

## Employee Stress, Well-Being, & Safety

(Online LER 590 EW)

School of Labor & Employment Relations  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

**Spring 2021**

**Wednesday from 11:00am-1:50pm**

Instructor	Office Phone	Office	E-mail	Office Hours
Dr. YoungAh Park Associate Professor	217-265-5126	LER 239	yapark15@illinois.edu	by appointment

### Course Description and Objectives

Organizations and businesses cannot be successful without ensuring health and safety of their workforce. As employees' health and safety is interlinked with many factors in their work and nonwork environment, there are various approaches in studying and addressing employee stress, well-being, and safety issues (e.g., human factors, public health, counseling, law, etc.). This course will mainly use the "organizational psychology" approach focusing on important psychosocial factors in the workplace that affect employee stress, well-being, and safety. This focus is also intended to help students see the importance of good people management. The class will include lectures, in-class learning activities (e.g., small-group discussions, video clips, case exercise, instant writing, etc.), and group project.

By fulfilling the course requirements successfully, students obtain fundamental principles and up-to-date knowledge of how organizations can prevent and manage work stress, as well as enhance health and safety of their workforce. Students will also have a greater understanding of possible prevention and intervention strategies managers and HR professionals can use to minimize the impact of stressors and ensure healthy and safe work environments.

### Course Requirements

#### **Zoom in-class assignments (25 points)**

The primary purpose is to reinforce student learning and make classes more interactive through various in-class activities. Throughout the semester, I will be giving you a total of 7 in-class assignments on random days. These assignments can include pop quizzes on readings, learning exercises based on your reading, instant reaction writing, and etc. **The five best scores** will count towards your grade, so *your two lowest scores will be dropped* (5 assignments x 5 pts = 25 pts). For example, if you get a zero score due to your absence, you can drop the score. Thus, NO makeup in-class assignment for points will be given unless students have a valid excuse (e.g., job interview, sickness, hospitalization, family emergency). Your in-class assignments should be submitted through Compass and then I'll post your grades on Compass.

#### **Small group discussions on workplace intervention articles (50 points)**

The purpose is to have students learn organizational intervention programs and program assessments in depth, as well as to encourage critical thinking concerning the focal interventions. Throughout the semester, students will read a total of 5 articles on specific organizational interventions and, accordingly, we will have 5 formal discussion sessions. As student discussions are important components of this course, please read the assigned articles in order to knowledgeably discuss the focal intervention in class. Thus, all students should provide reflections on the intervention in writing (no more than 2 pages, Times New Roman 12 font size, double-spaced, left alignment, 1 inch margin, no cover page) prior to Wednesday class (no later than

11:59 pm Tuesday). Students should also actively participate in discussion during class. Your reflection paper will be worth 10 pts for each discussion session (50pts = 5 sessions x 10pts). Note that these papers will be checked based on a “pass” or “fail” basis. Although you turn in your paper on time through Compass, if you miss a discussion session during class, you will lose part of your class participation points (missing a discussion session = -5 pts).

### **Overall class participation (25 points)**

Your successful learning depends on your active participation in discussion. Contributions to in-class discussions are critical and come from both quantity and quality. Class decorum is also a fundamental basis for class discussion (*please see the section for student conduct*). Your class participation and decorum count 25 points.

### **Exam (50 points)**

The first purpose is to ensure students’ full review of the learning content and mastery of important concepts, principles, and theories in this course. The second purpose is to assess students’ critical thinking on the topics covered in this course and application of their knowledge to case scenarios. **One examination** will be given in April (50pts). The exam will consist of short and long essays. Remember that essay questions are based on all aspects of the course: the reading assignments, in-class activities, lectures, discussions, video clips, and etc.

### **Final project (100 points)**

The main purpose of this group assignment is to provide you with the opportunity to apply what you learned in this course to a specific occupation or job. Your group representative is required to email me your team’s choice of an occupation no later than **March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021** (yapark15@illinois.edu).

You will (1) describe the general characteristics of an occupation/job and (2) identify common and/or serious threats to health and well-being in that occupation/job based on both public data sources (e.g., government reports, published empirical research) and online interviews with at least three employees in that occupation. Last, based on your group’s interview results, reading the relevant literature, and critical thinking about promoting a healthy and/or safe workplace, you will (3) suggest organizational interventions that would address those stress, health or safety issues. Your group will then make a 15-18 minute presentation on your project work. Additional 2-5 minutes will be assigned to Q&A with your audience.

