
Labor Studies (MA)

ACADEMIC DIRECTOR: Penny Lewis

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THE PROGRAM

The 30-credit Master's Degree in Labor Studies (M.A.) draws on the knowledge and methodologies of the social sciences—particularly from the fields of sociology, law, economics, and political science – to examine the issues facing workers in their workplaces and communities.

The program is designed to provide students with skills in critical thinking, research and analysis. Students also develop content knowledge in the areas of history, labor law, organizing, transnational labor issues, politics and public policy.

Career Prospects

Graduates of the Master's Degree in Labor Studies program are prepared for careers in the areas of organizing, labor rights, enforcement, labor law, social action research, human rights, public policy, non-profit and government service, and graduate studies with a research interest in labor.

The program is offered through CUNY SPS's Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies.

Admission Criteria

In addition to the admission criteria for graduate degree programs, a background in labor, related fields, and/or social science is an advantage but not essential.

Program Requirements

30 credits are required for the Master's Degree in Labor Studies. Students must complete 21 required credits and 9 elective credits as follows:

Core Requirements

- Students must complete 15 credits in the following courses:
 - LABR 602 - Research Methods
 - LABR 605 - Perspectives on the Labor Movement
 - LABR 698 - Capstone Project Planning
 - LABR 699 - Capstone Course
 - LHS 601 - U.S. Labor History
- Global Perspectives: One course from the following:
 - LABR 601 - Labor in the Era of Globalization
 - LABR 609 - Comparative Labor Movements
 - LABR 614 - Labor and Immigration
- Practical Applications: One course from the following:
 - LABR 603 - Labor-Management Relations
 - LABR 604 - Labor Law
 - LABR 608 - Issues in Organizing
 - LABR 620 - Collective Bargaining Theory and Practice
 - LABR 624 - Labor Law: A Case Study Approach
 - LABR 630 - Union Organization and Function
 - LABR 669 - Selected Topics in Labor Studies

Electives

Students must also complete 9 elective credits from the following courses:

- LABR 601 - Labor in the Era of Globalization
- LABR 603 - Labor-Management Relations
- LABR 604 - Labor Law
- LABR 606 - Labor Studies Field Work/Internship
- LABR 607 - Labor and the Economy
- LABR 608 - Issues in Organizing
- LABR 609 - Comparative Labor Movements
- LABR 610 - Policy Analysis
- LABR 614 - Labor and Immigration
- LABR 622 - Strategic Research Methods
- LABR 624 - Labor Law: A Case Study Approach
- LABR 630 - Union Organization and Function
- LABR 649 - Independent Study
- LABR 669 - Selected Topics in Labor Studies
- LPOL 601 - Labor and Politics
- LPOL 602 - Work, Culture and Politics in New York City

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

LABR 601	Labor in the Era of Globalization	3 Credits
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Prerequisite: None

This course will examine the impact of the globalization of production on work itself, as well as on workers and international labor movements. It will present globalization as a central problem for both developed and developing economies and as a dilemma for U.S. workers and their unions. Students will analyze the history and function of the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, including how these institutions influence the global flow of capital and labor, as well as goods and services. The course covers topics essential for understanding workers' issues and rights in contemporary economies, such as: the impact of global outsourcing; the rise in women workers around the world and the implications for gender issues; organizing in a multi-national context; increasing poverty and inequality; and the decreased regulatory powers of states relative to multinational corporations as a result of free-trade agreements and neo-liberal development policies. All topics will be infused with a historical perspective that traces the development of capitalism from its beginnings in nation-states to its current hegemony in the global marketplace. Students will study responses of the labor movement to capital flight and to the movement of jobs and production across national borders, including efforts at cross-border organizing. They will examine the extent and effectiveness of global labor strategies, and the potential of broad-based coalitions to protect workers' rights.

LABR 602	Research Methods	4 Credits
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Prerequisite: None

This course examines the various methods of research employed to produce accurate data on topics of concern to workers and unions. Students will learn the importance of formulating and framing research questions; what types of research methodologies can be utilized; why and when to use particular methodologies; how to compile and analyze statistical data and how to utilize qualitative and quantitative research methods. They will also learn how to analyze research findings in order to judge the reliability of data. Students will discuss the principal theoretical and operational issues in the research process. In order to develop analytic skills, they will critique and evaluate case studies, taken from a range of published research reports. Ultimately, students will develop tools and techniques for doing both quantitative and qualitative research.

