Course: ECO 280 Section: 01  
Professor: Brent Kramer  
Semester: Spring 2015  
Professor’s e-mail: brkramer@jjay.cuny.edu  
Credits: 3  
Room: New Building 1.165

Course Description: The role of work in the economy; classical economists and the determination of wages; wages, hours, and working conditions; trade unionism in the United States and collective bargaining; employment discrimination; interrelationship of wages, productivity and employment; labor in relation to business, government and economic change; economics of social insurance; current conditions and policy debates.

Prerequisite: ENG 101 and ECO 101, or permission of the instructor

Learning Objectives: Students should be able to understand and analyze policy issues regarding work and working conditions, as well as anticipate the effects of proposed social and economic policies on the lives of working people. Most media imply an equivalence between the interests of workers and those of employers; students should be able to transcend this bias in the media’s reporting. You should…

• be familiar with the classical labor theory of value, and the distinctions between money price and value for use;
• appreciate the role of work in creating value;
• understand why labor is different from all other economic resources;
• understand how capitalism organizes and uses labor, and how this is different from other historical economic systems;
• be familiar with the “standard” supply and demand model for determining wages, and understand why this model does not reflect real life;
• be familiar with the legal structures governing work and workplace relations in the U.S., especially the role of unions;
• understand the role of the social wage in the lives of working people;
• be familiar with some current changes in private workplaces in the U.S.;
• be familiar with the measures of employment and unemployment and the role of policy in affecting people’s ability to find good jobs; and
• be able to discuss alternative systems of organizing work.


Professor’s office & hours: I have no official office hours, but will often be available before and after class. The best way to meet with me is to arrange to do so immediately before or after class, or to e-mail me so we can set up a time.
Assignment drop-off: Most assignments will be submitted by email. However, in the unusual circumstance that “hard copy” is required, if you cannot bring an assignment to class, you may leave it with the department administrator, Rita Taveras, in 3503N.

Attendance: Since presentations by the instructor and discussion in class are an important part of this course, absences should be avoided. Understanding that “life happens,” there will be no penalty for up to four unexcused absences;* after that, the semester grade may be reduced by two percentage points for each unexcused absence (thus, for example, possibly changing a B- to a C+). If there are unusual circumstances, please let the instructor know (I don’t want details about medical conditions, but at least let me know if there is one). Except for very unusual circumstances, I do not provide class notes for absentees, but you are responsible for everything covered during your absence. Except for extremely unusual circumstances, there are no make-ups for missed quizzes; missing one without the instructor’s consent (and making acceptable alternative arrangements) will result in failing the course. *Determining when absences may be excused is completely at the instructor’s discretion.

Lateness: Late arrival to class is disruptive to all of us. Please make whatever arrangements are needed to arrive promptly. If there are special circumstances, please speak with the instructor. I track lateness and will discuss any concerns with individual students as needed; persistent lateness may also reduce your semester grade.

Electronics: Please turn off all electronic devices during class (taking notes on a laptop is only acceptable with a qualifying disability). If you are a single parent, or have some other responsibility that requires you to be able to be contacted in case of emergency, you may leave a phone on in silent mode. If you receive a call, please leave the room to answer it.

The Writing Center: The Writing Center, located in room 2450 North Hall, is a service that provides free tutoring to students of John Jay. The Writing Center is a valuable resource for any student of writing, and I encourage you to use it. If the instructor tells you that you must get help for your next written submission, you must do so. Be sure to make an appointment way ahead of time, as the center can get very busy.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism and cheating are violations of CUNY’s policy on academic integrity By registering in this course, you are promising to abide by all the requirements stated in this policy. Students who violate this policy are liable to severe penalty, including disciplinary action. Copying others’ work, or including published material without attribution (even if unintentional), will lead to a zero on that assignment. A second incident of plagiarism or cheating will lead to your failing the course. See also pp. 44-45 of the JJC Undergraduate Bulletin for further explanation.

Assessment: I teach and test in such a way that, with consistent effort and attention, nobody should fail. However, I do have to give grades. I intend to weight the measures like this: 30% through quizzes*, 10% through class participation; 10% for in-class reports on current policy issues; 30% altogether for several written assignments; and 20% for the term paper or final exam*. *(quizzes and the exam will be open-book; I will explain this in class).