**Examples of jobs:** Customer service employees, Salespeople, Engineers, Insurance loss assessors, Retail workers, Oil rig workers, Sports referees, Researchers in R&D function, HR managers, factory workers, health care workers, etc.

To complete this assignment, the following steps are required:

#### **(1) Describe the occupation**

Your goal is to provide a general overview of the nature of the work performed in the job and the number of people who work in this job. This should be a relatively brief portion of your project/presentation. Two useful sources for this information are the Bureau of Labor Statistics ([www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)) and O\*NET (<http://online.onetcenter.org>). If you can find them, it is always nice to supplement the statistical portrait with other media, such as pictures of people performing the job.

#### **(2) Identify common and/or serious threats or stressors to health and well-being**

Your goal is to identify health and/or safety risks in the job and threats to well-being. You should use the following sources for this information:

- (a) Government documents that provide health and safety risks for occupations. Perhaps the best source for these data is reports from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH, <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh>).
- (b) Published empirical research. For common jobs, you are likely to find many studies focusing on occupational health issues. These sources may include business, psychology, or public health journals devoted to health-related research or where they are available, journals devoted to a specific occupation. I do not expect you to conduct a complete review of the published literature on your occupation, but would encourage you to review this literature in some detail, as you are likely to find it quite helpful.
- (c) Interviews with members of your occupation. I would like your group members to locate and interview at least three people who either currently work in your chosen occupation or who have done so in the past. Your goal will be to conduct a brief interview with each person (that you will design). The interview should focus on their perceptions of health and safety threats, positive aspects of their job, and their thoughts about interventions that would increase their occupational health. Along the way, I would encourage you to keep track of particularly meaningful quotes that illustrate significant concerns or rewarding aspects of the work.

### **(3) Suggest interventions**

Based on your work in step 2, you will recommend a few interventions that address serious and/or common occupational health concerns in your occupation of choice. You can draw on the same sources you used in step 2, as well as the list of intervention-related readings in this course. I am less interested in whether you make the “right or correct” recommendations but more interested in whether your recommended intervention approaches are drawn from the data you gathered for the project and your group’s thoughtful and critical discussion and literature review.

### ***Deliverables and Grading:***

You will make a group presentation on your occupation of interest. I will leave the exact structure of that presentation for you to decide, but it should be delivered in Power Point and should basically summarize the stages of your work above. The presentation should be 15-18 minutes in length and should mostly focus on the identified stress and health risks, reports from the interviews you conducted, and suggested interventions. Another 2-5 minutes will be used for Q&A with your audience.

Team points are 50 and these will be based on the overall quality of the presentation as delivered in class. Each group member will receive the same grade regarding the team points. I will also have you rate each of your team member’s contribution to the group project, and this individual point is 50 based on the rating scores you receive from your team members. The rating format will be introduced later in class and uploaded on Compass. Thus, you can earn up to 100 points through this group project (50 for team performance, 50 for individual contribution).

### **Course Grades and Grading Scale**

Grades will be determined by 4 areas of your performance:

1. In-class assignments: 25 Points
2. Reaction papers for intervention discussions: 50 Points
3. Overall class participation & class decorum: 25 Points
4. Exam: 50 Points
5. Team Project: 100 Points

A total of 250 points

A (96-100%), A- (92-95.9%), B+ (88-91.9%), B (84-87.9%), B- (80-83.9%) 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 (Below 60%)

