



**WOODSWORTH COLLEGE**

UNIVERSITY of TORONTO

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To: Academic Advisory Committee  
Woodsworth College Council

Re: Proposed new course in Employment Relations

I move that WDW 240H1 (Introduction to Employment Relations) be added to the Employment Relations program, beginning in the academic year 2011-2012.

In the external review of the Employment Relations program, Professor Daphne Taras wrote:

The program lacks an introductory course that sets the stage for Employment Relations. The Self Study document describes a "gateway course" and this is a good idea. It would bridge together human resource management and labour relations, which is fundamental to the philosophy of the ER program. Students spoke of the need to meet each other, and get to know each other earlier in the program than is the case today. They would welcome a course that introduced ER students to each other..... There is an important "community-building" function of such a course, given early in the program.

Taras Report, page 7

In response to Professor Taras's recommendation, we propose to add a new introductory course to the Employment Relations program. If approved, it will be required for students enrolled in the Major and Specialist programs, and will be available also to students who are not enrolled in the programs. The calendar description for the proposed course is as follows:

**WDW 240H1 Introduction to Employment Relations**

**36L**

An introduction to the study of the world of work and employment, the history and development of employment relations, its central theories and concepts; the behaviours, outcomes, practices and institutions that emerge from or affect the employment relationship; contemporary issues and comparative employment relations systems. Open to first year students.

Information about the proposed course appears on the following pages.

1 March 2010

William Bateman  
Program Director

What does a course in employment relations entail? A recent definition suggests that it includes the *study of all aspects of work and employment and all the behaviors, outcomes, practices, and institutions that emanate from or affect the employment relationship*. The fundamental construct that underlies the discipline is therefore the *employment relationship*. The field of employment relations serves as an intellectual bridge connecting several disciplines to the world of work. These disciplines include economics (the study of resource allocation, production and distribution through price coordination in markets), psychology (the study of individual motives and behaviour), sociology (the study of social behaviour and social organization) and management and organization (the study of resource allocation, production and distribution through command coordination in hierarchical organizations). A course in employment relations therefore synthesizes several major academic traditions – e.g., economics, psychology, sociology and management – since all forms of individual behaviour and institutional coordination and economic organization are present when an employment relationship exists. Employment relations, as a field of study, can explain their interface in order to fully understand the world of work and employment.

### Course Themes

Employment Relations is comprised of two terms: ‘Employment’ and ‘Relations’. “Employment” refers to “any productive activity in which an individual (or a group of individuals) is (are) engaged”. By “relations” we mean the relationships that exist between various actors (workers, employers, governments, trade unions, and even unpaid volunteers) involved in any aspect of work. The term employment relations is increasingly replacing the traditional term ‘industrial relations’ largely because in the past, and still today, people have misconstrued ‘industrial relations’ as explaining only those relationships between employees and management that stem directly or indirectly from union-employer relationships. The original conception of industrial relations, more than a century ago, was much broader than this.

The study of employment relations therefore has a broad as well as a narrow focus. Originally, when both employment relations and industrial relations were terms that were used interchangeably (in the early 1900s), the field included all relationships and interactions between employers and employees. From this perspective, an employment relations course would cover all aspects of the employment relationship, including human resource management, employee relations, labour markets, and union-management (or labor) relations. In the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century its meaning (especially in North America and many other English speaking countries) became more specific and restricted. Accordingly, when people speak of industrial relations today, it is thought to pertain only to the study and practice of collective bargaining, trade unionism, and labor-management relations. The narrow view on industrial relations treats human resource management as a separate, largely distinct field that deals with nonunion employment relationships and the personnel practices and policies of employers while concepts such as unemployment and inequality are the content of economic courses.

The broad view, as opposed to the narrow view of employment relations, will be taken up in this course. The relationships that will be studied, and which arise at and out of the workplace generally include:

- the relationships between individual workers;
- the relationships between workers and their employer;
- the relationships between employers;
- the relationships employers and workers have with the organizations formed to promote their respective interests;
- and the relations between those organizations and other institutions such as government, interacting at all levels.