LABR 603	Labor-Management Relations	3 Credits
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Prerequisite: None

This course covers the development of labor relations in the United States, from the period preceding collective bargaining through the emergence of theories of management and corresponding stages of labor relations practice in the 20th century. The latter include: the rise of contract unions; industrial relations in an era of unionization and collective bargaining; the crisis resulting from increased competition and globalization; and the subsequent transformation of American labor-management relations. Students will develop a comparative perspective by studying labor-management relations across advanced

capitalists economies. Finally, the course will examine the future of labor-management relations, exploring the extent to which they will be adversarial or cooperative, and considering alternative models of worker representation.

LABR 604 Labor Law 3 Credits

Prerequisite: None

This course examines the statutes, procedures, and legal remedies as interpreted by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and courts concerning the unionization of employees; the collective bargaining process; and the relationship between workers and employers and between employees and their union. The course begins by examining the doctrines of labor law in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and continues with an exploration of the statutory bases of labor law. In subsequent sessions, case law concerning organizing and union recognition; unfair labor practices; collective bargaining; the right to strike and concerted action; arbitration; the duty of fair representation; and discrimination will be analyzed and discussed. Finally, the course will examine and evaluate various interpretations of the political/economic origins of modern labor law and its impact on unions and contemporary labor-management relations.

LABR 605 Perspectives on the Labor Movement 4 Credits

Prerequisite: None

This course familiarizes students with theories that provide explanations for the rise of unions as well as for the historical development of labor movements. Course readings and discussions range from Marxist perspectives to theories of American exceptionalism and business unionism, and include the work of both seminal sociologists and prominent labor historians. Students in this course will be challenged to apply their analytic skills to vital labor issues and real world experiences of workers and unions. In addition to evaluating the explanatory power offered by the major schools of thought on the labor movement, students will consider how issues of class, race, pluralism, globalization and workplace reorganization have shaped explanations for labor's rise, decline and relevance. Finally, the course will explore how and whether theories of the labor movement contribute to resolving labor's internal debates and revitalizing its power in an era of globalization.

LABR 606 Labor Studies Field Work/Internship 3 Credits

Prerequisite: None

Students in this course will combine a 16-week internship at a labor union or labor-related organization with readings on and analysis of the U.S. labor movement in a contemporary national and global context. In eight two-hour class meetings, students will reflect on their internships, comparing their experiences with those of other students and discussing them in relation to course readings on selected labor issues. In addition to union structure and governance, these issues will include union jurisdiction and industry analysis; organizing and collective bargaining; union democracy and rank-and-file participation; demographics of leadership and membership; dynamics of class and power relations; diversity and multiculturalism; the effects of globalization on work and workers; and alternative paradigms for worker organization. Through the combination of field work and scholarly analysis, students will explore the relationship between theory and practice and will acquire multiple perspectives on union structure, practice and principles as well as on a broad range of union activities.

LABR 607 Labor and the Economy 3 Credits

Prerequisite: None

This course provides students of contemporary labor with an essential knowledge of micro- and macro economic theories that explain conditions of work, workers and labor institutions. The course offers an overview of capitalism as an economic system, focusing on the principles and logic that underlie American capitalism in particular. Students will explore the role of production and profits; competition and concentration; wages and work; technology; and control and conflict in the workplace. They will examine issues of particular concern to workers and unions, including inflation; trade; internationalization; and globalization. They will also examine how unions affect wages, productivity and profitability. These questions will be discussed in historical perspective, considering classical, neo-classical and neo-Marxist theories. The operation of markets will be considered, focusing on supply and demand; competition; coordination; and market failures and limitations. Macroeconomic issues will be evaluated in terms of the "Keynesian Revolution" in economic thinking, which resulted in government regulation of the economy through taxation, monetary policy and government spending, as well as historical and contemporary challenges to this paradigm. Students will also focus on the political economy of discrimination, seeking to understand how disparities of income and the distribution of wealth are affected by race, gender and class.

LABR 608 Issues in Organizing 3 Credits

Prerequisite: None

This course deals with current debates concerning the future of organized labor in the United States. Students will examine a wide range of opinion, both within the labor movement and among scholars of the labor movement, concerning several key

questions: Considering current socio-political conditions in the global economy are unions still relevant? If so, is growth possible? If not, what other forms of worker organization are possible? To answer these questions, students will examine arguments advanced by top U.S. labor leaders and students of the labor movement. These arguments will be posed against a range of theoretical and historical perspectives, starting with Marx and Commons and including the work of contemporary scholars and researchers. Students will grapple with current issues and problems in organizing, including attitudes of workers; employer anti-union tactics; legal impediments; and alternative venues for union certification in both the public and private sector. They will discuss the importance of strategic research and media outreach. Finally, they will develop a set of criteria for evaluating the success of organizing initiatives.

