

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

**SOCIOLOGY 461 (WORKER MOVEMENTS & LABOUR UNIONS)**

**Course Outline, Winter 2011**

**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](http://blackboard.ucalgary.ca) OR [my.ucalgary.ca](http://my.ucalgary.ca)

**Instructor:** Tom Langford      Email: [langford@ucalgary.ca](mailto:langford@ucalgary.ca)  
Office: SS 954 Phone: 220-5043

**Office Hours:** Thursdays, 5 to 6 p.m. or by appointment

**Email guidelines:** Please use email to inform me of something important (e.g., you are sick and will be missing the next class), to ask a question that I can answer with a simple Yes or No (e.g., Is the class on March 8 cancelled?) or to book an appointment outside of the scheduled time for questions. For more complicated questions and discussions, please speak to me in person.

**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 that 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 organizations 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 neo-liberal corporate globalization. This focus includes recent 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, and the international campaign against sweatshop labour in the garment industry. 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 small seminar course, student participation is essential. Thirty-five percent of your final grade is based upon your preparation for and contributions to our seminars. Sometimes your preparation will consist of completing the same assigned reading as everyone else. Sometimes your preparation will consist of doing some independent research and presenting the results of that research at the next class. You will be expected to complete assigned readings on time and actively participate in discussions on those readings during our seminars. 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 course for you to take.

(3) As part of a group of students, you will be required to complete a group research project on a contemporary labour issue in Calgary. Your project will involve documentary research and interviews. The final report for this project will be in the form of an article that can be posted online and perhaps published in a local magazine. Your contributions towards the project will make up 25 percent of your final grade.

(4) There are no exams in this course. The final course component will be a major essay. The essay proposal is worth 5 percent of your final grade and the essay itself is worth 35 percent.

### **REQUIRED READINGS**

The three required books for the course are:

Bardswich, Miriam and Sandra Fryer, 2002. *Labour and Social Reform*. Oakville, Ont.: Rubicon Publishing.

Nowak, Mark, 2009. *Coal Mountain Elementary*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press.

Sluiter, Liesbeth, 2009. *Clean Clothes: A Global Movement to End Sweatshops*. London and New York: Pluto Press.

You will also be assigned other readings that will be available online, placed on reserve in the library or distributed in class. The schedule of assigned readings will be posted in the "Assigned Readings" section on Blackboard.

## **STUDENT EVALUATION**

### 1. Preparation for and Participation in Seminars

- Preparation will sometimes be judged solely by the quality of your contributions to a seminar discussion.
- Sometimes, however, preparation will also be judged by how you do on a surprise quiz at the beginning (15:30) of a class; a surprise quiz will only ask questions about a reading specifically assigned for that day.
- The quality of your participation is more important than the quantity; therefore you don't have to say a lot to get a good participation mark (although you do have to say something).
- You will receive a zero on any surprise quiz that you miss unless you provide a medical note or receive advance permission to have an "excused absence" for that class.
- If you miss a class, it is your obligation to make sure you are aware of what preparation is required for the next class. This information will be updated on Blackboard in the "Seminar Preparation" section.

... value = 35%

### 2. Group research project

- Size of groups to be determined.
- Certain classes will be set aside for work on the group research project.
- A research topic is to be chosen in consultation with the instructor; it must involve a collective worker struggle and/or some aspect of the labour movement in Calgary.
- Ethics approval is pending, so please don't start any research until approval is granted.
- Everyone in a group will get an opportunity to conduct at least one research interview and then process the data from that interview.
- Professor Langford will be involved in many of the group meetings, both to provide suggestions and to make sure there is an equitable division of labour.
- The final report should be about 3,000 words long and take the form of a magazine article or internet post that is written for the interested observer.
- Additional instructions will be circulated during January.

... value = 25%

### 3. Essay proposal

- A 300-word proposal for an essay on a topic of your choice (as long as it is relevant to the course content). The proposal should specify the research question(s) to be addressed in the essay and outline the tentative thesis/argument of the essay. (Therefore, in order to write a good proposal you have to do a fair bit of background reading and thinking.) Your reference list does not count towards the 300-word limit.
- Consultation with the instructor is recommended as you are developing your research question(s).
- Due date: Monday February 14 at 5:00 p.m. in the digital drop box

... value = 5%

## 4. Essay

- Style guidelines, etc., will be circulated during January.
- Length: 3,000 to 4,000 words
- You must write your essay on the topic identified in your essay proposal and approved by the instructor.
- Due date: Monday April 11 at 5:00 p.m. in the digital drop box

... value = 35%

5. Note. There is NO registrar-scheduled final examination in this course.

### **LETTER GRADE ASSIGNMENT**

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

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

## IMPORTANT NOTES

(1) Late Penalty. Except in the cases of documented illness, or extenuating circumstances brought to the instructor's attention before the due date of the essay or research project, a penalty of 5% of the assigned mark per day will be assessed any late work.

(2) How to arrange for deferred work at the end of a term.

*Deferred Term Work Form:*

Deferral of term work past the end of a term also requires a form to be filled out. It's available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/files/registrar/defTW.pdf>

Once an extension date has been agreed between instructor and student, the form should be taken to the Faculty of Arts Program Information Centre (SS 110) for approval by an Associate Dean (Students).

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

(4) "Intellectual honesty is the cornerstone of the development and acquisition of knowledge" (*Calendar 2010-11*, p. 48 ). Please review the University of Calgary's policies for dealing with student misconduct, particularly plagiarism and cheating (see pp. 48-51 of the *Calendar*).

(5) Handing in work outside of class, return of work, and release of final grades.

1. Students are encouraged to use the Digital Drop Box to submit work. If a paper copy is to be submitted, the student should personally deliver it to the instructor. Papers will not be accepted in the main Sociology Department office.

2. Essays will not be returned through the main Sociology Department office. The Freedom of Information and Privacy (FOIP) legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place (i.e. outside an instructor's office, the department office etc.). Students who want any of their work returned by mail must supply a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the instructor. Otherwise unclaimed assignments will be available for pick-up only during the instructor's office hours at the end of this term or at the beginning of the next term.

3. Final grades are not posted by the Sociology Department. They are available only online.

(6) **Ethics of 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. In completing course requirements, students must not undertake any human subjects research without discussing their plans with the instructor, to determine if ethics approval is required.

(7) **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.**

(8) The grades for a course component may be scaled to maintain equity among sections and to conform to departmental norms.

(9) ***Emergency evacuations.*** In the case of fire or other emergency evacuation of this classroom please proceed to the assembly point in the Social Sciences Food Court (alternate is the ICT Food Court).

### **ASSIGNED READINGS**

Assigned readings will be posted on Blackboard in the “Seminar Preparation” section.