

ECO3307: Labor Economics

Merrimack College Fall 2018

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00 - 3:15 PM

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and by appointment

Course Description

An economic system has to have some way of bringing workers together with tools and resources to produce what the population needs—and then also needs a way to distribute what is produced. In capitalism, labor markets are the primary coordinating mechanism. Workers sell their labor power, that is, their ability to work for a set period of time. Employers hire workers, provide tools and inputs, and direct the workers' labor. The output produced belongs to the employers. Workers are paid wages for their labor power and then they use the money to buy what they need from their own and other employers. This is not the only way of coordinating labor and distribution, however. Labor systems change over time and multiple systems of labor coexist at the same time. Capitalist employment in the U.S. has coexisted with slavery, indentured servitude, and household production and these systems were all interdependent. To a greater or lesser extent, these other non-capitalist labor system still exist and are still intertwined with capitalist production.

We are currently in an unsettled moment in the economics of labor. We cannot know what the medium-term future will look like, but it may look very different from the recent past. We will begin by taking stock of our current situation by considering the destabilizing changes brought by mechanization and globalization. We will then take a tour through the historical development of labor systems in the U.S. When we come full circle and return to our times, we can apply what we learned about past periods of transition to our analysis of the changes underway.

As we compare different labor systems, and variations within systems over time, we will attend to themes such as

- The distribution of power to make decisions about what, where, when, and how to produce
- The control over profit or surplus—that is, if the value of what is produced is greater than the cost of production, who decides what to do with the extra?
- The distribution of market risk—for example, if what is produced cannot be sold at a price high enough to cover the cost of production, who absorbs the loss?
- Geographic mobility—capital moving to places where labor and resources are already available, workers moving to where capital demands it

Learning Goals

Course Goals

- Knowledge and understanding – By the end of the semester you will understand the variety of ways that economic systems have coordinated labor and the ways in which the coordination of labor relates to the distribution of output.
- Skills – Economic theories use both verbal argument and mathematical modeling. You will practice using both sets of skills. You will practice writing logically organized, rigorous verbal arguments and you will practice manipulating and applying mathematical models. You will practice interpreting empirical data to tell an economic story.
- Ultimately, learning is a creative act. You will develop the ability to construct your own economic views, views that will be in accordance with your personal values and experience while also rooted in rigorous theory and the careful use of empirical evidence.

Learning Goals for Social Sciences Courses

- Students should understand the relationship between the individual and society from multiple perspectives.
- Students should be able to apply scientific methods to the study of human behavior and social structures.
- Students should be able to evaluate evidence pertaining to human behavior and social structures.

Liberal Studies Core Learning Goals

- **Effective Communication:** The ability to read, write, speak, and listen clearly, purposefully, and appropriately in a range of rhetorical situations.
- **Critical Thinking:** The ability to locate, analyze, integrate, synthesize, and evaluate complex information effectively.
- **Reflective Thinking:** The ability to articulate how, why, and to what purpose one has learned; the ability to learn from one's own experience and to cultivate and direct one's own intellectual, creative, personal and spiritual growth.
- **Ethical Understanding, Reasoning, and Responsibility:** The ability to make decisions guided by a moral and ethical framework, to understand the societal implications and consequences of those decisions, and to accept responsibility for one's self and for one's own actions.
- **Cultural Understanding and Respect for Diversity:** The ability to apply a global perspective to understand, respect, and appreciate the rich diversity of human cultures, experiences and ideas, and the ability to work and communicate effectively in diverse cultures, groups and environments.

Merrimack College Pedagogical Values

This course is offered in support of the academic mission and goals of Merrimack College

- Learning is not just a mental exercise. Learning shapes our lives and actions. *What you learn in this course can inform and empower your participation in existing labor systems and in political deliberation over how these systems may change.*
- Learning is an active dialectic/discussion-based pursuit of understanding, not the passive receipt of knowledge. *You will spend class time framing and asking questions of your classmates and of me and answering difficult questions posed by your classmates and by me.*
- Because we learn in interaction with others, community is a locus of learning. *We meet in the classroom to pursue the shared goal of learning together.*
- Good habits can act as building blocks for learning. *I will set high standards and also provide a structure and support for developing the academic skill set you will need to meet those standards – and many of those skills will also help you in other classes and other settings.*

(adapted from <http://www.merrimack.edu/academics/approach/augustinian-pedagogy.php>)

What you will do in pursuit of these learning goals

Class time and out-of-class time:

Before class: To prepare for each class meeting, do the assigned reading. Required texts are available for purchase in the bookstore and will also be on reserve in the library. All readings that are not in the required texts will be available through Blackboard.

