



CENTER FOR WORKING-CLASS STUDIES AT YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY



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[Project Organizational Chart](#)

The CWCS project organizational chart provides an overview of the projects currently being pursued by the Center and its affiliates.

[Steel Valley Voices: An Ethnic Community Archive](#)

Steel Valley Voices (SVV) collects and shares the stories and memories of the Youngstown area's diverse communities. This digital archive makes letters, documents, photographs, and other materials available to anyone with an interest in Mahoning Valley history and culture. SVV has collections representing 15 different groups, and we will soon add several pages exploring common ground in the migration experience, such as learning English, ethnic food, religious life, leisure activities, and work.

From early in the 19th century through recent years, the Mahoning Valley has drawn new migrants and immigrants seeking economic opportunities and new homes. As those families settled in the area, they created the diverse cultural mix of our present day community. They brought new languages, religious traditions, recipes, viewpoints, and artistic talents to the area. Since the mid-19th century, migrants and immigrants have left their mark here in the Mahoning Valley in many ways, from the onion domes of eastern European churches to delicatessen favorites and Brier Hill pizza to the jazz and blues music of African Americans. More recent arrivals from Puerto Rico, the Middle East, and various parts of Asia have added to our cultural mix, bringing new foods and new traditions. We can trace the experience of immigration and migration through family stories, preserved in letters, diaries, photographs, documents, and other materials. The memories held in these materials are of interest not only to local families but also to scholars and students who want to understand the history of immigration and migration, work, language, and the community.

[Working-Class Perspectives](#)

Our weekly blog offers commentaries on contemporary issues in working-class life, politics, education, and the economy, by Center members and other experts on social class.

[The DeFacto Unemployment Rate](#)

Beginning in spring 2009, the Center has maintained and updated an analysis of the real unemployment rate in the United States, looking beyond official statistics that leave out hundreds of thousands of people who have stopped looking for work, who have accepted part-time or low-wage jobs to get by, those in the military, and the prison population. We update these figures quarterly.

[Teaching about Class](#)

The CWCS has been developing models and resources for teaching about class for more than a decade. Our current efforts focus on developing courses and teaching strategies for general education courses at Youngstown State University (YSU). In partnership with the Composition Program, we have developed materials and model assignments for writing courses focused on themes of work and local history. We are also developing a new interdisciplinary course on Work and Class in American Culture and a course on Literature, Class, and



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Work.

Over the next two years, we will develop an online, open source textbook that will examine the meaning and experience of work in America while also guiding students to become better critical readers.

Working-Class Journalism

With a few exceptions, the working class is absent from the mainstream media. The CWCS is working to change that in two ways. First, we have increased our efforts to work with national and international journalists, to share both our expertise and our contacts to help them do a better job of reporting on working-class issues. Since early in 2008, we have assisted with more than 125 stories in [print, broadcast, and online journalism](#). We have arranged focus groups with area workers, set up interviews with local experts in labor and economic development, and helped journalists locate and analyze statistical data. We also work regularly with documentary filmmakers.

But improving coverage of working-class issues must also begin with training. Starting in 2007, the Center for Working-Class Studies has partnered with YSU's Journalism Program to develop opportunities for student journalists to report and write about issues facing working people. The centerpiece of that effort is a [series of reporting field trips](#). In spring 2007, students visited Sago, West Virginia, to talk to people one year after one of the nation's most deadly mining disasters. In December, another group spent several days in the Allentown, Pennsylvania area, writing stories comparing that community's economic response to the collapse of steel with the Mahoning Valley's experience. The students' stories have appeared in the local newspaper and on local television stations.

Tim Francisco and Alyssa Lenhoff, Center affiliates from YSU's Journalism program, have also developed a local news service, with students reporting on stories that otherwise get ignored. [TheNewsOutlet.org](#), a collaboration between the journalism major at YSU, WYSU, and *The Vindicator*, offers students an opportunity to gain practical journalistic experience telling often under-reported stories about people and issues in the Mahoning Valley. The journalism faculty members and local media professionals who direct the project believe in the importance of telling stories that are often ignored by mainstream media. As in previous partnerships with the CWCS, this project helps YSU students learn how to report, write, and use words, images, and sound to tell stories about ordinary people, including stories about working-class neighborhoods and perspectives.

TheNewsOutlet.org offers its stories free of charge to any media organization willing to give the students and TheNewsOutlet.org a byline. While the CWCS is not directly involved in this project, the work emerging from TheNewsOutlet.org exemplifies the kind of journalism we aim to promote: journalism that makes working-class people and their communities visible in compelling and complex ways. These stories from TheNewsOutlet.org do just that.



PREVIOUS PROJECTS

Since 1996, the Center for Working-Class Studies has pursued a variety of projects on working-class life, culture, and politics. Here's a sampling of our work from the last five years.

[Worker Portraits](#)

During the 2006-2007 academic year, Sherry Linkon and Alyssa Lenhoff coordinated a project to create an exhibit and report on how work is changing in the Mahoning Valley. "Worker Portraits: Faces of Strength" involved Youngstown State University (YSU) journalism students in writing profiles of individual workers, and CWCS affiliate Rosemary D'Apolito conducted research on demographic patterns. In April 2007, the resulting exhibit opened at the Youngstown Historical Center, featuring a dozen profiles, with beautiful photographs by Steve Cagan, and an accompanying booklet. We hope to take the exhibit on tour around the Mahoning Valley over the next two years.

[Building the Working-Class Studies Association](#)

The Center has played a central role in creating the new Working-Class Studies Association. In 2004-2005, we held a series of planning meetings and online discussions, and a small organizing committee developed a constitution and nominated an initial set of officers for the WCSA. These were presented at the WCSA first business meeting, held during the CWCS conference in May. As of July 2005, the first WCSA Steering

Committee is in place. The association will organize future conferences, and in 2006 it took over responsibility for publishing the newsletter, two key field-building activities that the CWCS had handled for the past 10 years. The WCSA also has plans to develop an online journal and possibly a print journal, and it will develop its own website. CWCS Co-Director Sherry Linkon coordinated these efforts and served as the organization's first President. The CWCS continues to provide clerical support for the WCSA, manage its listserv, and publish its newsletter. Please visit the

Arts Projects

One of the hallmarks of the CWCS is its commitment to the arts as a means of reflecting on and communicating about working-class life and culture. Since January 2004, we have sponsored several arts programs:

- In September 2004, the Center sponsored a production of the play *Intensive Care*, based on poems by CWCS community affiliate and emergency room nurse Jeanne Bryner. The play presents the lives and experiences of nurses past and present. We collaborated with YSU's Nursing Department to sponsor this production, and we made a special effort to invite members of local nurses unions as well as nursing students and faculty.
- The CWCS has sponsored arts exhibits every year since 1999. Exhibits have included *Unseen America*, labor posters from around the world, and photographs by Guy Suldhana, Steve Cagan, Russ Marshall, and others.
- The Ford Foundation grant also provided partial support for the design and production of a public work of art for the YSU campus. Center affiliate Greg Moring designed a sculptural fence and gates representing Youngstown's ethnic and working-class history. YSU art students assisted Greg in building the piece.

Working-Class Voting Patterns

After the 2004 election, and given Ohio's crucial role in that election, members of the Center began to develop a series of research projects on working-class voting patterns. Using the model created by Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers (in their book *Why the White Working Class Still Matters*), Center Co-Director John Russo together with Jack Metzgar and Dorian Warren from the Chicago Center for Working-Class Studies developed a project to examine voting patterns associated with class, gender, race, and union affiliation.