



Office Use Only: PP#

Cover Sheet for Out-of-State Institutions
New Program or Substantial Modification to Existing Program

Institution Submitting Proposal

SUNY Empire State University

Each action below requires a separate proposal and cover sheet.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☒ New Academic Program | ☐ Substantial Change to a Degree Program |
| ☐ New Area of Concentration | ☐ Substantial Change to an Area of Concentration |
| ☐ New Degree Level Approval | ☐ Substantial Change to a Certificate Program |
| ☐ New Stand-Alone Certificate | ☐ Cooperative Degree Program |
| ☐ Off Campus Program | ☐ Offer Program at Regional Higher Education Center |

Payment ☒ YesPayment ☐ R*STARS #

Payment

Date

Submitted: ☐ NoType: ☒ Check #

Amount: \$850

Submitted: April 10, 2026

Department Proposing Program	Department of Labor Studies in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences		
Degree Level and Degree Type	Master of Arts		
Title of Proposed Program	Work and Labor Policy		
Total Number of Credits	30 credits		
Program Modality	☐ On-campus ☒ Distance Education (fully online) ☐ Both		
Program Resources	☒ Using Existing Resources ☐ Requiring New Resources		
Projected Implementation Date (must be 60 days from proposal submission as per COMAR 13B.02.03.03)	☒ Fall	☐ Spring	☐ Summer Year: 2026
Provide Link to Most Recent Academic Catalog	URL: https://catalog.sunyempire.edu/		
Preferred Contact for this Proposal	Name: Gina Torino		
	Title: Dean, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences		
	Phone: 917-837-5480		
	Email: gina.torino@sunyempire.edu		
President/Chief Executive	Type Name: Lisa Vollendorf		
	Signature: <i>Lisa Vollendorf</i>		Date: 4/13/2026
	Date of Approval/Endorsement by Governing Board:		

Revised 1/2021



EMPIRE STATE UNIVERSITY

May 12, 2026

Maryland Higher Education Commission
6 N. Liberty Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Commissioners,

On behalf of SUNY Empire State University, I respectfully request approval from the Maryland Higher Education Commission to offer the University's Master of Arts in Work and Labor Policy program to Maryland residents.

The Master of Arts in Work and Labor Policy is designed to prepare students for leadership roles in labor relations, workforce development, public policy, advocacy, and organizational leadership. The program reflects SUNY Empire's longstanding commitment to adult learners, working professionals, and flexible, high-quality online education.

The program is delivered fully online by qualified faculty and is aligned with the University's mission to expand access to innovative and workforce-relevant graduate education. Students develop expertise in labor history, collective bargaining, employment policy, workplace equity, and organizational strategy through a rigorous interdisciplinary curriculum.

SUNY Empire State University is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and is committed to complying with all applicable Maryland regulations and requirements related to authorization and consumer protection.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and welcome the opportunity to provide any additional information the Commission may require.

Sincerely,

Dorothy A. Escribano, PhD
Interim Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

**OOS NEW PROGRAM REVIEW
EXTENDED OPERATION IN
MARYLAND**

MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION
Application for New Academic Programs for Out-of-State Degree-Granting Institutions
EXTENDED OPERATION IN MARYLAND

This questionnaire, properly completed with supporting documentation, shall serve as an application for approval for new academic programs for Out-of-State Degree-Granting Institutions under extended operational approval that operate in Maryland under the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13B.02.01.06

Out-of-State Degree-Granting Institutions that are not under extended operational approval can add additional programs using the Out-of-State Renewal Application, as per COMAR 13B.02.01.08, which can be found on the MHEC website.

If these programs/classes are to be offered at a military installation and the recruitment and enrollment of students is limited to active-duty personnel, their dependents, or civilians employed at the installation, and if the institution waives its right to claim veterans' benefits for enrolled students, do not complete this application. Complete an Application for Exemption to COMAR 13B.02.01 instead.