Practice the skill of active reading. You should come to class with notes about each reading. It may take some experimentation to find the note-taking technique that works best for you. (I use sticky notes to mark the passages that seem important as I read. After I finish reading I go back through the marked passages and write down a direct quote or a summary of the passage, including a page number citation. You can try that method, but you might find a different technique that you prefer.) Whatever your technique, you should keep your notes in a collected place as a reading journal that you bring to class.

- For each reading, also prepare a one-page notes summary with four components:
1. Write out the full text of a one- to two-sentence quote that states a major claim of the reading (cite the author and page number so we can all locate the quote in its original context if we need to) and your paraphrase/explanation of the quote.
 2. Compile a list of key words. Many of the authors we read make use of specialized vocabulary from economics and other disciplines (sociology, history, etc.). Note the use of specialized vocabulary, whether or not you feel comfortable with those terms already.
 3. Indicate a passage that you want to discuss in class. Cite the passage by author, page number, and paragraph number (e.g. Mutari and Figart, page 43, paragraph 2). You could select a passage because you have a question about the author's meaning, or you have a question about the implications, or you see a connection to another reading we did, or you see a connection to a personal experience.
 4. Explain your reason for the selecting the passage you did: Pose your question or explain the connection you want to highlight.

We will use your notes summaries to set the class agenda every class meeting. In addition, I will collect and grade them twelve times during the semester. The notes summaries are graded on a four-point scale, earning one point per component. The ten highest grades will count toward your final course grade.

For this 4-credit course you can expect to devote approximately eight to ten hours of study per week on average over the course of the semester. Two and a half hours are spent in class. Out-of-class work will require a typical student to spend an additional five to eight hours of effort per week on average outside of class.

During class: In one form or another, you should expect to be actively engaged in wrestling with economic issues and analytical techniques during class time. It is in the wrestling that learning occurs.

My goal is for our time together in the classroom to reflect the value of learning together in a community. To succeed, I will also need your commitment to this goal. Your full presence (not just your bodily presence) makes an important contribution to your classmates' learning as well as to your own. By enrolling in this course you are not only making a commitment to the course content, to me, and to yourself; you are also making a commitment to your classmates. See "Professionalism and Participation" below for more on how you can expect to engage with the course during class time.

Because each of you is important to your classmates' learning, your attendance is important. As a reflection of the value of your presence, your final grade in the course will likely be lower if you are absent frequently, regardless of your performance in other aspects of the course. When an absence is unavoidable, it is your responsibility to (1) tell me as soon as you know you will not be able to attend and (2) give me a brief written explanation when you return to class of how you caught up with what you missed during your absence.

After class: Be as active as possible in your review. For example, instead of only rereading your notes, quiz yourself, test how much you can explain to yourself or to a friend with your book closed. If you study with a partner or group, write questions for each other. See if you can apply concepts from earlier classes to your preparation for the next class.

You will also apply what you learned from the reading and our class discussions of those readings to the three writing assignments you will do over the course of the semester.

Assessing your learning progress

I will provide frequent opportunities for you to get feedback from me on your work in the course using both graded and ungraded assessments and assignments. Some of the feedback you get from me on your work will enter into the calculation of a final grade and some will not.

I will regularly ask you to give me anonymous feedback using a survey that asks the same six broad questions each time:

- At what moment in class since the last survey did you feel most engaged with what was happening?

- At what moment in class since the last survey were you most distanced from what was happening?
- What action that anyone (teacher or student) took this week did you find most affirming or helpful?
- What action that anyone took this week did you find most puzzling or confusing?
- What about the class this week surprised you the most? (This could be something about the content we learned, something about your reaction, something someone else did in class... anything.)
- What questions do you have for me about our use of course time or my expectations for your work?

I will summarize the results of each survey for you and I will use the feedback to inform my preparation for upcoming classes.

