

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
School of Labor and Employment Relations
Fall 2017

Course: LER 590EB, Special Topics in Employee Benefits

Instructor: Joe Martocchio, Professor of LER and Psychology

Schedule: Tuesdays, 8 – 10:50 A.M., Rm. 47, LER (Aug. 29 – Oct. 17)

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 3 – 5 PM

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Course Description

The purpose of this course is to provide students a firm understanding of employee benefits practices in today's business environment. A constant theme setting the back drop for this course will be on the various kinds of change facing companies and how these changes relate to employee benefits. Aspiring HR professionals will gain essential knowledge to effectively manage employee benefits programs in a variety of companies.

The course format is lecture and discussion of assigned readings. Course grades will be based on a formal group presentation of an employee benefits issue, general class participation, and completion of two thought papers.

Required Readings

Martocchio, J. J. (2018). *Employee Benefits* (6th edition). Burr Ridge, IL: Irwin/McGraw-Hill

Supplemental reading from time to time (provided by the instructor)

Student Evaluation and Grading Scale

<i>Thought papers (2 at 175 points each):</i>	35% (350 points)
<i>Class participation (3 at 100 points each):</i>	30% (300 points)
<i>Team presentation of an employee benefits issue:</i>	35% (350 points)
Total:	100% (1,000 points)

Calculation of Course Grades

Grade	Points
A	95-100% of 1,000 points, and so on...
A-	91-94.9%
B+	87-90.9%
B	83-86.9%
B-	80-82.9%
C+	77-79.9%
C	73-76.9%
C-	70-72.9%
D+	67-69.9%
D	63-66.9%
D-	60-62.9%
F	< 60%

Thought Papers

The purpose of the thought papers (there will be two) is to enable you to think over pressing issues in employee benefits (e.g., should the health care law be repealed?). In your paper, (a) take a position on the issue (e.g., I believe that the health care law should be repealed because the costs to small employers are too high...), and (b) provide rationale for your position, calling on outside sources to help substantiate your position. Base your presentation on 2 or 3 articles from HR practitioner publications (e.g., *HR Magazine*, published by the Society for Human Resource Management or *Benefits Quarterly* published by the International Foundation of Employee Benefits), business periodicals (e.g., *Fortune*), or major newspapers (e.g., *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*). Assume the role of an HR professional who is briefing his/her HR colleagues on a timely employee benefits topic. In the example, you would provide rationale for each point that you raise after the word “because” in (b).

Each thought paper should be about 3 pages (more than four pages is unacceptable) based on standard formatting (double spacing, 12 point font, and 1-inch margins all around). Listing of references does not count toward the page limit. I will hand out the issues to you at least two class sessions prior to the due dates of **September 19 and October 10**.

I will grade each paper as follows: Meeting both criteria earn you 175 points (A); meeting only one of the criteria earns you 140 points (B-); and, meeting none of the criteria earns you 0 points.

Class Participation

I will give at random 4 short quizzes throughout the semester, of which the top 3 scores count toward your grade. Each quiz will have 3 questions from which you will answer one.

How should you prepare to answer questions? *First*, read the assigned material. Some questions will be based on key terms, which are the words or terms highlighted in bold within the chapters. For instance, “Define qualified plans.” *Second*, be familiar with the learning objectives stated in each chapter. Within the chapters, the all-capital letters headings correspond to learning objectives. Within the objectives, you will see secondary headings (left, mixed case). I might ask: “Define three types of retirement savings plans.” The answer would be defined benefit, defined contribution, and hybrid, and you would briefly talk about each one.

Team Presentation of an Employee Benefits Issue

Your team will make one 30-minute presentation on an employee benefits issue of your choice. Base your presentation on about 3 or 4 articles from the types of publications listed in the Thought Paper section. Assume the role of HR professionals who are briefing their HR colleagues on a timely employee benefits topic. Please use 10 to 12 PowerPoint slides for the presentation. Following the presentation, please lead a class discussion. To lead a discussion, write two questions about the topic in the article you presented. *Please hand in your PowerPoint slides (a printed black-and-white copy)*. Your grade will be based on a logical presentation of ideas in your oral and PowerPoint deliveries. I will make random assignments of presentation dates and team assignments. ***I will send class members an e-mail on August 30 with team assignments and presentation dates.***

Academic Integrity

The University is responsible for maintaining academic integrity to ensure the quality of scholarship. It is your responsibility as a student to refrain from academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, i.e., representing the words or ideas of another as your own. Read the [UIUC Student Code: Part 4. Academic Integrity](#) (1-401 to 1-406).

Cell Phone and Lap Top Use

Please do not use your cell phones (to make or receive calls or to text) during class. If you

receive a phone call, please step outside the classroom to take it. Urgent calls come in from time to time and you should take them. Please do not use laptops during class *unless* you are taking class session notes. In this case, please sit in the front rows.

Why implement what may be considered a restrictive policy? Ultimately, it is for your educational benefit. When asking questions during class sessions, many students were distracted and often could not answer straightforward questions. Also, more students reported to me that clicking of keys is distracting. This policy will be to everyone's benefit by keeping you focused squarely on class activities. *Keep in mind that we'll be spending less than 24 hours together spread out over 8 weeks. Let's all take good advantage of our limited time together.*

You will have a 15-minute break approximately midway through each class session. By all means, feel free to use laptops and phones during break times.

I reserve the right to reduce your course grade by 5 points for each instance of usage not permitted by this policy.

Late Work

There will be a 20 percent grade reduction on any late assignments.

Course Outline and Readings

- August 29** *Introduction to Employee Benefits
Psychology and Economics of Employee Benefits*
- Martocchio: Chapters 1 and 2
- September 5** *Contextual Influences on Employee Benefits and
Managing the Employee Benefits Program*
- Martocchio: Chapters 3 and 10
- September 12** *Employer-Sponsored Retirement Plans,
Disability Plans and Life Insurance, and Workers' Compensation Programs*
- Martocchio: Chapters 4 and 6
- September 19** *Employer-Sponsored Health Care Plans*
- Martocchio: Chapter 5
- September 26** *Government-Mandated Social Security*
- Martocchio: Chapter 7
- October 3** *Paid Time-Off, Flexible Work Schedules, and
Accommodation and Enhancement Benefits*
- Martocchio: Chapters 8 and 9
- October 10** *Executive Benefits*
- Martocchio: Chapter 11
- October 17** *Global Employee Benefits at a Glance*
- Martocchio: Chapter 12