Please Note: A separate application form must be completed and submitted with all supporting documentation for each proposed location in Maryland.

PROPOSED START DATE. Fall 2026
Applications should be submitted at least <u>5 months</u> prior to the proposed start date.

INSTITUTION APPLYING FOR APPROVAL.	
Name of Institution:	SUNY Empire State University
Web Address:	https://www.sunyempire.edu/
OPEID Code: 010286 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, ID Code – Title IV eligibility.	
Chief Executives Officer: Lisa Vollendorf, President	
Mailing Address: 2 Union Ave., Saratoga Springs, NY 12866	
Telephone: 1-800-847-3000	Email: president@sunyempire.edu

Institutional Liaison: Name and title of the individual who will serve as liaison to the Maryland Higher Education Commission:	
Name:	Gina Torino
Title:	Dean, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
Mailing Address: 4 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016	
Telephone: 917-837-5480	Email: gina.torino@sunyempire.edu

***** CERTIFICATION *****

I hereby affirm that the answers given in this application and its attachments are accurate and complete and further agree to comply with the *Annotated Code of Maryland* and State regulations governing the operation of out-of-State degree-granting institutions (COMAR 13B.02.01).

4/13/2026

Date

Lisa Vollendorf

Print Name of Chief Executive Officer

Lisa Vollendorf

Signature of Chief Executive Officer

Electronic applications are preferred for applications. You can send your application to oosauthorization.mhec@maryland.gov

All payments should be mailed to:
Maryland Higher Education Commission
Director of Academic Affairs
Institution Review
217 East Redwood St., Suite 2100
Baltimore, Maryland 21202 .

A copy of these regulations can be found on the [Maryland Higher Education Commission's web site](http://MarylandHigherEducationCommission.org) (mhec.maryland.gov)

I. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION.

Only a complete application can be acted upon. While separate application forms must be completed and submitted for each proposed location, the following Supporting Documentation needs to be included only once for the entire package of applications. **CHECK EACH ITEM AS ATTACHED.**

☒ Cover letter from the Chief Academic Officer addressed to the Secretary of Higher Education requesting the approval of the new program.

☒ Out-of-State New Program and Sub Mod Cover Sheet with all required signatures for each newly proposed program.

☒ Application Fee COMAR 13B.02.01.08B(2)

The institution shall submit a non-refundable application fee in the amount of (a) \$7,500 for up to two degree programs and (b) an additional \$850 for each degree program over two programs. The institution's check should be made payable to: Maryland Higher Education Commission. The application renewal fee will be waived for renewals of out-of-state institutions operating at Regional Maryland Higher Education Center.

☒ Faculty Compliance Report COMAR 13B.02.01.16C

At least 1/3 of the classes offered shall be taught by full-time faculty of the parent institution. Submit a Faculty Compliance Report¹ for each newly proposed program.

☒ Teach-out Plan COMAR 13B.02.01.08B(4)(j)(iv)

The institution must provide a copy of its teach-out plan² allowing enrolled students to complete their programs if the institution decides to cease offering this program in Maryland.

¹ Requirements and forms for a Faculty Compliance Report are available on the Out-of-State Degree Granting Institutions page of our website: mhec.maryland.gov

² A teach-out plan is an institution's written plan to ensure its students are treated fairly with regard to finishing their programs of study. Minimum requirements for a teach-out plan are available on the Out-of-State Degree Granting Institutions page of our website: mhec.maryland.gov

II. APPLICATION QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire, properly completed with supporting documentation, shall serve as an application for approval for new academic programs for Out-of-State Degree-Granting Institutions that operate in Maryland under the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13B.02.01.06.

Please note: a separate application form must be completed and submitted with all supporting documentation for each proposed location in Maryland.

Provide the following information for each newly proposed program.