Professionalism and participation: No matter the explicit content of your college courses, part of what you will learn is how to successfully participate in a professional setting. The social norms of the classroom may be distinct from the norms you follow in other settings. Professionalism requires self-awareness about your actions and your contributions to the class. Professionalism includes preparing for class by completing all of the listed tasks before you arrive, arriving on time, giving your full attention to the class while it is in session, remaining in the room for the whole class period, and remaining on task while participating in class activities.

Honesty is also an important component of professionalism; please refer to the Merrimack College Academic Integrity Code, which is available on the Provost's webpage at http://www.merrimack.edu/about/offices_services/office-of-the-provost/academic-integrity-code.php. Any violation of the academic integrity code will result *at a minimum* in a requirement that you redo the assignment for at most 70% credit and a ten-point reduction in your professionalism and participation grade. Severe violations may result in a grade of zero for the assignment and/or the professionalism and participation grade, or a failing grade for the course.

Participation takes many forms. You do not have to be a confident, eloquent conversationalist to make a valuable contribution to the class. Below are some of the ways you will be able to participate in class.

Do the reading and come to class with your reading notes summary: (See above for details on the reading notes summary.)

Be attentive: Demonstrate your attention to your classmates and to me with body language and facial expression. Your cell phone should be switched off and placed out of sight – not only out of my sight, but also out of yours. When you use your phone, tablet, or computer to do things that are not related to class, it not only diminishes your own ability to engage with the class material, it diminishes the ability of those sitting around you to engage with the class.

Do the in-class writing exercises: During some of our class meetings, I will ask you to spend some time reflecting on and writing in response to a question related to our reading or discussion.

Contribute to class conversations: We will use a variety of more and less structured conversations to explore the topics we study in this class. I expect you to stay on topic during the time devoted to conversation. In more structured

activities, you may have an assigned conversational role. Even when you are not pre-assigned a role, keep in mind a variety of possible conversational moves you may make, including the following:

- Introduce a topic of conversation by posing a problem, question, or theme.
- Summarize the conversation thus far. What are the dominant themes and shared concerns? What themes have we passed over that might be a good focus for the next discussion?
- Keep a record of helpful resources, tips, suggestions that participants contribute during conversation. Share the list out loud and/or in writing at the end.
- Offer an illustrative example from the assigned reading or from your experience. Or, offer a counterexample from the assigned reading or from your experience.
- Ask a previous speaker a clarifying question or ask a previous speaker to offer evidence in support of a claim.
- Synthesize: Identify a connection (or contradiction) between what two previous speakers have said.
- If you notice an emerging consensus, play devil's advocate and argue an opposing viewpoint (it need not be your own viewpoint).
- Listen for unacknowledged bias emerging in the conversation. Alert us to issues of race, class, gender, culture, and power that are implicit in our discussion but have not yet been voiced directly. (This is critical thinking – uncovering and questioning starting assumptions – with a particular focus on social identity.)
- Post a speed limit when it seems appropriate – ask for a minute of silence to give everyone some time to think.

Complete the surveys thoughtfully: See “Assessing your learning progress” above. I won't know which survey form is whose, but thoughtful feedback on the surveys will make an important contribution to making this a successful class.

Communicate with me individually: You can visit my office hours unannounced or make an appointment. You can also communicate with me via e-mail; I check e-mail regularly Monday through Friday.

Essays: Three times during the semester—in late October, in late November, and during finals week—you will write a take-home essay that asks you to make connections among the topics we have studied. The prompts will be distributed two to three weeks before the essay is due. On the day they are due, there will be no additional assigned readings; we will spend the class period discussing the essays. Each is worth 20 points toward the final grade.

