

**THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
(www.soci.ucalgary.ca)**

SOCIOLOGY 461 (WORKER MOVEMENTS & LABOUR UNIONS)

Course Outline, Fall 2008

Safewalk/Campus Security: 220-5333, ANYTIME

This course makes use of Blackboard to communicate information to students. To access Blackboard, go to: blackboard.ucalgary.ca OR my.ucalgary.ca

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Office: SS 954 Phone: 220-6500

Office Hours: Mondays and Fridays, immediately after our classes (4:15 to 5:00 p.m.) or by special appointment. Office hours start on September 8 and end on December 5, but are cancelled on Friday October 3 (Department of Sociology Planning Meeting), Monday October 13 (Thanksgiving) and Monday November 10 (Reading Day). Please try to email me at least 48 hours prior to when you want a special appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

Workers in capitalist relations of production survive by exchanging their labour power for a wage or salary. They are simultaneously dependent upon the success of their own employer and involved in ongoing (although sometimes latent) conflict with that employer over on-the-job safety, wages and benefits, job autonomy, and the amount of work that must be accomplished for a particular wage or salary.

One of the defining characteristics of capitalist societies is the joining together of workers in common cause, united by the similar circumstances of their lives and a moral interpretation which defines those circumstances as unjust. This course studies examples of worker organization and mobilization, using concepts drawn from the sociological literature on social movements. The course is thus about worker movements.

Worker movements have sometimes given rise to formal institutions such as labour unions, co-operative societies and political parties, but can also be observed in the everyday collective activities of workers in workplaces and communities. In studying worker movements we must necessarily study the role of labour unions in organizing workers' struggles against and accommodation to their conditions in capitalist society. Nonetheless, labour unions only constitute part of the story of worker movements.

This course will focus on worker movements and labour unions in the contemporary era of corporate globalization. Our focus will include current union struggles at the University of Calgary (particularly the privatization of food services and the subsequent campaign to unionize the employees of Chartwells), the state of the labour movement in Calgary and the rest of Alberta, the significance of the election of pro-worker governments in a number of South American countries, the international campaign against sweatshop labour in the garment industry and whether any worker movements have become “green” in response to global warming and other pressing environmental issues. In order to understand current developments both in Canada and other countries, however, we must also study the history of workers’ struggles and organizing efforts during the early decades of industrialization. Finally, we will undertake the analysis of different theoretical approaches to understanding worker movements and labour unions.

Please keep the following points in mind as you are contemplating whether to take this course:

- (1) There is a great deal to learn about this subject, and as a consequence students will be expected to carry a fairly heavy reading load.
- (2) Since this is a seminar course, students will be expected to complete assigned readings, viewings and reading/viewing questions on time and actively participate in discussions on those readings and viewings during our seminars. In order to encourage you to complete your assigned readings and viewings on time, there will be short, surprise “Reading/Viewing Quizzes” prior to many (but not all) of our classes during the term. You will never have advance notice of when a reading/viewing quiz will take place, so you are advised to always come to class sharp at 3 p.m. and be prepared to write a quiz. The quiz on a particular day will be based upon that day’s assigned readings and reading questions as well as any videos that were screened in the previous class. These “Reading/Viewing Quizzes” will make up 25 percent of the final grade. Furthermore, 10 percent of the course grade is for actively and thoughtfully participating in classroom discussions. If your schedule is such that it looks like you will be unable to make our classes on a regular basis, this is probably not the best class for you to take.
- (3) We will host a few guest speakers during the term. At the end of each class with a guest speaker, students will be required to pass in a page that lists at least two questions you could have asked, or actually did ask, that day’s speaker. These submissions will be worth 5 per cent of the final grade.
- (4) As part of a group of 2 or 3 students, you will be required to complete a group research project on an issue posing problems for workers and/or labour unions in contemporary Calgary. Your project will involve documentary research and interviews with at least two labour union officials or labour activists. Your group will produce a written report as well as make a presentation on your research to the rest of the class. Twenty-five per cent of the course grade is for your work on this group project.

(5) You will have the option of completing either (A) a major essay, or (B) a take-home final examination (see details below). The value of either of these options is 35 per cent.

REQUIRED READINGS

The two required books for the course are:

Black, Errol and Jim Silver. 2008. *Building a Better World: An Introduction to Trade Unionism in Canada*, second edition. Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

Munck, Ronaldo. 2002. *Globalization and Labour: The New 'Great Transformation'*. London and New York: Zed Books.

You will also be assigned other readings that will be available online, placed on Reserve in MacKimmie Library or distributed in class. The schedule of assigned readings will be posted in the "Assigned Readings" section on Blackboard. The schedule will always cover at least two classes into the future, including the assigned reading questions. We will be reading all of *Building A Better World* and *Globalization and Labour*, so you can't go wrong by reading ahead in either of these books.

STUDENT EVALUATION

1. Reading/Viewing Quizzes

- held on a surprise basis at the beginning (3 p.m.) of some (but not all) of our classes
- each quiz will cover that day's assigned reading and reading questions along with any videos that were screened in the previous class (see list of assigned readings/viewings on Blackboard)
- mix of question types
- each quiz will last five to ten minutes, depending upon the type of questions
- when calculating your final quiz mark, I will drop your lowest result and average the rest
- you will receive a zero on any quiz that you miss unless you provide a medical note or receive advance permission to have an "excused absence" for that class

... value = 25%

2. Participation in seminars

- please come to class prepared to contribute to our discussions
- you don't have to say a lot in order to make a positive contribution, but you do have to say something!

