Labor Studies Credit and Degree Programs: A Growth Sector of Higher Education

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Abstract
[Excerpt] In a time of generally declining economic activity, labor studies for college credit is a flourishing enterprise. While college enrollments are dropping, budgets being cut back, and new or marginal programs disappearing, labor studies degree programs are expanding. Why? What accounts for this new movement in higher education?

Keywords
ILR, Cornell University, economic activity, labor studies, college credit, enrollment, budget, program, degree, blue collar worker, white collar worker, worker, university, United States, education, union, member

Disciplines
Economics | Education | Labor Relations | Unions

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In a time of generally declining economic activity, labor studies for college credit is a flourishing enterprise. While college enrollments are dropping, budgets being cut back, and new or marginal programs disappearing, labor studies degree programs are expanding. Why? What accounts for this new movement in higher education?

Blue collar and low-paid white collar workers have been considered unreachable by college credit and degree programs. Even such innovative offerings as the British Open University and the University Without Walls in the United States have failed to attract this segment of the population.1 Labor studies students, while constituting a minuscule proportion of the 70 million adults who take part in some form of continuing education in this country, are significant as a break from traditional patterns. The fact that working adults who are recruited primarily as union members are enrolling in increasing numbers for credit and degree programs indicates an untapped potential for the spread of higher education.

Why this new movement? Among the forces for the change are social and institutional factors. Social factors that push union members toward

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1 Less than 5 percent of the enrollment in the British Open University (a program popularized through television) came from the blue collar occupations. Knowledgeable observers indicate that nontraditional adult degree programs in the United States have attracted mainly professional and middle class students.

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Dr. Gray, assistant dean of the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, is chairman of the University and College Labor Education Association's committee on academic standards and degrees.
continuing education include technological advances that require occupational retooling and new demands on union leadership that call for increased skills and knowledge. The drive to accreditation is what is new and surprising. This may reflect, in part, the influence of credential-conscious public sector and professional employees who constitute a growing portion of union membership. In a broader sense, it may indicate that the recognition that goes with college credits and degrees is a consumer good that has been added to labor's never-ending quest for more of what society has to offer.

In any case, this quest has been pushed forward by unions at the bargaining table and in the community and by university labor education centers. Building trades unions successfully linked apprenticeship training to community college degree programs. Industrial unions negotiated educational benefit plans and looked for course offerings that would meet the needs of their membership. University labor education programs laid the groundwork through the long-term certificate courses. The result is a growing movement to establish college credit and degree programs for union members.

This trend toward degree programs raises many questions. What are the characteristics of emerging programs? Where are they located? Under what type of institutional sponsorship are they offered? Who are the students? How are such programs staffed and financed? What is their relationship to organized labor? How do they affect ongoing (noncredit) labor education in universities and unions? What special problems do they face? Do they need advice or assistance from established labor education centers? If so, what is the appropriate mechanism for coordination and interchange?

In search of answers to these questions, the University and College Labor Education Association established a task force to take a look at newly emerging college credit labor studies programs. Its preliminary survey in 1972 found that seven degree programs were underway. By 1973, the number had jumped to twenty. The task force became a standing committee of the association with responsibility for keeping track of labor studies credit and degree programs, stimulating interinstitutional exchange, and providing consultative and evaluative services to colleges and universities in this field. Its 1975 survey has located more than forty-nine college credit certificate and degree programs in forty-three institutions.

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3 "Labor Oriented Adult Degree Programs," a paper presented at the UCLEA annual meeting.

with more being planned. Results of the survey are summarized in this report, pointing to questions for further study.

**Labor Studies as a College Major**

It is important to distinguish labor studies from the related and longer-established course of study, industrial relations. The latter emerged on the university scene in the post-World War II era and currently constitutes a major field of concentration toward the bachelor's degree in twelve and a specialized graduate degree in twenty-one institutions throughout the United States. In comparison, labor studies is a relative newcomer.

Industrial relations as a college major is designed to provide technical and professional training for specialists in labor-management relations.

The distinction between labor studies and industrial relations is one of orientation and emphasis. Labor studies focuses on work life and the organized labor movement. Its counterpart is management, a field of concentration in many university business schools and community colleges.

