LER497G Global Workers’ Rights: Semester Calendar

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**Course instructor**
Daniel Hawkins, 123b Keller
Email: dih46@psu.edu
Office hours: Monday, 2-4pm

**Course information**
Spring 2013
Tues/Thurs, 11:15-12:30
207 Donald H Ford Building

**Course description**

This course examines the multiple debates around the topic of workers’ rights: taking legal, political and social perspectives and linking them to contemporary debates and proposals to enhance and/or strengthen workers’ rights in the global economy. The course combines an initial discussion of the nature and breadth of workers’ rights, both as philosophical discussions and institutional policy parameters, with a more practical examination of the legal grounding of workers’ rights and the actual political enforcement and/or negation of rights. The course looks at workers’ rights from a multiplicity of angles, focusing on the ambiguity of rights in the contemporary age of global economic integration. This is done by examining how different actors (states, MNCs, and labor unions) perceive rights and what they do to either subvert or improve workers’ rights in different regions of the world and in different sectors or economic processes.
Questions to be explored

1. What is work and labor? How important is work for human development? What are rights and how can workers’ rights be defined and justified?
2. How have workers’ rights been both elevated and yet also sidestepped or ignored since the onset of globalization?
3. What are some of the structural problems confronting the advancement of a rights’-based agenda in the world of work?
4. What are some of the relatively new mechanisms in place that look to replace or compensate for the limits of State action in regulating work in today’s global economy? How effective are they in protecting and guaranteeing workers’ rights?

Course objectives

By the course’s end, students will have a more nuanced understanding of what workers’ rights mean and what elements comprise workers’ rights. Furthermore, students will be able to think critically about the multiple dimensions of rights and about the institutional protections of rights as well as the limitations to the improvement/protection of workers’ rights. Students will learn more about the problems inherent in combining pro-workers’ rights policies with enhanced economic liberalization. Finally, students will be able to list and critique some of the new mechanisms and proposals promoted by diverse actors to promote respect for labor rights and workers’ rights and ensure that they are upheld in all sectors, spheres and geographies of the global economy.

Course structure

The course is designed as a seminar format, with core readings discussed in-depth in each class based on a careful reading of the texts prior to class. READING TEXTS IS ESSENTIAL, not optional. The course is roughly divided into two components. The first part carries us into the terrain of rights, from conceptual and philosophical perspectives. Thereafter, the discussion moves into the legal and institutional dimension of rights, focusing on the notions and practicalities of labor law and labor standards, both at the national and international levels. The second component of the course looks into non-state initiatives at regulating rights in a global economy. These classes will examine mechanisms such as codes of conduct, social clauses in trade agreements and international framework agreements. Furthermore, we will examine the heterogenous role of labor movements in promoting workers rights in diverse parts of the globe.

Assessments

1. Class participation (20%): This course will involve a high level of discussion in class, and your active participation in these discussions is essential.
Everyone is expected to lead one class discussion and to write a 1 or 2 paragraph statement discussing an important point they gained from their particular reading and how it relates to the themes of the class session. This “discussion memo” should be uploaded to the course ANGEL website’s drop box by 5pm on Mondays. Students should read all memos prior to class.

2. Take-home essay exam (25%): At the courses’ mid-point, students will be given a take-home essay exam that will cover all the material discussed up until that point in the course. The exam will be given out on February 19 and will be due back on 28 February. (All mid-term papers must be uploaded to the corresponding folder on Angel before midnight of the date specified).

3. During the week of March 20-23, the Global Center for Workers’ Rights will be hosting the International Symposium on the topic of workers’ rights. During this week there will be no formal class sessions. However, all students must attend at least two discussion panels and summarize the topic and main arguments (in max. two pages) made by one of the panelists presenting his/her work (10%) These summaries must be uploaded to the respective folder on Angel by midnight the following Monday (25 March).

4. Final research paper (45% of final grade): Students should produce a 20 page research paper which addresses a topic of their choice related to the themes of the course. The paper should be double-spaced, 12 pt. font, with 1 inch margins. Content details will be discussed in class. A one-page research proposal is due on Thursday, March 28. The final paper is due on May 2, 2013.

Readings
All readings can be found on ANGEL. Students are expected to read and take notes on all assigned readings prior to class. Students are also asked to print out readings and bring them to class for easy reference during classroom discussions.