LABR 609 Comparative Labor Movements 3 Credits

Prerequisite: None

This course will examine labor movements in the advanced industrialized economies of Western Europe as well as in the industrializing economies of Latin America, Africa and Asia. The course will focus on differences and similarities among and between these labor movements and the U.S. labor movement in terms of union density, collective bargaining structure, and industrial relations at the plant level. Among the main topics addressed in this course is globalization and its impact on labor movements throughout the world. The course will address critical issues confronting labor movements in the industrializing economies, particularly the "Southern cone" (Chile, Argentina and Uruguay); Mexico; Brazil; South Africa; China; and India. Particular attention will be paid to the relationship between unions and political systems in the U.S. and other nations. The course will explore relationships between workers and works councils in Western Europe; the relationship between unions and political action; the challenges of immigration, diversity and declining union power globally; and strategies for revitalization of labor movements in the industrialized democracies. The course will also study labor movements under authoritarian regimes and military dictatorships, examining the role of unions in struggles for democracy.

LABR 610 Policy Analysis 3 Credits

Prerequisite: None

This course will introduce students to theories and techniques of policy analysis and will help them acquire the basic skills necessary to do analytic work. The course will begin by defining policy analysis and the various social models that underlie differing analytic and evaluative frameworks. It will examine the institutions, interests, and forces that shape policy debate and affect "delivery" of policy initiatives. Students will explore several models of analysis and consider their limits as well as their strengths. They will explore the role of government in implementing public policy and allocating resources. In that process, students will address a key question: How do the interests of social institutions and social groups combine with access to the political process to determine who gets what and when? Finally, students will examine case studies of public-policy analysis in three areas of concern to workers and the labor movement.

LABR 614 Labor and Immigration 3 Credits

Prerequisite: None

This course explores the dynamics of immigration to the U.S., past and present, with a particular focus on its implications for the labor movement. The course covers a range of topics that are vital to understanding the impact of immigration on labor, such as: the "push" and "pull" factors that shape migration flows; the characteristics of the distinctive waves of migration to the U.S. over the past two centuries; the varying skill levels and world views of immigrants from different parts of the world; the historical and contemporary tensions between immigrants and U.S.-born workers; the role of immigrant social networks in chain migration and in immigrant labor organizing; changing notions of citizenship and the emergence of "illegal" immigration; the changing gender composition of the immigrant workforce; changing employer policies toward immigrant labor; the development of the modern immigrant rights movement; and the politics of the current immigration reform debate. Students will explore the ways in which the labor movement has responded to immigration in the past and currently, and examine the conditions under which efforts to organize immigrant workers have been successful and those under which they have failed. The growth of worker centers as alternative models for immigrant organizing will also be examined.

LABR 620 Collective Bargaining Theory and Practice 3 Credits

Prerequisite: None

This course will provide students with a theoretical understanding of the collective bargaining process in the U.S. In addition to studying union and management theories of bargaining, students will analyze contemporary and historically significant bargaining scenarios in the private and public sectors and will develop advanced knowledge of labor relations in a variety of workplace environments. Students will examine the legal framework of collective bargaining and will study the evolution of public policy governing labor relations. In addition to studying the bargaining process and methods of contract enforcement, students

will discuss alternative models of worker representation in a global economy. They will gain practical understanding by designing and participating in mock bargaining sessions.

LABR 622 Strategic Research Methods 3 Credits

Prerequisite: None

This course examines research methods designed to support union growth and representation, including market analysis, market surveys, corporate research, policy research, public pension fund research and worker surveys. There is particular emphasis on corporate research techniques, including analysis of financial statements, property record research, litigation research, public record requests, and use of on-line resources. Students will also learn basic database design and spreadsheet skills to facilitate market analysis and analysis of collective bargaining agreements.

LABR 624 Labor Law: A Case-Study Approach 3 Credits

Prerequisite: None

This course will examine the body of law governing union organizing, labor relations, and employee rights through the study of case law and legal precedents. The course will cover federal labor law, embodied in the National Labor Relations Act and the Railway Labor Act, as well as state laws regarding the public sector and the legal environment in "right-to-work" states. In studying precedent-setting case law, students will analyze the impact of U.S. labor law on the right to organize, the collective bargaining process, contract enforcement, and dispute resolution. They will debate the strengths and weaknesses of current law in terms of protections for workers and will evaluate the range of strategies employed by unions to circumvent obstacles presented by the law, including third-party card check in organizing and efforts to pass reform of current law.