Course readings: There are several books we will read all or most of—these you can either buy or read in the library; those that the library has in hard copy will be on course reserve available at the circulation desk, others are available as e-books through the library website. All other required book chapters or articles will be available as PDF files or web links on Blackboard. The books are:

- Mutari, Ellen and Deborah Figart. 2015. *Just One More Hand: Life in the Casino Economy*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. ISBN 978-1-4422-3667-7
- Lichtenstein, Nelson. 2002. *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. ISBN 0-691-05768-0
- Reuss, Alejandro. 2013. *Labor and the Global Economy*. Boston: Dollars & Sense. ISBN 978-1-939402-02-8
- Silva, Jennifer. 2013. *Coming Up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-993146-0

Work done	Percentage of final grade
Reading notes summaries	40 (4 points each for the best ten of the notes summaries I collect—there are no make-ups if you do not have your notes or are absent on a day I collect them. See “Before Class” on p.3.)
Essays	60 (20 points each for three essays. See “Essays” on p.6.)
Professionalism and participation	I start with the assumption that you are a member in good standing of our learning community. Frequent absences or actions that harm the group goals of the class can result in a grade penalty of up to 10 points. Academic dishonesty can result in a failing grade in the class.

Date:	Topics and tasks for the day:	To be done before class:
Sep 4	Introduction	
Sep 6	Defining labor	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reuss, <i>Labor and the Global Economy</i>, Chapter 2 “What is labor?” • Lichtenstein, <i>State of the Union</i>, Introduction
Sep 11	The political context for labor: globalization	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reuss, <i>Labor and the Global Economy</i>, Chapters 1 “Introduction” and 3 “Changing Conditions of Labor”
Sep 13		Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reuss, <i>Labor and the Global Economy</i>, Chapters 4 “Global Economic Integration” and 5 “Integration, Incomes, and Inequality”
Sep 18	Flexible labor	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hatton, <i>The Temp Economy</i>, “Introduction”
Sep 20	Labor and the life cycle	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Silva, <i>Coming Up Short</i>, Chapter 1 “Coming of Age in the Risk Society”
Sep 25		Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Silva, <i>Coming Up Short</i>, Chapter 2 “Prisoners of the Present,” and Conclusion “The Hidden Injuries of Risk”

Sep 27	Catholic Social Thought	<i>Guest lecture by Mark Allman, Associate Dean of Liberal Arts and Professor of Religious and Theological Studies</i>
Oct 2	How much labor do we do?	<i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing, <i>The Precariat</i>, Chapter 5 “Labour, Work, and the Time Squeeze” • Juliet Schor, “The Future of Work, Leisure, and Consumption” and see the data tables in Schor, “Sustainable Consumption and Worktime Reduction” pp.42-43
Oct 4	Technology—cause? effect? both?	<i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frey and Osborne, <i>The Future of Employment</i> Sections: I Introduction, II A History of Technological Revolutions and Employment, III The Technological Revolutions of the Twenty-First Century (pp.1-28), Figure III (p.37), Figure IV (p.41), V Conclusions (pp.44-45)
Oct 11	History of organized labor in the U.S.	<i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lichtenstein, <i>State of the Union</i>, Chapter 1 “Reconstructing the 1930s”
Oct 16		<i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lichtenstein, <i>State of the Union</i>, Chapter 2 “Citizenship at Work”
Oct 18		<i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lichtenstein, <i>State of the Union</i>, Chapter 3
Oct 23		<i>Write:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Writing assignment 1 due
Oct 25		<i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lichtenstein, <i>State of the Union</i>, Chapter 4
Oct 30		<i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lichtenstein, <i>State of the Union</i>, Chapter 5
Nov 1		<i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lichtenstein, <i>State of the Union</i>, Chapter 6
Nov 6	Case Study: The Casino Economy	<i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutari and Figart, <i>Just One More Hand</i>; Chapters TBA
Nov 8		<i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutari and Figart, <i>Just One More Hand</i>; Chapters TBA
Nov 13		<i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutari and Figart, <i>Just One More Hand</i>; Chapters TBA
Nov 15		<i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutari and Figart, <i>Just One More Hand</i>; Chapters TBA
Nov 20		<i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutari and Figart, <i>Just One More Hand</i>; Chapters TBA

Nov 27		<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutari and Figart, <i>Just One More Hand</i>; Chapters TBA
Nov 29		<p>Write:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Writing assignment 2 due
Dec 4	Back to the globalized present	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reuss 6, 12, and 13
Dec 6		<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reuss 14 and 15 • William Finnegan, “Dignity” from <i>The New Yorker</i>, September 15, 2014
	Reading period	Write your final essay.
	Finals period	We will meet during our assigned final exam block to discuss the final essays.