A/B. Pursuant to COMAR 13B.02.01.06A, the institution shall present evidence demonstrating the educational need to establish operations, offer programs, and award the degrees in question in the State. This shall include the evidence required by COMAR 13B.02.01.06B and listed below.

- (1) The degree to be awarded;
- (2) The area of specialization;
- (3) The purpose or objective of the program or course of study to be offered (Please include a program description and identify all learning outcomes);
- (4) Specific academic content of the program or course of study (Please include all program requirements);
- (5) The quality of the proposed program in comparison to existing programs;
- (6) An analysis of the market for the program; Include information on the student population that will be served by the program, the roles or pathways for which this program will prepare students, and what distinguishes the proposed program from similar programs in the state.
- (7) The State's equal educational opportunity obligations under State and federal law.

C. In addition, the out-of-State institution shall demonstrate that the proposed program, for which the institution is making application:

- (1) Meets a critical and compelling regional or Statewide need;
Demonstrate demand and need for the program in terms of meeting present and future needs of the region and the State in general based on one or more of the following:
 - (a) The need for the advancement and evolution of knowledge
 - (b) Societal needs, including expanding educational opportunities and choices for minority and educationally disadvantaged students at institutions of higher education
 - (c) The need to strengthen and expand the capacity of historically black institutions to provide high quality and unique educational programs.
 - (d) Occupational and professional needs relative to upgrading vocational/technical skills or meeting job market requirements.
- (2) Is consistent with the current Maryland State Plan for Postsecondary Education.
Demonstrate how the program serves one of the three goals of the State Plan: access, success, innovation.

D. The out-of-State institution shall clearly state the demand and need for a program, for which the institution is making application, in terms of meeting present and future needs of the region and the State in general. Two kinds of need may be identified:

- (1) Societal needs, including the tradition of liberal arts education, which provides immeasurable returns to the State in part by instilling in citizens a capacity for advanced learning and individual and societal benefits regardless of workforce or market demand considerations and/or expanding educational opportunities and choices for minority and educationally disadvantaged students at institutions of higher education; and
- (2) Occupational needs relative to meeting workforce requirements or upgrading vocational or technical skills.

E. Market Demand Data

- (1) The out-of-State institution shall present data projecting market demand and the availability of openings in the job market to be served by the new program for which the institution is making application. The type of information submitted will vary, depending on the program, but may include workforce and employment projections prepared by the federal and State governments as well as professional and trade associations.
- (2) With the exception of programs in the liberal arts, recently collected, existing, or new market surveys shall be used which clearly provide quantifiable and reliable data from prospective employers on the educational and training needs, and the anticipated number of vacancies, expected over the next 5 years.
- (3) In assessing demand for a new program, for which the institution is making application, an institution shall also present data showing the current supply of graduates in that program area in the State and region.

Some potential data sources are:

- Education Crosswalk
<https://www.onetonline.org/crosswalk/CIP/>
- Maryland Occupational Projections
<https://www.dllr.state.md.us/lmi/iandoproj/maryland.shtml>
- Maryland Workforce Exchange
<https://mwejobs.maryland.gov/vosnet/Default.aspx>
- Health Professional Shortage Area Search Tool
<https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find>

Is a Maryland employer sponsoring/supporting the application for the program(s) to be offered at this location?

☐ Yes ☒ No

If yes, please attach a letter of support from the employer addressed to the Assistant Secretary, Academic Affairs. The letter should outline the employer's reasons for selecting the institution and its programs and state the benefits to the employees who participate in the program

F. Faculty Information

Commission authorization is by academic program; therefore, each program is reviewed independently to determine compliance with COMAR 13B.02.01.16. In addition to the Faculty Compliance Report included with your supporting documentation, please provide the following information:

(a) List all faculty that are to teach in the first year (or cycle) of the program at this location. For each faculty member provide the following information: COMAR 13B.02.01.16A, B, and C.