The UCLEA survey includes only those programs that offer labor studies as a major field of concentration for college credit and which attract working adults as students.

**Institutions That Offer Labor Studies Credit Programs**

Labor studies constitutes a major toward the associate degree in twenty-eight colleges and universities, the bachelor's degree in nine, and a graduate degree in three. In addition, eight institutions offer long-term labor studies certificate courses for college credit that can be applied toward a degree. At the associate degree level, most of the sponsors are community colleges — twenty-two out of twenty-eight. University labor education centers are responsible for two of the associate degree offerings and have an input in nine of the others. Even at the bachelor's level, established university labor education centers account for a minority of the degree offerings — three out of nine — but cooperate in three more. Only at the graduate level have university labor centers preempted the field.

Two of the degree programs are cosponsored by labor organizations. The AFL-CIO Labor Studies Center – Antioch program is national in scope, reaching out to union staff through an external degree structure. The other union-sponsored college program is located in New York City under

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5 Rutgers University established the first degree program of this type in 1967.

4 Left out are a number of programs that may be evolving in that direction, e.g., Monteith and the Weekend College at Wayne State University, which enroll union members with a minor in labor studies toward a liberal arts degree. Also omitted are the long-term noncredit certificate programs in labor studies that are offered by several university labor education centers.
the auspices of District Council 37, AFSCME and the College of New Rochelle with Cornell University, NYSSILR, providing the instruction that constitutes a major in labor studies.

Labor studies degree programs are currently offered in eighteen of the United States and in one province of Canada. Most are distributed throughout the East and Midwest, with the Western and Southern states underrepresented. States with more than one degree program are California, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Iowa.

Role of University Labor Education Centers

While university labor education centers have played an active role in planning labor studies degree programs in a few states, a surprising number of new programs have been organized by community colleges without active assistance from established university centers. Eleven universities are sponsoring or cooperating in labor studies credit course programs. Six have established such programs within their own universities — Roosevelt, Penn State, Rutgers, and Indiana at the undergraduate level; and Rutgers, Massachusetts, and Federal City at the graduate level. Five others cooperate in planning and staffing programs that are offered for credit toward a degree in community colleges. Notable is the role played by the Labor Education Center at the University of California (Berkeley) in initiating labor studies degree offerings in three San Francisco Bay colleges. The impetus for these programs came from a Ford Foundation-financed course of union leadership training for minorities that "turned students on" to an interest in continuing education with the recognition afforded by a college degree. Cornell's ILR School established a labor studies certificate program that has subsequently been linked to degree offerings in six other institutions in New York State. The University of Iowa currently cooperates in planning and staffing labor studies credit courses in four community colleges. And the University of Connecticut, Rutgers, and Michigan State have been developing similar cooperative relationships.

One can only speculate on the proliferation of college credit offerings for labor outside the orbit of labor education centers. Traditionalism of universities with respect to new credit offerings is one factor. For example, at Berkeley and Cornell it was not possible to mount a degree program in labor studies within the time frame of the labor students who sought this recognition. Community colleges (and in New York State, Empire State College, a newly created adult degree-granting institution) proved more adaptable. Another influence has been active union promotion of these programs in states or localities not previously served by labor education centers. In any case, credit courses for labor are currently offered by a large
number of institutions without previous experience in the labor education field.

**Degree Structure**

Among the questions surveyed were (1) the number of credits required for a degree, (2) labor studies as a proportion of total requirements, (3) percentage of enrollees who major in this field, (4) how credits are acquired, and (5) how programs are staffed and administered.

Labor studies degree programs, with a few exceptions, tend to follow the traditional degree structure of American institutions of higher education. At the undergraduate level, the total number of credits required for a degree is approximately the same for all the programs — 60 to 65 for an associate, 125 to 130 for the bachelor’s. There seems to be greater variation in master’s degree requirements, ranging from 30 to 42.7

The amount of emphasis on labor studies, on the other hand, follows no consistent pattern. The number of labor studies credits required for a degree ranges from one-fourth to two-thirds of total credit requirements. Furthermore, there seems to be wide variation in the extent to which labor studies classes are designed for or attract majors. In some institutions, a small minority of students in labor classes are committed to a major in this subject; in others, only majors are enrolled.