Staying in touch: Students will be expected to check their John Jay email regularly; changes and additional readings, assignments, or clarifications will be announced by email and on Blackboard. You may, of course, forward your John Jay email to whatever address you wish (I can show you how). However, when responding to the instructor, please put your name in the subject line.
**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND TOPICS (READINGS NEXT PAGE)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 29, Feb. 3 &amp; 5</td>
<td>Introduction, Economic overview; What should economics be about?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 10</td>
<td>What is capitalism? Problems with GDP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Feb. 12</strong></td>
<td><strong>College closed (Lincoln’s birthday)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 17</td>
<td>What is &quot;work&quot;? What is its role in creating value?</td>
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<td><strong>Tues., Feb. 17th, Last day to drop without a W</strong></td>
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<td>Feb. 19</td>
<td>Problems of work in US capitalism. Is our work &quot;wage slavery&quot;?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 24</td>
<td>Classical determination of wages; is the supply/demand model appropriate?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb. 26 &amp; March 3</td>
<td>Marxian analysis of work, alienation, and exploitation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 5, 10, &amp; 12</td>
<td>First quiz (Mar. 5); Recent labor history; labor law issues. Fair Labor</td>
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<td>Standards &amp; abuses</td>
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<td><strong>What’s going on with labor in our economy?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>March 17</td>
<td>Overview of jobs crisis</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 19 &amp; 24</td>
<td>Unions—what they do; the employer attack on unions and the social wage</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 26 &amp; 31</td>
<td>Measures of employment, unemployment, etc.; NAIRU</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2</td>
<td>Second quiz and continue with topic</td>
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<td><strong>April 3 – 11  SPRING RECESS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>April 14 &amp; 16</td>
<td>Minimum Wage issues</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Thurs. April 16th — Last day to withdraw. After this you MUST be given a letter grade.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>April 21 &amp; 23</td>
<td>“Contingentization” of work (non-standard jobs); Fast food &amp; Big Box issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 28 &amp; 30</td>
<td>Discrimination &amp; Third quiz (on Thursday)</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 5 &amp; 7</td>
<td>Alternative models of organizing work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 12 &amp; 14</td>
<td>Catch up or fill in with other material</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 19 4:00-6:00 pm</td>
<td>Final exam OR term paper (to be determined)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**NOTE THAT QUIZ DATES MAY CHANGE**
**TENTATIVE LIST OF READINGS** (note: full source notes on following pages)

All other readings are detailed in the notes below and are available on Blackboard or by direct web download.

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<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Source(s)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Introduction</td>
<td>EFE chs.1-3; <em>Introduction</em> folder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Context: economic overview; What should economics be about?</td>
<td>EFE chs.1-3; <em>Introduction</em> folder</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is &quot;work&quot;? What is its role in creating value? Problems with GDP</td>
<td>EFE ch.4; <em>How do we measure the economy</em> folder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problems of work in US capitalism. Is our work &quot;wage slavery&quot;?</td>
<td>EFE ch. 8; <em>Work in capitalism</em> folder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical determination of wages; is the supply/demand model</td>
<td><em>Classical theory</em> folder *Think of contemporary examples as you read</td>
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<tr>
<td>appropriate?</td>
<td>Smith’s analysis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marxian analysis of work, alienation, and exploitation</td>
<td><em>Workers as a class</em> folder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recent labor history; labor law issues. Fair Labor Standards and</td>
<td><em>Labor law</em> folder</td>
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<td>abuses.</td>
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<td>The jobs crisis</td>
<td><em>Labor Market 2015</em> folder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unions—what they do; the employer attack on unions and the social</td>
<td>EFE reread pp. 108-110; Chapter 13; <em>Unions</em> folder; “Salt of the Earth” movie</td>
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<td>wage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Measures of employment, unemployment, etc.; NAIRU</td>
<td><em>Unemployment</em> folder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimum wage issues</td>
<td><em>Minimum Wage</em> folder</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Wal-Mart model</td>
<td><em>Big Box and Fast Food</em> folder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contingentization of work</td>
<td><em>Non-standard work</em> folder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td><em>Discrimination</em> folder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alternative models</td>
<td><em>Alternatives</em> folder *“Mondragon” movie, EFE chs. 25-27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sources

(the first four chapters are also available on line, at [http://www.economicsforeveryone.ca/excerpts](http://www.economicsforeveryone.ca/excerpts))

Introduction folder:

Brent Kramer, What is capitalism?
Brent Kramer, Division of revenue chart


How do we measure the economy folder:

Jim Hightower, “Let’s Measure the Job Market the Way We Gauge Stock Market Health,” *Nation of Change* June 21, 2014

Work in capitalism folder:

Amy Gluckman, “Quality In, Workers Out?” *Dollars and Sense* September-October 2003


Classical Theory folder:
- Brent Kramer, “Labor Hours Model”

Workers as a class folder:
- Karl Marx, excerpt from *Capital* (1849), from [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/wage-labour/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/wage-labour/index.htm)
- Brent Kramer, “Dead labor explained”
- Brent Kramer, chart illustrating the Marxian argument for why workers would be impoverished (immiseration) under capitalism.
- David Bernz and the group “Stone Soup”, singing “Rockin’ Solidarity,” based on Ralph Chapin’s “Solidarity Forever,” the anthem of the union movement (music: Battle Hymn of the Republic).

Labor Law folder:


Labor market folder:


**Brent Kramer**, slide show on employment issues in New York State & New York City


Unions folder:


**Yates**, another excerpt from the same book (pp. 56-59).

**Two charts** originally from the AFL-CIO website ([www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org)); one adapted by instructor


Social Wage & Unemployment folder:

International comparison of government effects on income inequality, OECD, private source

International comparison of social benefits for low-income families, OECD, private source


Minimum Wage folder:


Gerald Friedman, “What Happened to Wages?” Dollars and Sense, September-October 2014. [Not available on line]


Non-standard work folder:


Big Box folder:


Brian McFadden, “Walmart Cares,” The Strip (cartoon, undated), New York Times


Organization United for Respect at Walmart (OURWalmart), e-mail blast, Nov. 13, 2014.

Alternatives folder:
Richard D. Wolff, “Yes, there is an alternative to capitalism: Mondragon shows the way,” The Guardian June 24, 2012


Discrimination folder: