

**POLS 249/SOC 266/HSTCMP 249:
Introduction to Labor Studies
University of Washington
Winter 2021
Jacob M. Grumbach**

Class Meetings: 1:00PM – 2:20PM, Monday-Wednesday

Office Hours: Wednesday 2:30 – 3:30PM in 131 Gowen

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Course Overview

This interdisciplinary course focuses on work and workers, with particular attention to the way politics, law, and collective action shape how work is performed and compensated. The focus is primarily on the United States, but some attention is also given to conditions in other countries. The course looks broadly at factors that shape worker compensation, autonomy, and wellbeing. The course looks at worker struggles to gain power and influence conditions in the workplace and society. The class offers perspectives on the formation, internal organization, and influence of worker organizations in different industries, national settings, and historical periods. The class considers working conditions in today's world of globalization and precarious employment.

The course puts current conditions in historical perspective by considering changes over time in technology and labor processes; international political economy; the racial, gender, and skill composition of the labor force; state repression and state tolerance of collective action; and employer opposition to unions and workers' rights. The course concludes by looking at some current efforts to resist unfair working conditions and assert worker voice in the workplace.

The primary goal of the course is to help students become more critical, sophisticated observers and participants in American politics.

Course Texts

This is a *reading intensive course*, and it is imperative that you come to lecture and discussion section having done all readings. Because this course has no textbook, readings will not simply summarize the content from lecture; the readings instead provide additional theories and evidence that you will utilize in your paper and exams. All book chapters will be available on Canvas (see below), and all articles are available to UW students for free online (make sure to

use the UW Library Proxy on your browser). In addition, you will almost always be able to find the readings by simply Googling the author and title.

Readings in **bold** are certain to appear on exams and paper assignments. Readings *not* in bold are recommended for doing well in the class, but are of lower priority.

Assignments and Grading

This course will have an in-class midterm, final exam, and one term paper (assignments to be provided on bCourses and in class). The components of your grade are distributed as follows:

Midterm Exam	20%
Reading Responses	10%
Discussion Section Participation and Quizzes	15%
Final Exam	25%
Term Paper	30%

It is critically important that you attend all *lectures* and attend *discussion section*. You are responsible for all material in assigned readings and discussed in class. The course also requires you to attend an assigned discussion section once a week.

You will complete **four Reading Responses** (due on the Wednesday of Weeks 2, 3, 7, and 10). A Reading Response is a short paragraph, typically between three and five sentences, that *summarizes the argument* of one or more readings from the previous or current week. You will submit your Reading Response on Canvas. Perfect scores will be given for reasonable effort. Late Reading Responses will not be accepted.

The **Term Paper** (with a strict limit of 8 double-spaced pages) is due by the beginning of lecture on Wednesday, March 3rd. Details of the Term Paper assignment, including paper topics and formatting instructions, will be sent out in Week 2. You will submit your Term Paper on Canvas. Late papers will be graded down 1/3 of a grade for each day they are late.

You can also receive a small amount of extra credit for **creating a meme** about concepts from class.

The UW's policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available [here](#). Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the [Religious Accommodations Request form](#).

Academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the course. Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any other act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Academic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a

postponement or extension on a test or assignment, or the submission of essentially the same written assignment for two different courses without prior permission of the instructors.

The Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies

Please utilize the [Harry Bridges Center](#) as a resource during the class. The Bridges Center helps to coordinate the labor studies minor, programs activities and speakers related to work and labor, and provides research and scholarship support for UW students. The center has an extensive collection of online and hardcopy texts that can supplement required class material. The center also houses some fascinating [web-based history projects that can be found here](#).

The [Labor Archives of Washington](#) is a major repository of archival materials related to the history of work, labor organizations, and social justice organizations in and around the Pacific Northwest. It is housed in Special Collections at UW Libraries, and has an extensive and growing collection of digitized historical materials.

Readings and Course Schedule

Week 1: The State of Working America

Readings

- **Larry Mishel, Josh Bivens, Elise Gould, and Heidi Shierholz. 2012. *The State of Working America: 12th Edition*. Economic Policy Institute. Chapter 1 (Overview).**
- **Steven Greenhouse. 2020. “The Worker’s Friend? Here’s how Trump has Waged his War on Workers.” *The American Prospect*.**
- Optional:
 - Thomas Edsall. 2019. “The Right Has a Greater Appreciation of Labor’s Role Than We Do.” *The New York Times*.

Week 2: Theories and Philosophies of Labor and Work

Readings

- **Elizabeth Anderson. 2017. *Private Government*. Chapter 2.**
- **Karl Marx. 1844. “Estranged Labor.” *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.**
- **Mancur Olson. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action*. Chapter 3, Parts A and B.**
- **The Economist. 2017. “Coase’s Theory of the Firm.”**

Week 3: What Are Unions and Why Are They in Decline?

