I am very pleased that you have decided to take this course, and I welcome you to it. I hope our semester together will be worthwhile and exciting for you and for me and that it will help all of us to grow in our intellectual clarity and our commitments regarding labor unions.

A brief description of the course corresponds to its three segments. We will first examine the history of the labor movement, chiefly in the United States. This history has moved from militant beginnings through an accommodationist phase after World War II and a deep decline, to the recent start of a resurgence. Second, we will examine challenges that face the union movement largely from its internal dynamics, including the challenges of diversity, corruption, and the development of new, effective organizing strategies. Finally, we will place the labor movement in the context of the rapid and profound changes in the world of work and economic activity we are seeing in the contemporary period.

The course is designed from a value-oriented rather than the sort of value-neutral orientation that used to be assumed in social science, but is no longer. I come to the subject with the belief that labor unions are a very important way to achieve greater justice in our society. They have not always lived up this promise and, indeed, sometimes and in some times and places have been quite counterproductive. For a number of reasons, including some of their own making, labor unions declined in power and vitality during the 1970s and 1980s. In the last few years, the labor movement seems to have begun to revitalize itself. It has started the very difficult process of developing the new strategies and structures it will need if it to fight effectively for greater social justice. I hope our course can look at the problems squarely and participate in the current renewal. Not everyone in the class may share this same value orientation. We will have an intellectually open class environment in which everyone listens carefully to everyone else and where we welcome divergent points of view when they are supported with evidence.

My objectives for you are the following:

• Balance a commitment to the labor movement with intellectual honesty and scientific rigor in studying it.
• Learn a lot about labor unions, paying special attention to change that has led to a recent renewal of organizing.
• Use historical and contemporary inquiry to inform one another.
• Bounce back and forth between general propositions and case studies.
• Improve skills in research, presentation, and writing, especially those that can be applied to focused research problems of public interest.

Sociology and History

MALS seminars all are interdisciplinary. This is an orientation that I embrace with great enthusiasm for this course and in all my teaching. As a sociologist, I recognize the roots of my discipline in the study of the huge changes associated with the rise of industrial capitalism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After a long period during which U.S. sociology became largely ahistorical, contemporary sociology has returned to its roots so that historical sociology is now once again in the mainstream. The study of labor unions and the labor movement inescapably merges historical inquiries about origins and turning point with contemporary inquiries about challenges and emerging directions. We will devote many weeks to labor and labor movement history and use
explicitly historical materials when we address the current situation, as well. We will often be hard pressed to tell whether what we are reading is by an historian or a sociologist. We will also read some work by economists, psychologists, industrial relations specialists, and journalists.

Readings

Reading, as in any graduate seminar, is the centerpiece of the intellectual activity. We will have a substantial and diverse set of assigned readings, none of them requiring such technical knowledge as statistics. (I will supplement from time to time with statistical data.) Your responsibility is to prepare for class participation by careful reading. To aid you in studying the reading and as a starting point for our discussion, please prepare, for each class, a typed page with the following two parts:

(1) identify a brief segment in the reading (typed out in full if short or referenced if longer, e.g., Burawoy 1981, p. 7 middle, “The labor process cannot .... notwithstanding.”) that you see as central to the argument, followed by a brief (a few sentences) comment on the segment (possibilities: importance, surprise, controversy).

(2) pose a question about the reading to which you do not know the answer. The question should get at something that puzzles you or that you feel is important enough to warrant further exploration.

If there are two readings for the class, present a page for each. If there are more than two, present a page for at least two. Please distribute your page(s) by email to each member of the class by noon on the day of the class.

Some of the readings are entire books. These are available for purchase through the Student Supply Store and perhaps at other area book stores. The remaining readings are available through the library’s electronic reserve system. The books to buy are:


Movies

Labor unions, organizing, and strikes have been the subject of a whole film genre, which is still being added to. Part of our course is a substantial series of such movies, which we will discuss as part of our class. I will arrange a screening of each movie before or after a class meeting (i.e., starting at 5 pm or ending at 10 pm). If you can come to that screening, great. Otherwise, please arrange to see the movie on your own before the class where we will discuss it. All the movies except “American Standoff” are available at the library’s Media Center.

Research, Presentation, and Writing

Everyone in the class will be involved in a case study project, a library research/literature review project, and a letter to the editor assignment. Each of these is applied, attempts to address issues the labor movement faces, and should improve your critical reading and research skills.

Case study assignment. You will be choosing a book length study of one union or one organizing struggle from among the following list (you can suggest alternatives to me). A call number in brackets indicates that the NCSU library has the book. All books listed without a call number are available at UNC-CH or Duke.


After studying the book, you will be writing a 2-3 page review of the book that addresses the following issues:

–the key elements of the narrative or argument (honored down to about one page)

–the lessons of the case for the labor movement, along with the limitations to the lessons (the central element in your review)

–key strengths and weaknesses (or limitations) to the book
You will also present the case to the class in a short and carefully prepared presentation of about five minutes. This assignment is designed to provide concrete examples to go with the general propositions we will develop in class; each student doing this assignment will acquire extensive knowledge of one union, and the assignment as a whole will provide the class some acquaintance with a diverse set of unions and organizing campaigns. The written reviews are due on September 24th, and the class presentations will be scheduled for the classes directly thereafter.

