Labor and Employment Relations (LHR)

LHR 450: Developing a Career in Human Resources or Employment Relations

3 Credits

The overall goals for this course are to enhance student awareness of aspects of themselves that are related to career success and satisfaction, guide student exploration of the world of work, and equip students with strategies for finding an optimal career match in the world of work. More specifically, this course will help students to increase awareness of their strengths, values, interests, and personality thereby helping students to make informed decisions to select and prepare for the next step in their career. Students will research the world of work through information interviews. They will learn how to develop and deploy a personal brand, including resume, cover letters, elevator pitches. Students will apply the career planning resources available through Penn State Career Services, the Liberal Arts Career Enrichment Network, and the Labor and Human Relations Department to their job and internship searches. Students will learn about career management skills from notable and distinguished alumni. Students will improve interviewing skills and prepare for a wide range of interview challenges. Students will integrate prior self-assessment results to summarize the professional assets that each student offers to employers. They will define their unique differentiators and identify the primary motivator that drives them. They will chart five year career goals and draft a development plan for realizing those goals. These steps will help students to begin the life-long process of managing their career in a systematic and proactive manner. Students will be introduced to the various career service options available to them at Penn State including: Penn State Career Services, Liberal Arts Career Enrichment Network, Nittany Lion Careers, and the resources available to them in the School of Labor and Employment Relations. They will also participate in the Strengths Finder Assessment, which is a tool to identify skills in which they exhibit high levels of strength. The following Career Readiness Competencies will be addressed by this course: Critical thinking and problem solving. Students will also strengthen their oral and written methods of communication. The role of digital technology in a career search will be discussed. Career Development Processes will be covered in this course. Resume and cover letter writing will be addressed. Students will learn to develop a network through avenues such as LinkedIn, networking events, information interviews, and connecting with alumni. Students will develop interview skills. Students will receive guidance on developing effective job search strategies, including job offer negotiation, skills and qualities employers are seeking, and career decision making.

Corequisites: 3 credits of LHR course

LHR 452: Human Resources and Employment Relations in Tech

3 Credits

Students will study the theory, practice, and controversies related to human resources and employment relations in the tech sector. This course will explore how organizations manage the people who produce technology and compare human resource management (HRM) practices in the tech sector to those from industries not based on knowledge resources. We further investigate the role organizational culture and leadership play and introduce students to the relevant public policy debates concerning the organization of work and HRM practices in tech. The course culminates in visits to a variety of U.S. tech companies and meetings with tech employee representatives to build and extend the insights learned in the classroom.

Prerequisites: 9 credits in LER

LHR 466: Labor Union Structure, Administration and Governance

3 Credits

American unions have long played an important role in the American economy. However, in the last forty years, the number of workers represented by unions has declined steadily. Within this same time frame unions have been looking at ways to restructure in order to increase their strength if not to just survive. This includes organizing workers beyond their traditional membership, merging with other unions, and reorganizing union hierarchy. It also includes looking at ways to reconnect and mobilize existing members; motivating them to become more committed to and actively involved in their unions. This course will look at the similarities and differences of union structure, internal and external rules of governance and examine best practices for effective union administration. The traditional labor movement’s connection with new types of workers’ organizations and non-unionized labor movements will also be explored. As they organize, structure, and govern themselves, labor unions must address and accommodate to the diversity among actual and potential members of differing economic, social, occupational, and cultural groups. As students work through the topics outlined above, they will examine whether and how the US labor movement succeeds, or sometimes fails, at creating representational structure that attracts and mobilizes workers of professional, middle- and lower classes, skilled and unskilled occupations, immigrant and native born, and different genders and races. This course asks: how does one create the kind of union structure and governance that best achieves social justice and progress? At the conclusion of the course students will be able to: - Describe and analyze the primary ways in which unions have structured their activities at the local, national and international levels; - Describe the manner in which union members interact within the governance processes common in the labor movement; - Analyze the relationship between union administration and governance with respect to the legal framework within which unions must operate; - Develop plans to attract employees to join a union and develop tools to effectively socialize new members as effective contributors in pursuing legitimate union objectives. - Articulate the variety of ways in which leadership emerges within the labor movement and how leadership affects the labor movement’s ability to successfully interact with the political, social and economic factors influence union success. Students will be able to link these concepts to related courses in the LER major and minor classes addressing collective bargaining and employment relations. They will also find connections to the College of the Liberal Arts and the Smeal College of Business. Courses in related disciplines: Management; Political Science; Psychology; History; Economics.

Prerequisite: LER 100
Bachelor of Arts: Humanities
United States Cultures (US)

LHR 468: American Labor Unions

3 Credits

This course will explore the current state of American labor unions and the historical, cultural, legal, political, and economic contexts within which they operate. In addition, we will examine alternative organizational
forms through which U.S. workers organize including cooperatives, worker centers, living wage campaigns, and digital platforms. Among the subjects that students will analyze are the US public’s perception of unions, the recent increase in political resistance to US public employee unions, the relationship between rising inequality and declining U.S. labor union membership, shifting union attitudes toward immigrant workers, the impact of globalization on U.S. unions, and how U.S. unions compare to those in other parts of the world. We will also analyze how divisions of class, gender, race, sexuality, and nationality shape the U.S. labor movement today. Finally, we will discuss pressing contemporary issues such as the rise of the gig economy, 2019-2020 strike wave, the Janus v. AFSCME decision, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on U.S. workers. Guest speakers, who are union practitioners, will provide students with the opportunity to question elected union officers and staff and will provide real world context to the course readings. This course will give students a fundamental understanding of how U.S. unions are structured and operate, and how those unions both impact and are impacted by the U.S. and global economies.

Prerequisites: 4th semester standing