

LABOR STUDIES: A.A., A.S.

This program has been updated for the Spring 2026 term.

Students of Labor Studies will examine the topics of work, workers and worker organizations. Students will study the history of the labor movement, labor law and collective bargaining, and focus on current problems and policies generated by changes in the global economy, technology, the workforce and the workplace.

Students will sharpen skills in writing and research and critical reading and thinking, as, together with a faculty mentor, create a program to meet specific needs and goals. Labor Studies is an interdisciplinary field, which draws on the methodologies and subject matter of the social sciences and humanities and other interdisciplinary areas, such as American studies, women's studies and African-American studies.

Degree programs in Labor Studies offer students the opportunity to develop individualized degree plans based on their intellectual, professional, and personal interests. General program guidelines can be found on the "Program Details" tab, and students will work with an academic mentor to choose courses that meet the guidelines and address each student's individual interests. Students can also work with their academic mentors to identify applicable transfer credits, prior college-level learning, and possible course equivalencies. Working with a mentor and using Empire State University's educational planning process, students can develop a specialized concentration in Labor Studies by following the general program guidelines as well as any applicable concentration guidelines. Students may also develop their own concentrations.

For more information about general undergraduate degree requirements, please visit Earning an Undergraduate Degree (<https://catalog.sunyempire.edu/undergraduate/earning-undergraduate-degree/>).

Labor Studies degrees are offered through The Harry Van Arsdale, Jr. School of Labor Studies (<https://sunyempire.edu/about/partnerships/labor-partnerships/>) in New York City and online.

Program Details

Labor studies comprises an examination of work, workers, and worker organizations, both historically and in contemporary contexts. It provides the opportunity for workers/students to critically examine the forces and relations of power that shape their lives, and to collectively assess ideas, policies, and worker-centered strategies for social change and justice.

A liberal arts/social science-based mode of inquiry, Labor Studies draws upon the methodologies and subject matter of a wide range of academic disciplines in order to bring into focus the social, cultural and political presence of workers and the organizations that represent them. The goal is to engage in an educational process that enables workers to situate themselves in relation to broader processes of political-economic and cultural change and encourage informed and active citizenship.

In a Labor Studies classroom, students' experience, as workers, is a point of departure for ongoing academic inquiry into the historical and contemporary role of work, workers, and the institutions they create in the making of a democratic society. Labor Studies courses also provide understanding of relevant methodological approaches.

Below are the Labor Studies program's foundational outcomes and examples of the courses that meet them.

FOUNDATION 1: Describe the role of workers in key events and developments in US History from 1776 to the present.

Code	Title	Credits
LABR 2010	US History: Workers' Perspectives	4
LABR 3042	Labor, Education, and Social Progress	4
LABR 3072	United States Labor History	4
LABR 3090	Labor & the Sociological Imagination	4
LABR 3120	The Political Economy of New York City: Workers' Perspectives	4
LABR 3155	Global History: Workers Beyond the West	4

FOUNDATION 2: EXPLORE RELATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS OF POLITICAL ECONOMIC POWER IN THE WORKPLACE, INCLUDING THOSE RELATED TO ENDURING CLASS, GENDER, AND RACIAL INEQUALITIES.

Code	Title	Credits
LABR 1010	Class Race & Gender for Workers	4
LABR 1040	Economics for Workers	4
LABR 3005	Collective Bargaining	4
LABR 3025	Diversity in the Workplace: Union Perspectives	4
LABR 3060	Labor Law	4
LABR 3130	Women, the Economy & the Trades	4

FOUNDATION 3: Describe and/or create their own interpretations how artistic methods and cultural expression contribute to worker representation, identity and solidarity.

Code	Title	Credits
LABR 1050	Literature & Society for Workers	4
LABR 3135	Working-class Themes in Literature	4
LABR 3150	Labor on Film	4
LABR 3160	Public Art as Social Practice: Labor & Cultural Organizing	4

FOUNDATION 4: ANALYZE their first-person experiences as craftspeople and union members.

While Labor Studies degree programs will vary in focus and approach, they should include exposure to:

- historical perspectives on the changing nature of work and the role of workers in effecting social change;
- theories of social stratification and the interaction of class, race and gender;
- examinations of economic, social and political change as they affect workers in the United States and internationally;
- and quantitative or other methodological perspectives appropriate to the concentration.

A variety of degree designs can correspond to the guidelines. While no individual degree program need include all of the following, Labor Studies students consider such topics as:

- The breadth of labor studies – the interdisciplinary characteristics of Labor Studies; methodologies that labor studies specialists draw from the social sciences and humanities; subject matter from other disciplines relevant to labor studies.
- Labor history – the impact of workers and labor movements on historical development; how history has shaped labor's role in society; how organized workers and those outside trade unions have come to recognize distinct interests and traditions; how workers

formulated strategies for defending and extending their interests in light of employer interests and government policy.

- Institutional dynamics — what labor organizations do and how they function; how workers utilize political institutions to achieve their goals; how family, community and educational structures define labor; how racial, gender and ethnic identities influence work, the workplace and the labor movement.
- Social and cultural factors — how class, racial, ethnic and gender divisions function within society; how social identities are formed and social inequalities maintained or modified; how people experience and affect social structures and institutions.
- How the economy affects labor — how market economies create the framework for labor movements; how worker and employer interests manifest themselves in the workplace; how wages are determined; how local, regional and international economic development affect labor.
- Labor-management relations — how workers organize unions; how workers bargain for and enforce contracts; how labor addresses such issues as wages, hours, health and safety, and social benefits; how management responds to worker strategies; how legislation mirrors and influences labor relations; how government's role in labor-management relations changes.
- Workers outside the United States — the degree to which the histories, interests and institutions of workers in other countries are similar to those of their counterparts in the U.S.; regional or global trends that affect workers in different parts of the world.
- Images of workers — how images of work, workers and their organizations are depicted in literature, the arts and the media; how workers create images of themselves.
- Theories of the labor movement — philosophies that analyze, influence and reflect labor's growth; how the labor movement shifts divergent perspectives regarding short-term and long-term objectives.

NOTE: The Labor Studies area of study is offered only in New York City and through online study.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will describe the role of workers in key events and developments in US History from 1776 to the present.
- Students will be able to explore relations and institutions of political economic power in the workplace, including those related to enduring class, gender, and racial inequalities.
- Students will describe and/or create their own interpretations how artistic methods and cultural expressions contribute to worker representation, identity and solidarity.
- Students will analyze their first-person experiences as craftspeople and union members.