Library research/literature review project. You will choose a narrow topic to research in some depth within the overall domain of the course. After getting my approval of your choice, you will critically review the literature on your topic. On the basis of your critical literature review, I would like you to write and present in class what we could call an “applied literature review,” which is not the same as a standard social science or history literature review. Here, with regard to your topic, the focus should be on such questions as:

–What “no win” dilemmas does the labor movement face and has it faced?
–How have decisions made in the past imposed important costs on the labor movement?
–What decisions face the labor movement now, and how does the literature suggest that union leaders and members think about these decisions?
–How does public policy, state action, and the law shape this domain? What specific changes, if any, would be useful?

We will schedule your presentation toward the end of the course; you should limit it to ten minutes. Your paper is due at the last class meeting. It should be about ten pages long.

Letter to the editor. For this assignment, each class member should find a newspaper or magazine article about labor unions, the labor movement, and/or organizing. Do not choose an article from a journal read primarily by scholars. The article need not be current, although recent articles are better for this assignment than ones from a different historical period. Write a letter to the editor that responds to the article from the point of view of a serious student of labor unions. You should draw on your knowledge but write for the lay audience that the newspaper or magazine normally attracts. Hand in both your letter and the article to which you are responding. This assignment is due on November 5th. After you get my reaction, you may want to revise your letter and send it off.

Evaluation

Your grade in the course will be the weighted average of your grades on the various course components: class discussion (20%); case study (15%); literature review (25%); letter to the editor (10%); take home final exam (30%).

Additional Understandings

It goes almost without saying that harassment of any sort, including sexual or racial harassment, is inconsistent with the free inquiry we will pursue together and is illegal. If you experience or witness such harassment, please alert the instructor or the director of the MALS program. If you have any questions about appropriate ways to meet the requirements to give credit when you use the words, ideas, or images of others, I will be happy to talk with you. If you have a documented disability, I will work with you to make appropriate accommodations.

The university’s official positions on these matters can be found at the following web sites:
Disabilities: http://www.ncsu.edu/equal_op/dss
Harassment: http://www.ncsu.edu/equal_op/
Academic honesty: http://www.fis/ncsu.edu/ncsulegal/41.03-codeof.htm

I look forward to our semester together. While clearly there is a full agenda to dive into, a big part of the semester's fun will be getting to know one another, discussion of a wide range of social issues from the point of view of the labor movement, and developing a joint perspective from the very different ones each of us will bring to the course. Let me know whenever I can be of help to you.
SCHEDULE OF READING AND MOVIES

LABOR MOVEMENT HISTORY

August 20: Introduction and Historical Overview

August 27: Militant Unionism
Movie: “Matewan” Mini-theater 2324 D.H. Hill Library 5 pm.

September 3: Accomodationist Unionism

September 10: The Attack on Labor
Movie: “American Dream” Mini-theater 2324 D.H. Hill Library 8 p.m.-10 p.m.

September 17: The Current Renewal
Movie: “American Standoff” in Mini-theater 2324 D.H. Hill Library 8-10 p.m.

INTERNAL CHALLENGES FACING THE LABOR MOVEMENT

September 24: Diversity
Movie: “Out At Work” Mini-theater 2324 D.H. Hill Library 8-10 p.m.
Case study book reviews due

October 1: Militance, Democracy, and Oligarchy

**Case study presentations**
Movie: “At the River I Stand” Mini-theater 2324 D.H. Hill Library 8-10 p.m.

**October 8:**  Corruption

**Case study presentations**

**October 15:**  Fall break. No class.

**October 22:**  Organizing
The following four readings are from:
Bronfenbrenner, Kate and Tom Juravich, “It Takes More than House Calls: Organizing to Win with a Comprehensive Union-Building Strategy” (pp. 19-36).
Lewis, Janet and Bill Mirand, “Creating an Organizing Culture in Today’s Building and Construction Trades: a Case Study of IBEW Local 46” (pp.297-308).
Condit, Brian, Tom Davis, Jeff Grabelsky, and Fred Kotler, “Construction Organizing: A Case Study of Success” (pp. 309-19).

**SOUTHERN UNIONIZATION**

**October 29**
Movie: “The Strike of ‘34” Mini-theater 2324 D.H. Hill Library 8-10 p.m.

**UNIONS IN THE CHANGING ECONOMY AND WORK WORLD**

**November 5:**  Restructuring–Growth of the Service Sector and Contingent Work

Letter to the Editor paper due in class

November 12:  Workplace Restructuring and Technological Change


Class Presentations

November 19:  Employee Involvement and Participative Management


Class Presentations

November 26:  Globalization–Off Shore Production


Class Presentations

December 3:  Globalization–Immigration


Library research/applied literature review paper due in class.

Wrap up. Distribute take home final. Course evaluation.