LABR 630 Union Organization and Function 3 Credits

Prerequisite: None

This course will provide students with an advanced understanding of social science concepts and organizational theories that are designed to analyze the structures, functions, and practices of unions. Students will examine the main functions of unions, including collective bargaining, political action, and organizing, and explore the ways in which various types of union structures are matched to industry structures. Topics will include workforce demographics, diversity, models of union leadership, governance and decision-making, power relations, conflict, and diversity in union membership and leadership. In analyzing how unions are built and sustained, students will examine such factors as motivation, commitment and personality as well as the behavior of individuals and groups in unions. Unions, like other organizations, are under substantial pressure from the external environment to adapt to changing industrial and economic conditions. Concepts related to the change process, such as stakeholder analysis, resistance to change, and participative design will be discussed and applied to case studies of union transformation.

LABR 649 Independent Study 1-3 Credits

Prerequisite: Permission of the Academic Director

The Independent Study will be taken under the supervision of an instructor. The student will develop a proposal and rationale for the Independent Study, which must be approved in advance by the instructor. The Instructor and the student will develop a set of guidelines for the course, including the scope of reading and writing assignments. These guidelines will be submitted to the Academic Director in the form of a course proposal and plan. Students will be limited to one independent study in fulfillment of the elective requirement.

LABR 669 Selected Topics in Labor Studies 3 Credits

Prerequisite: Permission of the Academic Director

This course will offer qualified students the opportunity to study special topics within the scope of Labor Studies that are not covered, or are only partially covered, in courses offered. Topics may vary from semester to semester and could include study of particular industries or particular global regions of production; examinations of working-class experience; demographic research; uses of technologies in organizing and other mobilizations; worker centers and other alternative organizations for non-unionized workers; alliances between labor organizations and other advocacy organizations.

LABR 698 Capstone Project Planning 1 Credit

Prerequisite: None

This seminar is the first in a two-part capstone sequence for M.A. in Labor Studies students. With assistance from the instructor and from their peers, students will choose the research question for their individual research project, develop hypotheses and appropriate research methodology, prepare an annotated bibliography, and plan the research itself. By the end of the semester each student will have written a full research proposal for her/his capstone project.

LABR 699	Capstone Course	3 Credits
<i>Prerequisite: None</i>		
This course, which should be taken in the student's final semester, is an opportunity for students to integrate and synthesize the body of knowledge acquired in courses leading to completion of the M.A. in Labor Studies. Students will work with the instructor to develop an interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary capstone project that demonstrates the student's command of subject matter and literature covered in the courses. The project may take various forms, including an independent or group research; an annotated literature review; or a media presentation. All projects must include an extensive bibliography and a 20-25 page analytic essay. Classroom sessions will alternate with independent supervised research and project development.		
LHIS 601	U.S. Labor History	3 Credits
<i>Prerequisite: None</i>		
This course will examine U.S. labor history from the Great Depression of 1929 to the present. Students will examine this history from several perspectives, seeking to understand how the experience of workers and the nature of working-class institutions have evolved in the context of larger historical developments. In this process, the course will try to account for patterns of growth and decline in the labor movement, paying particular attention to: industrialization and deindustrialization; patterns of migration and immigration; and the historical relationships between organized labor and other movements for social justice. Students will explore how the ideologies and structures of organized labor have been shaped by major economic, political and social forces as well as diverse cultural expressions. At every level of analysis, students will address issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation, especially as these categories of social identity relate to class and class-formation. Assigned texts reflect a range of scholarship and differing points of view. Thus, students will become familiar with historiographical debates about topics covered in this course.		
LPOL 601	Labor and Politics	3 Credits
<i>Prerequisite: None</i>		
This course will examine approaches to political action employed by unions, in the United States. In addition to studying traditional approaches to electoral politics, the course will examine alternative forms of political behavior, including third-party movements; labor-party initiatives; independent politics; and direct action. Students will analyze the logic and practice of these various political strategies, evaluating their strengths and limitations. The course will provide a historical context, beginning in the United States with reform labor unionism and syndicalism. Students will discuss conservative principles of "pure and simple" unionism and "pure and simple politics" as well as more radical attempts to build a labor/socialist party. Finally, they will focus on the history of labor's alliance with the Democratic Party, starting with the New Deal and continuing to the present. A number of case studies will be analyzed.		
LPOL 602	Work, Culture and Politics in New York City	3 Credits
<i>Prerequisite: None</i>		
This course is designed to provide an interactive overview of the constantly changing worlds of work, culture and politics in New York City. We will learn about where New Yorkers live and work, how specific urban communities develop, and assess how the cultural and political institutions of New York serve the city's diverse population. The class uses an historical frame to situate the contemporary city, spending equal time on past and present inquiries. Field trips to significant spaces, and visits to and from NYC organizers, policy makers, artists and scholars will take place on a near weekly basis. Throughout, we will learn about New York's key industries, trends in immigration, economic development, public policy, public and private space, popular culture, urban social identity, community organizations, and labor's contributions to building the city's institutions.		