- (1) the course(s) the faculty might soon teach;
- (2) the degrees the individual holds
- (3) the degrees areas of specialization; and
- (4) whether or not the faculty member is full-time or part-time (adjunct) at your parent institution

(b) Please include a curriculum vitae/resume for each potential faculty member. For those faculty who are yet to be hired include a job description and minimal qualifications.



II. Application Questionnaire Responses for Empire State University's Master of Arts in Work and Labor Policy Application with MHEC

A/B. COMAR 13B.02.01.06A and COMAR 13B.02.01.06B Required Evidence Demonstrating Educational Need to Establish and Offer Programs and Award Degrees in Maryland

- (1) Degree to be awarded:** Master of Arts
- (2) Area of Specialization:** Work and Labor Policy
- (3) Purpose and Program Objectives:**

"The Master of Arts (M.A.) Work and Labor Policy program is designed for unionists, human resource professionals, arbitrators, educators, journalists, political activists, lawyers, individuals involved in government or private industry, and anyone in the world of work and labor in the 21st century. While the program provides students with a background in American labor relations, labor history, labor law and collective bargaining, the focus is on current problems and policies generated by changes in the global economy, technology, the workforce and the workplace. This program can increase effectiveness in present positions or prepare students for new positions that deal in labor, government, industrial relations or human resources.

Students are encouraged to use elective courses and produce a final project to develop an area of specialty. Faculty will help students choose elective courses, as well as a final project focused on a policy memorandum."

Program Learning Objectives:

Upon successful completion of the program, students will be able to:

- Understand the policy process from formation to implementation.
- Create a paradigm for analyzing public policy.
- Intensively engage with specific policy issues.
- Engage in sustained, disciplined research effort.
- Develop competencies that they are likely to need as professionals in the public policy arena.

- (4) Program Requirements:**

Program Curriculum

In order to complete this 30-credit program, students must take 4 core courses, 5 concentration courses, and the capstone course.

Code	Title	Credits
CORE COURSES		12
<u>PPOL 6007</u>	Policy Process	
<u>LABR 6010</u>	Work and Labor Studies	
<u>LABR 6015</u>	Labor Policy in America	
CHOOSE:		
<u>PPOL 6021</u>	Methods for Policy Research (preferred course)	
OR		
<u>PPOL 6020</u>	Research Methods (if you intend to pursue doctoral studies)	
CONCENTRATION COURSES		15
Students select one of two concentrations: Workforce Development or the General Concentration. Each concentration requires completion of 5, 3-credit courses. The General concentration allows a student to take scheduled or individualized electives to reflect their interests and to reinforce the individual focus of their degree.		
<i>For the General Concentration:</i>		
Choose 5 Electives (3cr each)		
<i>For the Workforce Development Concentration:</i>		
<u>CAED 6010</u>	Principles of Community & Economic Development	
<u>CAED 6070</u>	Workforce Development Policy	
<u>LABR 6030</u>	Sociology of Work: Human Resources	
<u>ADLC 6040</u>	Learning & Education in the Workplace	
Choose 1 Elective (3cr)		
CAPSTONE		
<u>LABR 7010</u>	Final Project - Professional Project: Work and Labor Policy	3

Code	Title	Credits
Total Credits		30

Electives

Students are urged to use their electives to build a concentration in such areas as trade union administration, collective bargaining and dispute resolution, or human resource management. Examples of some electives include but are not limited to:

Code	Title	Credits
LABR 6050	Government, Work, & Labor	3
LABR 6070	Theories of the Labor Movement	3

(5) Evidence of Program Quality and Comparability

Empire State University's Master of Arts in Work and Labor Policy is a high-quality graduate program because it is interdisciplinary, workforce-relevant, fully online, and intentionally designed for working adults and professionals in labor, human resources, advocacy, government, education, and private industry.