... value = 10%

3. Participation in classes with guest speakers

- At the end of each class with a guest speaker, students will be required to pass in a page that lists at least two questions you could have asked, or actually did ask, that day's speaker.

... value = 5%

4. Group research project on an issue posing problems for workers and/or labour unions in contemporary Calgary.

- Group of 2-3 students
- Topic to be chosen in consultation with the instructor
- Ethics approval pending, so don't start until approval is granted
- Each group is responsible for identifying a research question, conducting the research, preparing a written report (approx. 3000 words) and summarizing your findings in a 15 minute classroom presentation
- Additional instructions will be circulated

... value = 25%

5. You will be required to complete a major essay or a take-home final examination, but not both.

OPTION A: Major Essay

- (1) Topic: You must write on a topic approved by the instructor.
- (2) How to Get Approval for Your Topic. The instructor will only approve essay topics that are highly relevant to the subject matter of this course. You must first make an appointment to discuss potential essay topics with the instructor. If you wish to go ahead with this option, you must prepare an essay proposal.
- (3) Essay Proposal. It is due in the digital drop box no later than Friday October 10. It should be no longer than 500 words, excluding references. It should outline the scholarly research question you propose to investigate and indicate why this is an important research question. You should also submit a reference list that includes five academic references that will be important for your proposed essay topic.
- (4) Approval of Essay Proposal. You will know whether your essay proposal is approved no later than October 17.
- (5) Changing Your Mind. You must write an essay on a topic that has been approved by the instructor. If you change your mind about writing on an approved topic, you must switch to Option B, the Take-Home Final Examination. No essay proposals submitted after October 10 will be considered for approval.
- (6) References: Your key references for the essay must be academic books and/or academic journal articles.
- (7) Style: You must follow the ASA (American Sociological Association) style of referencing sources.
- (8) Length: Between 4,000 and 5,000 words, excluding references and title page. You must indicate the word count for your essay at the top of the first page. Essays that exceed the word count will be penalized 5 per cent of the assigned grade for every 100 words, or part thereof, over 5,000 words.
- (9) Submission: Please submit an electronic version of your essay in the Digital Drop Box available on Blackboard.
- (10) Due Date. Thursday December 4.
- (11) Value: 35%
- (12) Bonus for Early Submission: Essays submitted by Thursday November 27 will receive a bonus of 5 per cent of the assigned grade. (For example, an essay that earns a mark of 80 percent will receive a bonus of $80 * .05 = 4\%$ if submitted by November 27.)

OPTION B: Take-Home Final Examination

- (1) Timing. It will be handed out at our final class on Friday December 5 and must be completed by Friday December 12 at 4:15 p.m.
- (2) How to Submit. Either bring a copy to Professor Langford in SS 954 between 3 and 4:30 p.m. on December 12 OR submit an electronic version of your answers in the Digital Drop Box available on Blackboard.

(3) Coverage and Format. You will be expected to construct essay answers to assigned questions. This examination will be based on all course materials.

(4) Value. 35%.

IMPORTANT CONVENTIONS

(1) Except in the cases of documented illness, or extenuating circumstances brought to the attention of instructor prior to the due date of a particular course component, there will be a penalty for late work of 5% of the assigned grade per day.

(2) A student who has a legitimate reason for being unable to complete a required course activity on time must discuss an alternative course of action with the instructor. At his discretion, the instructor will transfer the percentage weight to another component of the course, or set a makeup activity.

(3) Please note that requests to defer term work past the end of a term go through the Undergraduate Programs Office (UPO). You can find the Deferred Term Work Form at: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/files/registrar/defTW.pdf> You must submit this form to the Social Sciences Associate Dean (Students) through the Undergraduate Programs Office, 4th Floor, MacEwan Student Centre. To make an appointment with the Associate Dean, phone (403) 220-8155. Only the Associate Dean approves requests for deferrals which extend beyond the end of a term.

(4) The quality of a student's writing is a factor in the evaluation of a student's work in this course.

(5) "Intellectual honesty is the cornerstone of the development and acquisition of knowledge" (*Calendar 2008-09*, p. 54). Please review the University of Calgary's policies for dealing with student misconduct, particularly plagiarism and cheating.

(6) **The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP)** legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments or tests or projects from a public place, e.g., outside an instructor's office or the Department main office. Graded work must be returned to students individually. After the term is over, please email the instructor to arrange to pick up work in person. Alternately please supply a stamped, self-addressed envelope so that your work can be returned to you by mail.

(7) **Ethics Research:** Students are advised that any research with human subjects--including any interviewing (even with friends and family), opinion polling, or unobtrusive observation--must have the approval of the Departmental Ethics Committee. Therefore please ensure that departmental ethics approval is in place before you begin the group research project for this course.

(8) Academic Accommodation

Students with a disability, who require academic accommodation, need to register with the Disability Resource Centre (MC 295, telephone 220-8237). Academic accommodation letters need to be provided to course instructors no later than fourteen (14) days after the first day of class. **It is a student's responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre and to request academic accommodation, if required.**

LETTER GRADE ASSIGNMENT

At the end of the term numerical marks are totalled and a final letter grade is assigned on the following basis:

Percentage Range	Letter Grade	Percentage Range	Letter Grade
49 or less	F	72-75	B-
50-53	D	76-79	B
54-58	D+	80-84	B+
59-62	C-	85-89	A-
63-66	C	90-94	A
67-71	C+	95 or higher	A+