Class attendance (policy)

Students are expected to attend all classes. Obviously, unexpected events can occur such as ill health, family or personal commitments and/or professional obligations. Such events are unavoidable and understandable. However, both for respect to your fellow classmates, to the teacher, and to the Department and University, students should ensure that if they miss class they catch up on the work missed. Therefore, it is policy that any time a student misses a class he/she must send (no later than one full day after the missed class) a three-page summary of the main ideas and arguments found in the respective readings for that class, to the teacher. Students should ensure that they do not miss more than 10% of all class sessions.
**Week 1: January 8**  
Introduction and discussion of syllabus.  
Brief presentation of Professor Hawkins’ academic and professional work and interests.  
Brief discussion of what students understand by workers’ rights: problems and possibilities.

**January 10, What is work? What is labor?**


**Week two: January 15 & January 17, What do we mean by Rights and especially Workers’ Rights? What is the history of debates involving workers’ rights?**


**Worker rights: Politico-legal dimensions and regimes**

**Week three: January 22 & January 24, Fitting rights into legal frameworks**


**Week four: January 29 & January 31, Labor rights and globalization: expanding legal protections to encompass liberalization and informalization**


Week five: February 5, The heterogeneities of labor law in developing countries: problems and proposals


February 7, Special guest lecturer: Professor Dr. Ruth Milkman (CUNY Graduate Center, New York)

“Back to the future? U.S. labor organizing in the new gilded age”
12:00p.m. in Room 502 Keller

Week six: February 12 & February 14, Core labor rights and international political power struggles


Week seven: February 19 & February 21, Multinational production and labor rights: Going up or going down?

Beyond the ILO and beyond national labor law: Codes of conduct, social clauses, and international framework agreements: Enhancing or compromising workers’ rights?

Week eight: February 26 & February 28, Can capital really incorporate rights’-based practices?


Mid term take-home exam
(Exam due Thursday, 28 February; drop box)

Week nine: March 12 & March 14, Workers’ struggles against corporate codes of conduct


Week ten: Special event: The Global Center for Workers’ Rights’ International Symposium (March 20-23):

“Global Workers’ Rights: Patterns of Exclusion, Possibilities for Change”

Assignment: Students must attend two discussion panels and summarize the main arguments of one panelists’ presentation. (15%)

Week eleven: March 26 & March 28, International Framework Agreements

**Week twelve: April 2 & April 4, Repressing labor rights: Global chains of production and instances of worker repression: moving between economic thrusts and cultural-political tugs**


**Week thirteen: April 9 & April 11, Migrant workers and rights: between repression and empowerment**


**Week fourteen: April 16 & April 18, Labor unions and worker responses: Pushing against the grain or splintering unity of action?**

3. Anner, Mark. 2007. “Forging new labor activism in global commodity chains in Latin America”, in: *International Labor & Working Class History*, No.72, Fall, pp.18-41
Week fifteen: April 23 & April 25,

Student presentations of research papers

Week sixteen: EXAMS

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Academic Dishonesty

Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all of the community is required to subscribe. All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor. In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in-class or take-home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not. Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity. Any instance of academic dishonesty (as defined in the student handbook, including cheating on exams, plagiarism, or collaboration on written assignments) will result in failure of the course. Violations will also be reported to the appropriate University authorities for further action. More information on academic integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found at: http://www.la.psu.edu/CLA-Academic_Integrity/integrity.shtml

In this course we may be using a tool, Turnitin.com, to confirm that you have used sources accurately in your papers. If you have any questions about how to cite your sources, please review the materials available on the Plagiarism Tutorial for Students page or the iStudy module on Academic Integrity, Plagiarism and Copyright. Students are responsible for ensuring that their work is consistent with Penn State's expectations about academic integrity. Additional information about the Turnitin plagiarism prevention tool is available on the Turnitin site and on the Information for Students page.

Disabilities

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at 814-863-1807 (V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit the Office for Disability Services Web site at http://equity.psu.edu/ods/.
In order to receive consideration for course accommodations, you must contact ODS and provide documentation (see the documentation guidelines at http://equity.psu.edu/ods/guidelines/documentation-guidelines). If the documentation supports the need for academic adjustments, ODS will provide a letter identifying appropriate academic adjustments. Please share this letter and discuss the adjustments with your instructor as early in the course as possible. You must contact ODS and request academic adjustment letters at the beginning of each semester.