The broad study of employment relations also includes the processes through which these relationships are expressed (such as, social customs, labour markets, employment legislation, collective bargaining, workers' participation in decision-making, and grievance and dispute settlement), and the management of conflict between employers, workers and trade unions when it arises.

“We can nonetheless assert that [employment] relations *must* have a future because real-life capitalism cannot survive without it. This lesson had to be learned the hard way in the first age of globalization a century ago; it is hoped that it will not have to be re-learned in the same way during the second age of globalization we are now passing through.”

(Bruce E. Kaufman, 2005)

The objective of this course is to introduce students to the basic subject matter that constitutes the field of employment relations, which is unique in the social sciences as the only field where ‘all aspects of employment’ are both studied and practiced. This includes answers to such questions as why people work and how they feel about their work, how managers attempt to motivate and direct employees, how the law regulates work and the workplace, where and how these laws develop, how different actors in the employment relations system compete to fulfill different functions and the ways in which workers attempt to improve the conditions of their working lives and strive for more voice? For purposes of comparison, there will also be a presentation of employment relations and human resource management arrangements in other countries, what is termed the study of ‘comparative employment relations’.

Among the many propositions that form part of employment relations, there are five fundamental tenets that will be examined in this course and that are crucial to understanding the field. These include the tenet(s) that:

- Labour is not a mere commodity or input into the production process. When treated as such there are serious social and economic repercussions,
- Achieving and maintaining economic efficiency is impossible without also maintaining a minimum of equity, social justice and economic security,
- Labour markets tend toward imperfect competition and are not always capable of self-regulation, leading to such serious problems as inequality and unemployment,

- Workers require a say (or ‘voice’) over the way their employment relations are determined,
- Society is made better not only by providing consumers with plentiful low-priced goods and services but also by providing workers with decent earnings and meaningful work.

Most other social science disciplines minimize, deny or neglect these propositions whereas the study of employment relations treats them as essential. Employment relations is not anti-capitalist or anti-market, in fact as a close reading of these five propositions reveals, part of its purpose is to make the market system work better. To accomplish this goal, students will learn how employment relations seeks to humanize, stabilize, professionalize, democratize and create balance in the market system through new or improved institutions. As the quote by Bruce Kaufman points out, the goal of trying to create a more efficient and equitable society is both a prerequisite for the smooth functioning of market systems around the globe but also comprises the rationale for study and enquiry in the field of employment relations. To borrow from the well known aphorism “There is nothing as practical as a good theory”.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

At the end of this class, students will be familiar with: the history and development of employment relations as a field of study, the central questions and theories covered by the discipline, the actors in the employment relations system and their roles, determine why we work, how people feel about their work, where the laws which regulate the workplace are derived from, the ways in which employers assemble, compensate and evaluate workers, the structure and function of trade unions, the operation of collective bargaining and the nature of employment relations in several other high income and low income economies. Students will be able to evaluate critically media reports about these issues and will be familiar with data sources and other sources of information which relate to work and employment and will be able to access those sources and to find information. They will also be able to describe the relationships among different aspects of the employment relationship and discuss potential policy changes in an informed fashion.

### **Course Format**

The format of the course is primarily lectures with active class participation. Multi-media, film documentaries and other e-resources will periodically be used to illustrate important themes from the course. Distinguished guest lecturers in the field of Employment Relations will be invited to speak to students on topics of relevance to the field. Students will be asked to participate formally as well as informally, through active class discussion, to write an essay from a list of topics provided and are required to write a mid-term test along with a final examination.

### **Course Requirements**

Presentation (10%); Mid-term test (20%); Essay (20%); Final examination (50%)

**Course Textbook:**

No single textbook is required as there does not exist (at this moment) a comprehensive introductory employment relations text suitable for undergraduates. Recommended texts and readings will be made available. Here are some valuable reference texts that may be of use:

An Introduction to Collective Bargaining & Industrial Relations (2007). Thomas A. Kochan, Harry C. Katz, and Alexander J. S. Colvin. McGraw-Hill. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. ISBN: 0073137154.