Open admissions is characteristic of almost all of the programs and most claim to offer special tutorial service to those who need help in meeting course requirements.

In contrast, the path to acquisition of credit is the conventional one of classroom attendance, examinations, and letter grades. Exceptions are the degree programs of Empire State College, the College of New Rochelle, Antioch, and Florida International, which appraise student progress in terms of competencies, allowing credit for knowledge acquired through experience.

Staffing appears to be a problem. The UCLEA Committee on Academic Standards and Degrees recommends at least one full-time labor education professional as minimum staffing for a labor studies program. This has been achieved in a minority of programs. Labor studies programs report a heavy reliance on part-time faculty, a practice which may be necessary in order to attract expertise from the labor movement and labor-related agencies. On the other hand, full-time staff members are in a position to spend more time on student counseling, curriculum development, preparation of course materials, and consultation with unions — attributes of a quality program.

7 This may be compensated for by other requirements, e.g., thesis or internship.
Since labor studies credit course offerings are new, they are housed in a variety of departments, including Social Studies, Occupational Education, Human Resources, Education, and even Business. Rarely are such courses the function of a Department of Labor Studies.

**Students**

More than six thousand students are currently registered in labor studies credit courses in schools that offer a major in this field. Almost all of these students are part-time. Most are union members, with a sprinkling of community, government, and management. They are working adults, mostly over twenty-five years of age. Women tend to be underrepresented relative to their percentage of the working population. On an overall basis, women constitute 12 percent of the enrollees in two-year programs, 30 percent in four-year programs, and 17 percent of the graduate students. The only exceptions are Empire State and New Rochelle Colleges in New York City, where a special trade union women studies program has increased female enrollments.

Minority group participation varies widely among institutions, accounting for from 0 to 92 percent of students. The overall percentage for all labor studies degree programs reported in the survey is 20 percent black and 4 percent Hispanic in two-year programs; 25 percent and 10 percent in four-year programs; and 16 percent and 7 percent in graduate programs. The institutions with above-average minority enrollment are, as in the case of women, those that have developed special outreach — Merritt College in California, which developed out of a Ford Foundation—funded minority leadership training course, and the Cornell-related courses in New York City, where a specially funded scholarship and recruitment effort boosts minority participation.

**Financial Structure**

Almost all of the labor studies degree programs are state supported. Consequently, tuition rates are relatively low. California colleges are tuition free. In other states, per-credit-hour rates range from $4 in Texas to $33 in Pennsylvania. At such privately supported institutions as the College of New Rochelle (New York) and Roosevelt University (Chicago), rates are higher. In most of the colleges surveyed, tuition income provides about one-third of total financial support, with state and local support providing the other two-thirds. California (Berkeley-UC and Bay Area Community Colleges) programs were originally supported with foundation funds.

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* Most students are full time only in the University of Massachusetts master's program, and the bachelor's programs at Pennsylvania State and at Livingston College, Rutgers.
LABOR STUDIES CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS THAT CARRY COLLEGE CREDIT

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
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<th>Credits Required</th>
<th>Credits Admissions</th>
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</table>

* See Associate Degree Chart

Labor Advisory Committees

Unions have for many years insisted that educational institutions providing educational services to organized workers function in cooperation with and under the guidance of labor advisory committees, an idea that has been strongly endorsed by the University and College Labor Education Association. All the existing labor studies credit programs have such committees, either specifically organized for the degree program or functioning with respect to total university labor education offerings. Labor advisory committees generally help to recruit students and help to provide funds through political action with state and local government. In addition, these committees guide the administration in planning curriculum, selecting faculty, and designing degree structures adapted to the needs of union members. Some institutions report having committees that meet monthly. More typical is a quarterly or semiannual meeting schedule.

Curriculum

A preliminary survey of curriculum shows no consistent pattern of course offerings, reflecting differences in sponsoring institutions and the embryo state of labor studies as a college major. Core subjects that appear in almost all labor studies listings include: labor history, collective bargaining, labor law, communications skills, labor in society, union structure and administration, and economics.