The program compares favorably with peer graduate offerings in labor and employment studies. CUNY's M.A. in Labor Studies similarly draws from sociology, law, history, economics, political science, and labor relations and emphasizes advocacy, equity, leadership, research, and collective bargaining. Cornell's ILR graduate programs prepare students for careers in labor, policy, human resources, and non-governmental organizations, while UMass Amherst's labor studies program emphasizes research, organizing, collective bargaining, labor law, and worker justice.

Empire's program is distinctive because it brings this labor-policy curriculum to students through a flexible online delivery model, expanding access for working adults who may not be able to relocate or attend a residential program. As a fully online program, students earn the same diploma as campus-based students, while developing communication, analytical, and leadership skills.

(6) Market Analysis of Need; Student Populations Served; Roles and Pathways to Graduates

There is continuing market need for graduate-level preparation in work, labor policy, human resources, workforce development, and employment relations. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects steady demand across several related occupational areas. Labor relations specialists had a median annual wage of \$93,500 in May 2024, with approximately 5,100 openings projected annually from 2024 to 2034. Human resources managers are projected to grow 5% from 2024 to 2034, with about 17,900 openings annually and a May

2024 median wage of \$140,030. Training and development managers are projected to grow 6% over the same period, with about 3,800 openings annually. Social and community service managers are also projected to grow 6%, with about 18,600 annual openings. The program is designed to serve adult learners, working professionals, union leaders, HR professionals, public-sector employees, advocates, educators, and individuals seeking advancement in labor relations, workforce development, employment policy, and organizational leadership. This aligns directly with Empire's institutional mission and delivery model, as well as with MHEC's interest in labor market demand, student access, uniqueness, and the institution's ability to serve additional students. MHEC's academic program proposal guidance specifically identifies current regional labor market demand, student access, program uniqueness, and institutional capacity as relevant considerations.

Graduates may pursue or advance in roles such as:

- labor relations specialist
- union representative or organizer
- human resources manager or employee relations specialist
- workforce development professional
- training and development manager
- policy analyst
- mediator, arbitrator, or conciliator
- nonprofit, advocacy, or community organization leader
- public-sector labor or employment policy professional

The program's relevance is strengthened by its focus on labor law, collective bargaining, workforce development, equity, policy analysis, and organizational strategy—areas that are increasingly important as employers, unions, public agencies, and community organizations navigate changing labor markets, AI, remote work, worker organizing, and workforce shortages.

Sources:

Bureau of Labor Statistics- <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/human-resources-managers.htm>; <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/training-and-development-managers.htm>; <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/social-and-community-service-managers.htm>

(7) Equal Educational Opportunity Obligation Under State and Federal Law

Offering the M.A. in Work and Labor Policy through a flexible online format supports New York's and SUNY's obligations to provide equal educational opportunity and nondiscriminatory access to educational programs. SUNY policy states that no discrimination or harassment may occur "on any of the campuses or in the programs or activities of the University" and that judgments and actions toward students and employees must be based on qualifications, abilities, and performance. Empire State University's own Non-Discrimination/Anti-Harassment Policy similarly affirms that the university is committed to an educational and employment environment where faculty, staff, students, volunteers, and visitors are treated with respect and dignity and provided equal treatment.

Federal civil rights law also supports broad and nondiscriminatory access to educational programs. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs receiving federal financial assistance. Title IX prohibits sex-based discrimination in education programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits disability discrimination in programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance and is intended to ensure students with disabilities have equal access to educational opportunities.

By offering the program online, Empire extends access to students who may be place-bound, employed full time, caregivers, geographically distant, disabled, or otherwise unable to participate in traditional campus-based graduate education. This delivery model is consistent with Empire's access mission and with legal and policy commitments to nondiscriminatory educational opportunity.