## Classroom Formats & Student Conduct

1. Class is held once per week. Please be courteous to others by being to class on time. Students are expected to prepare for class ahead of time (i.e., read the assigned materials prior to class) and be an active learner in all components of classes. Reading materials will be uploaded on Compass weekly.
2. Disruptive behaviors will not be tolerated.
  - **Mobile phones:** Please silence them and do not use them during class time. If you need to have your cell phone on for emergency reasons, please put them on the vibrant mode. No text-messaging and emailing is allowed during class. If you have emergency, you may leave me a message and leave the zoom class meeting.
  - **Zoom camera on:** Students are expected to turn on their camera during class time and particularly for group discussion sessions. This is to enhance interpersonal interactions and student engagement in class for best learning outcomes. If you have an internet issue with this option, please let me know in advance.
3. **We are each responsible for creating a friendly learning environment in this course. Be courteous and inclusive to your peers regardless of their backgrounds and different opinions, especially regarding your team project work.**
4. Communication:
  - a. If you have to miss more than 2 classes in a row due to long-term constraints or you will have to miss an exam, please do let me know. You can find the missed in-class activity materials on Compass.
  - b. Throughout the semester, you're more than welcome to set up a zoom meeting appointment with me to talk about how to improve your performance in this course. Please note that the grading scale is clearly provided in this syllabus. *Grades will not be adjusted on the last minute. Therefore, if you have concerns or questions, please email and talk to me early on.*
  - c. The syllabus contains important information that you will be responsible for knowing throughout the semester (e.g., policies & rules, course evaluation elements, course schedule, etc.). Therefore, if you have a question about the course, please consult the syllabus before you contact me. I will gladly respond to emails if you need clarification about what is covered in the syllabus; however, I will not respond to emails about questions that can be easily answered by reading the syllabus.

### Extra Credit

During the semester, there may be opportunities for you to earn extra credits through participating in research experiments or helping recruit research participants. This will be a voluntary opportunity. If you do not want to participate but still wish to earn extra credit, alternative assignments will be given for equal opportunities. Available points and further instructions will be given if there are any opportunities at my discretion.

### Other Important Policies

**Students with Disabilities:** UIUC provides, upon request, appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, please refer to the following website and contact the University's disability services office.

<http://www.disability.illinois.edu/>

**Academic Integrity Policy:** As with any other University course, plagiarism, cheating or any other form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in any way. *Cases of academic integrity infractions will be pursued to the fullest extent allowed by University regulations* (see [http://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1\\_part4\\_1-402.html](http://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1_part4_1-402.html) for details). *Ignorance of a rule is never a defense. Therefore, it is students' responsibility to educate themselves about the risk of academic integrity infractions and to avoid it. Just don't do it!!*

**Sexual Misconduct Policy and Reporting:** The University of Illinois is committed to combating sexual misconduct. Faculty and staff members are required to report any instances of sexual misconduct to the University's Title IX and Disability Office. In turn, an individual with the Title IX and Disability Office will provide information about rights and options, including accommodations, support services, the campus disciplinary process, and law enforcement options.

A list of the designated University employees who, as counselors, confidential advisors, and medical professionals, do not have this reporting responsibility and can maintain confidentiality, can be found here: <http://wecare.illinois.edu/resources/students/#confidential>

Other information about resources and reporting is available here: <http://wecare.illinois.edu/>

## Course Schedule

Week 1: 1/27

- Course Introduction
- NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) & OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration)

Week 2: 2/3

- Work stress models and theoretical frameworks

Week 3: 2/10

- Common work stressors and strains
- Individual differences in experiencing work stress

**Break (2/17): Non-instructional day (no class)**

Week 4: 2/24

- Emotional labor in human service jobs
- Workplace violence and interpersonal mistreatment
- Intervention Discussion I: Reducing incivility and its related stress at work

Week 5: 3/3

- Organizational injustice as a stressor
- Intervention Discussion II: Displaying fairness while delivering bad news in organizations

Week 6: 3/10

- Situational factors and job characteristics for employee well-being
- Group project meetings (individual group work)

Week 7: 3/17

- Work-nonwork life conflict and employee well-being
- Intervention Discussion III: Intervention for family-friendly supervisor behavior

**Break (3/24): Non-instructional day (no class)**

Week 8: 3/31

- Recovery from work stress
- Corporate wellness programs
- Intervention Discussion IV: Microbreaks and lunch breaks at work

Week 9: 4/7

- Alcohol & substance use on the job

Week 10: 4/14

- Organizational safety climate & employee safety behaviors
- Intervention Discussion V: Behavioral approach to occupational safety

Week 11: 4/21

- **Take-home exam**

Week 12: 4/28

- Group project meeting

Week 13: 5/5

- Final presentation

*\* This schedule and topic is subject to change due to unexpected constraints or events. Each week's reading materials can be found on Compass.*