

Economics 153

Labor Economics Seminar

The focus of this seminar will be on policies to increase low pay and to improve the tradeoff between economic growth and equality. We will discuss research and policy papers and undertake research on these topics. Class time will be devoted primarily to student presentations and discussions. The primary task for each student during the term will be a research project.

During the first part of the term students will present summaries and critiques of assigned readings and begin to choose their research topics. The second part of the term will be devoted to presentations of preliminary research ideas, preparation and presentation of early findings and preliminary drafts of written reports, culminating in presentation of final papers.

A background in labor economics and some research skills and interests are required for this class. Everyone will need an e-mail account and computer access. Student assignments will include frequent writing and presentations.

Depending in part upon student interest, the topics we will study include: living wages, minimum wages, efficiency wages, earned income tax credits, corporate codes of conduct, international labor standards, labor law reform and new forms of unionism. This list will be modified in the next few weeks.

Admission to the course is by permission of the instructor. I will give out class entry codes to each student.

The assignment for the second class meeting:

Read the three reports that I wrote last year on living wages in the Bay Area. They are available on the IIR home page: socrates.berkeley.edu/~iir. Write a one-page essay on the strengths and weaknesses of the living wage strategy. Bring enough copies for everyone in the class and be prepared to present your essay orally to the class. Your essay can focus on any specific aspect of the living wage strategy if you wish.