Readings

- **Kim Kelly. 2018. "What a Labor Union Is and How It Works." *Teen Vogue*.**
- **Jake Rosenfeld. 2014. *What Unions No Longer Do*. Chapters 1 and 2.**
- **Kate Bronfenbrenner. 2009. "No Holds Barred: The Intensification of Employer Opposition to Organizing." Economic Policy Institute.**
- **Jane McAlevey. 2015. "The Crisis of New Labor and Alinsky's Legacy: Revisiting the Role of the Organic Grassroots Leaders in Building Powerful Organizations and Movements." *Politics & Society*.**

Week 4: The Rise of the New Gilded Age

Readings

- **Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson. 2010. "Winner-take-all politics: Public policy, political organization, and the precipitous rise of top incomes in the United States." *Politics & Society*.**
- **Paul Krugman. 2002. "For Richer." *New York Times Magazine*.**
- **Susan Dynarski. 2018. "Fresh Proof That Strong Unions Help Reduce Income Inequality." *New York Times*.**
- **John Alquist. 2017. "Labor Unions, Political Representation, and Economic Inequality." *Annual Review of Political Science*.**

Week 5: Labor and Racial Justice [NOTE: Midterm on Wednesday, February 3rd]

Readings

- **Paul Frymer and Jacob M. Grumbach. 2020. "Labor Unions and White Racial Politics." *American Journal of Political Science*.**
- **Jake Rosenfeld and Meredith Kleykamp. 2012. "Organized Labor and Racial Wage Inequality in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology*.**
- **Dan Kaufman. 2018. "A Labor Day Reflection on Unions, Race, and Division." *The New Yorker*.**
- **W.E.B. Du Bois. 1923. "The Hosts of Black Labor." *The Nation*.**
- **Optional:**
 - Paul Frymer. 2008. *Black and Blue: African Americans, the Labor Movement, and the Decline of the Democratic Party*.
 - W.E.B. Du Bois. 1918. "The Black Man and the Unions." *The Crisis*.

Week 6: Labor and Immigration

Readings

- Michael Kazin. 2013. “How Labor Learned to Love Immigration.” *The New Republic*.
- Ruth Milkman. 2019. “Immigrants Didn’t Kill Your Union.” *Dissent*.
- Michael McCann and George Lovell. 2020. “Union by Law: Filipino Labor Activists, Rights Radicalism, and Racial Capitalism.” Chapter 1.

Week 7: Labor, Law, and Policy Feedbacks

Readings

- James Feigenbaum, Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, and Vanessa Williamson. 2018. “Right-to-Work Laws Have Devastated Unions — and Democrats.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/08/opinion/connor-lamb-unions-pennsylvania.html>
- Paul Frymer. 2004. “Race, Labor, and the Twentieth-Century American State.” *Politics & Society*.
- Alexander Hertel-Fernandez. 2017. “Policy Feedback as Political Weapon: Conservative Advocacy and the Demobilization of the Public Sector Labor Movement.” *Perspectives on Politics*.
- Noam Scheiber and Kenneth P. Vogel. 2018. “Behind a Key Anti-Labor Case, a Web of Conservative Donors.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/25/business/economy/labor-court-conservatives.html>
- Optional:
 - William E. Forbath. 1991. *Law and the Shaping of the American Labor Movement*. Chapter 1.
 - Leslie K. Finger and Michael T. Hartney. 2019. “Financial Solidarity: The Future of Unions in the post-Janus Era.” *Perspectives on Politics*.

Week 8: Technology, Monopsony, and Policy

Readings

- Kim Kelly. 2020. “Misclassified Information.” *The Baffler*.
- Suresh Naidu, Eric Posner, and Glen Weyl. 2018. “More and more companies have monopoly power over workers’ wages. That’s killing the economy.” *Vox*.
- Dylan Matthews. 2017. “A Basic Income Really Could End Poverty Forever.” *Vox*.
- Daniel Zamora. 2017. “The Case Against a Basic Income.” *Jacobin*.

- Optional:
 - Ryan Cooper. “The Leisure Agenda.” People’s Policy Project. <https://www.peoplespolicyproject.org/projects/the-leisure-agenda/>
 - Mark Erlich. 2020. “Construction Workers and the Gig Economy.” *Dissent*.

Week 9: The Labor Movement Moving Forward [NOTE: Term Paper Due Wednesday, March 3rd]

Readings

- **Alexia Fernandez Campbell. 2019. “A record number of US workers went on strike in 2018.” *Vox*.**
- **Maryam Jameel and Joe Yerardi. 2019. “Workplace discrimination is illegal. But our data shows it’s still a huge problem.” *Vox*.**
- **Darrick Hamilton. 2015. “The Federal Job Guarantee: A Step Toward Racial Justice.” *Dissent*.**
- **Harold Meyerson. 2019. “The Fight for 15’s Long, Winding, and Brandeisian Road.” *The American Prospect*.**
- Optional:
 - Alexander Hertel-Fernandez. 2018. “Employers are increasingly using their workers as lobbyists. Here’s why that’s a problem.” *Vox*.

Week 10: Review and Reflection