The Global Evolution of Industrial Relations. (2005). Bruce E. Kaufman. ILO. ISBN: 9221141535.

Contemporary Issues in Employment Relations. (2006). LERA Series. David Lewin (ed). ISBN: 0913447927.

The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations. (2009). Paul Blyton et al (eds). Sage. ISBN: 9781412911542.

Theoretical Perspectives on Work and the Employment Relationship. (2004). Kaufman (ed). LERA Series.

## Lecture Schedule and Reading List

Lectures will normally be 2 hours in duration. The third hour will be used for student presentations, reviewing questions, assistance with topics, review in preparation for the mid-term test and final examination, and for films or guest speakers (subject to availability).

WEEKLY LECTURE TOPICS
PART I –THE FOUNDATIONS OF EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS (ER)
<b>Week 1:</b> Introduction to the Course
<b>Week 2:</b> History and Development of Employment Relations
<b>Week 3:</b> Micro-Theories of the Employment Relationship - Understanding Human and Organizational Behaviour
<b>Week 4:</b> Macro-Theories of the Employment Relations System – Understanding Labour Market Institutions and Institutional Outcomes
PART II – THE ‘KEY’ EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS CONCEPTS
<b>Week 5:</b> The Concepts of Equity, Efficiency and Voice
<b>Week 6:</b> The Concept of Balance of Interests in Employment Relations
<b>Week 7:</b> The Concept of High Performance Management of Workers and Work
<b>Week 8:</b> The Concept of Unions and Collective Bargaining
PART III – CONTEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS ISSUES
<b>Week 9:</b> Comparative Employment Relations Systems
<b>Week 10:</b> The Ageing Workforce – Implications for Productivity, Growth, Retirement and Pensions
<b>Week 11:</b> The Volunteer Economy
<b>Week 12:</b> The Evolution of Non-Standard Work and New Forms of Employment

## Weekly Readings

### PART I –THE FOUNDATIONS OF EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS (ER)

**Week 1:** Industrial Relations in a New Age. (1986). Clark Kerr and Paul Staudohar (eds). Josse-Bass Publishers. HD6971.I548, pp.1-36.

**Week 2:** The Global Evolution of Industrial Relations. (2004). Bruce E. Kaufman. ILO, Geneva. ISBN: 9221141535, pp.1-160

The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations. (2009). Paul Blyton et al (eds). Sage. ISBN: 9781412911542. Chapter 2.

**Week 3:** Bruce Kaufman, "Models of Man in Industrial Relations Research," Industrial and Labor Relations Review, V.43, N.1, October 1989.

**Week 4:** The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations. (2009). Paul Blyton et al (eds). Sage. ISBN: 9781412911542. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

### PART II – THE ‘KEY’ EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS CONCEPTS

**Week 5:** Meltz, N. (1989), “Industrial Relations: Balancing Efficiency and Equity” in Jack Barbash (eds). Theories and Concepts in Comparative Industrial Relations. University South Carolina Press.

Budd, J. (2004). Employment With a Human Face: Balancing Equity, Efficiency and Voice. ILR Press. Cornell University Press.

**Week 6:** Theoretical Perspectives on Work and the Employment Relationship. (2004). Kaufman (ed). LERA Series. Chapter 7.

**Week 7:** The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations. (2009). Paul Blyton et al (eds). Sage. ISBN: 9781412911542. Chapter 22.

**Week 8:** The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations. (2009). Paul Blyton et al (eds). Sage. ISBN: 9781412911542. Chapter 20 and 21.

### PART III – CONTEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS ISSUES

**Week 9:** The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations. (2009). Paul Blyton et al (eds). Sage. ISBN: 9781412911542. Chapters 7 and 34.

**Week 10:** Contemporary Issues in Employment Relations. (2006). David Lewin (ed). LERA Series. ISBN: 0913447927. Chapter 7.

**Week 11:** Theoretical Perspectives on Work and the Employment Relationship. (2004). Kaufman (ed). LERA Series. Chapter 4.

**Week 12:** The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations. (2009). Paul Blyton et al (eds). Sage. ISBN: 9781412911542. Chapter 8.