The United Auto Workers Education Department, a major promoter of

* A follow-up survey is currently underway.
labor studies degree programs, has published a suggested sequence of courses along with course outlines and bibliographies, drawing on the experience of several existing programs. The AFL-CIO Leadership Studies Center, as a basis for its Antioch degree, designed a curriculum based on an analysis of competencies required for effective union leadership. Other programs tend to reflect interests of local advisory committees and availability of teaching resources.

Problem Areas

The survey reports the following questions of concern to institutions with labor studies degree offerings (listed in order of frequency of citation): recruiting students, locating qualified faculty, developing career opportunities for graduates, finding suitable course materials, providing sufficient tutorial assistance to students, securing adequate financial resources, and working out an effective curriculum.

Almost all of the surveyed institutions indicated an active interest in obtaining assistance from UCLEA in the solving of these problems.

Outlook

Labor studies degree programs are apparently meeting a real need for continuing education of working union members as reflected in their growing enrollments. On the other hand, newly established programs face serious problems in achieving the academic quality that these labor students deserve.

What is urgently needed is a mechanism for interchange of experience toward the goal of developing and testing curriculum models and course materials. As modest first steps in this direction Illinois and Michigan State universities have held conferences on labor studies programs in their respective states, and the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, in cooperation with the AFL-CIO and UAW, sponsored a national conference of community college presidents to discuss experience in labor programs. Also needed is an in-depth study of these programs in action, including student, faculty, and labor advisory committee appraisal of their effectiveness.

Labor studies for college credit is a new challenge in the labor education field. Labor education in unions and universities has a long tradition of experiential, action-oriented education for union activists. How to apply and capitalize on this experience within the constraints and goals of an academic degree program is the critical question ahead.

This handbook may be obtained from the UAW Education Department, 8000 East Jefferson Street, Detroit, Michigan 48214.

Proceedings of the conference may be obtained from AACJA at One Dupont Circle, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.
## ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROGRAMS WITH A CONCENTRATION IN LABOR STUDIES

### DEGREE STRUCTURE

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*in Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, Estherville, and Clinton*
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# ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROGRAMS WITH A CONCENTRATION IN LABOR STUDIES (Continued)

## FACULTY AND STUDENTS

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*See Bachelor Degree Chart
| College                          | Black and Hispanic | Hispanic | Non-Hispanic | Black and Hispanic | Hispanic | Non-Hispanic | Black and Hispanic | Hispanic | Non-Hispanic | Black and Hispanic | Hispanic | Non-Hispanic | Black and Hispanic | Hispanic | Non-Hispanic | Black and Hispanic | Hispanic | Non-Hispanic | Black and Hispanic | Hispanic | Non-Hispanic | Black and Hispanic | Hispanic | Non-Hispanic |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|----------|--------------|
| Macomb County CC                |                    |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
| Merritt College                 | most               |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
| Monroe                          |                    |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
| Northern Kentucky               |                    |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
| Olive Harvey College           |                    |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
| Penn State University          | most               |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
| Prairie State College          | 25                 | 75       | X            |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
| Russell Sage College*          |                    |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
| San Francisco CC               | 100                | X        |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
| San Jose City College          | 100                | X        |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
| Schoolcraft                    |                    |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
| Shoreline                      | 50                 | 50       | X            |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
| Tarrant County Junior College  | 100                |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
| West Virginia Northern         | 100                | X        |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |                   |          |              |
### ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROGRAMS WITH A CONCENTRATION IN LABOR STUDIES (Continued)

**FINANCIAL STRUCTURE, LABOR PARTICIPATION, AND MAJOR PROBLEM AREAS**

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*Livingston College only
## Bachelor Degree Programs with a Major in Labor Studies

### Faculty and Students

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**BACHELOR DEGREE PROGRAMS WITH A MAJOR IN LABOR STUDIES**

*FINANCIAL SUPPORT, LABOR ADVISORY COMMITTEE, AND MAJOR PROBLEM AREAS.*

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Labor Studies Journal

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