

HSTCMP 249/POL S 249/SOC 266: Labor Studies

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Overview

This interdisciplinary course focuses on work and workers in the United States and abroad. It looks broadly at factors that determine the conditions under which work is performed and factors that effect worker autonomy and control. The course looks at efforts by workers to organize and gain power to influence conditions in the workplace and society. The class offers various perspectives on the formation, internal organization, and influence of labor organizations in different industries, national settings, and historical periods. It also considers how law and regulation impact worker capacities to organize. The class considers the impact of changes over time in the labor process; 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.

Role of Service-Learning in the Course

Service learning introduces students to a range of organizations dedicated to promoting the interests and rights of workers, and exposes students to the everyday issues that people seeking to build the political, economic, and cultural power of workers face in the contemporary United States.

Service learning opportunities for students of labor studies can provide first-hand experience of: 1) how worker organizing and campaigns for economic justice operate; 2) how such efforts include but are not limited to labor unions and collective bargaining; and 3) specific strategies activists and organizations use to respond to inequalities in income, wealth, autonomy, and political power. The region around UW has a variety of innovative, diverse, and increasingly bold organizations that provide exceptional opportunities for students to both study and become involved in new ways to improve working conditions and develop economic democracy.

Assignments Related to Service-Learning

Students will submit regular written reflections on the work that they are doing with community partners. They will also write an end-of-quarter paper on the goals, tactics, and leadership of the organization they work with and the work they performed. The paper will also reflect on whether their practical experience differs from what they learned in course readings.

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