Sources:

SUNY Policy "Equal Opportunity: Access, Employment and Fair Treatment in the State University of New York"

https://www.suny.edu/sunypp/documents.cfm?doc_id=533

SUNY Empire State University Policy "Non-Discrimination/ Anti-Harassment"

<https://www.sunyempire.edu/policies/non-discrimination-anti-harassment-policy.html>

Title VI of Civil Rights Law of 1964 Prohibits Racial Discrimination

<https://www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/civil-rights-laws/race-color-and-national-origin-discrimination/education-and-title-vi>

Title IX Prohibits Sexual Discrimination

<https://www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/civil-rights-laws/title-ix-and-sex-discrimination>

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Prohibits Discrimination Against People with Disabilities

<https://www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/individuals-disabilities/section-504>

C. In addition, the out-of-State institution shall demonstrate that the proposed program, for which the institution is making application:

(1) Critical and Compelling Regional or Statewide Need:

Empire State University's Master of Arts in Work and Labor Policy meets a critical regional and statewide need by preparing working adults and professionals for leadership in labor relations, workforce development, human resources, employment policy, advocacy, and public-sector service. The program is intentionally designed for unionists, human resource professionals, arbitrators, educators, journalists, political activists, lawyers, and individuals in government or private industry, with a curriculum focused on labor relations, labor history, labor law, collective bargaining, workforce development, and policy analysis.

a. The need for the advancement and evolution of knowledge:

The program addresses rapidly evolving issues in the workplace, including changes in the global economy, technology, workforce structures, labor policy, and employment relationships. Empire's program explicitly emphasizes current problems and policies generated by changes in the global economy, technology, the workforce, and the workplace. This focus advances knowledge in areas essential to public policy, labor relations, worker advocacy, organizational leadership, and workforce strategy.

b. Societal need and expanded educational opportunity.

Because the program is offered fully online, it expands access for working adults, union members, caregivers, place-bound students, and other nontraditional learners who may not be able to relocate or attend a residential graduate program. The online delivery model supports access for students whose work schedules, family responsibilities, geographic location, or economic circumstances may otherwise limit graduate study.

c. Strengthen/Expand Capacity of HBCUs

While this criterion is not directly applicable because Empire State University is not a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), the university has a longstanding mission centered on expanding educational opportunity for underserved and nontraditional learners. SUNY Empire is the largest military-serving four-year institution in the SUNY system and serves more military-affiliated students than any other SUNY campus. The university also serves a predominantly adult and working learner population, with 51% of students working full time, 64% attending part time, and 51% identifying as first-generation college students. In addition, 69% of undergraduate students receive financial aid, reflecting the institution's strong service to financially vulnerable and Pell-eligible populations. (suny.edu)

Empire also serves a highly diverse student body. Recent enrollment data show that approximately 15% of students identify as Black or African American, more than 15% identify as Hispanic/Latino, and the university enrolls students from a broad range of racial, ethnic, military, geographic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Empire's fully online and flexible delivery model is specifically designed to expand access for working adults, military-affiliated students, caregivers, geographically dispersed learners, and other students who may not be well served by traditional campus-based graduate education.

In this context, the proposed Master of Arts in Work and Labor Policy advances broader state and federal goals of educational access, workforce mobility, and equitable participation in graduate education for historically underserved and nontraditional student populations.

d. Occupational and professional need.

The labor market supports the need for advanced preparation in labor policy, employment relations, human resources, mediation, and workforce development. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that labor relations specialists had a

median annual wage of \$93,500 in May 2024 and projects approximately 5,100 openings annually from 2024 to 2034. Related occupational areas also show continued demand: human resources specialists are projected to grow 6% from 2024 to 2034, with approximately 81,800 openings annually; arbitrators, mediators, and conciliators are projected to grow 4%; and social and community service managers are projected to grow 6%, with approximately 18,600 openings annually.

The program prepares students for roles and advancement pathways including labor relations specialist, union representative or organizer, human resources professional, workforce development leader, policy analyst, mediator, arbitrator, employee relations specialist, nonprofit or advocacy leader, and public-sector employment policy professional.

