Donald and Lee Badgett, M. V., Employers' Responses to Sexual Harassment (December 1, 2018). Available at SSRN: [https://ssrn.com/abstract=3407960](https://ssrn.com/abstract=3407960) or [http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3407960](http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3407960)


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**Review and Exam 1 (3/3 – 3/5)**

**March 3:** Catch up and Review

*Assignment 2 Due*

**March 5:** Exam 1

**Topics:** Wages and hours worked (neoclassical and political economy approaches), Low Wages, Minimum Wages/Living Wages, Poverty, Unemployment, Discrimination

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**Care Labor and Care Penalties (3/10 – 3/12)**

**March 10:** Household and Care Labor


**Optional:**


**March 12: Care Penalties and Motherhood Penalties**


Optional:


**SPRING BREAK. No class March 17 or March 19**

**Prison Labor, Migrant Labor and Immigration (3/24 – 3/31)**

**March 24: Prison Labor**


Optional:


**March 26: Migrant Labor**

*Assignment 3 Due*

• Real World Labor, Chapter 11, 2.3

**March 31: Immigration**


**Optional:**


**Labor Unions: History and Economics (4/2 – 4/9)**

**April 2: Brief History of Unions**

*Assignment 4 Due*


**April 7: Economics of Unions**


**April 9: U.S Labor Strikes**

*Assignment 5 Due*


Optional:


**Review and Exam 2 (4/14 – 4/16)**

April 14: Catch up and Review

April 16: Exam 2

Topics: Household and Care Labor, Care Penalties, Prison Labor, Migrant Labor, Immigration, Labor Unions.

**Group Presentations (4/21 – 4/28)**

April 21: Groups 1 and 2 presentations

April 23: Groups 3 and 4 presentations

April 28: Groups 5 and 6 presentations

**Group Reports due May 7 along with Assignment 6**