(2) Consistency with the Maryland State Plan for Postsecondary Education

The M.A. in Work and Labor Policy is consistent with the Maryland State Plan for Postsecondary Education because it directly advances ALL the State Plan's goals of **access, success, and innovation**. MHEC's 2022 State Plan identifies student access, student success, and innovation as central goals for Maryland postsecondary education.

Access.

The program advances access by offering a high-quality graduate degree fully online, making it available to Maryland residents who may be working full time, supporting families, serving in unions or public agencies, or living outside easy commuting distance of a campus. This aligns with Maryland's goal to ensure equitable access to affordable and quality postsecondary education for all Maryland residents.

Success.

The program promotes student success by serving adult and working learners with a focused 30-credit graduate curriculum connected to clear professional pathways in labor relations, workforce development, human resources, advocacy, and policy. Empire's program information emphasizes preparation for careers in labor relations, workforce development, and human resources through skills in labor law, collective bargaining, and policy analysis.

Innovation.

The program supports innovation by using online delivery to meet workforce and educational needs across geography and by addressing contemporary workplace challenges, including technology, workforce change, employment policy, and organizational transformation. Maryland's State Plan includes fostering innovation in higher education to improve access and student success, including through partnerships that support workforce development and workforce readiness.

In sum, Empire State University's M.A. in Work and Labor Policy responds to Maryland's need for accessible, workforce-relevant graduate education; prepares students for labor, policy, HR, and workforce development roles; and advances the State Plan's goals of access, success, and innovation.

D. Demand and Need for the Master of Arts in Work and Labor Policy in Maryland

SUNY Empire State University's Master of Arts in Work and Labor Policy addresses two distinct and interrelated categories of need in Maryland: deep societal needs rooted in the liberal arts tradition and the imperatives of equity and informed citizenship, and pressing occupational needs generated by a rapidly shifting labor landscape that demands sophisticated professional expertise in labor relations, human resources, workforce development, and public policy.

(1) Societal Need

Maryland is a state that has consistently recognized equity, access, and civic participation as core commitments of its higher education system. The 2022 Maryland State Plan for Higher Education identifies "ensuring equitable access to affordable and high-quality postsecondary education for all Maryland residents" as a primary goal, and it emphasizes the importance of applying an equity lens across all goals and priorities. The State Plan notes that Maryland is one of the most diverse states in the nation, with approximately a two-thirds probability that any two residents chosen at random will come from different racial or ethnic groups. A graduate program in Work and Labor Studies directly responds to this diversity by centering the experiences of working people—including those from historically marginalized communities—and by cultivating the critical analytical and civic capacities that the liberal arts tradition uniquely provides.

The Program's interdisciplinary character is precisely suited to this societal mission. Labor Studies draws upon the methodologies and subject matter of the social sciences and humanities, as well as interdisciplinary areas such as American studies, women's studies, and African-American studies. The goal is to engage in an educational process that enables workers to situate themselves in relation to broader processes of political-economic and cultural change and to encourage informed and active citizenship. This formation of critically engaged citizens who can analyze the conditions of their own lives and communities is the essence of the liberal arts mission, and it yields immeasurable returns to Maryland's democratic life that no labor market metric can fully capture. Empire State University

Maryland's emphasis on expanding educational opportunity for minority and educationally disadvantaged students makes the Program's flexible, largely online delivery model especially valuable. SUNY Empire State University is the largest-serving military-affiliated institution in the SUNY system and is the first and only university designated an autism-supportive institution, having created an inclusive environment and academic experience for neurodivergent students. These institutional commitments to inclusion translate directly into a graduate program that can reach working adults, union members, public servants, and first-generation graduate students across Maryland—populations who are often excluded from traditional, campus-based residential programs.

Maryland's own Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), working in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Labor and the Maryland Department of Commerce, has developed an annual Workforce Needs Analysis specifically to align postsecondary education with workforce demands and to ensure that the state's academic program landscape supports both in-demand occupations and the broader civic needs of Maryland residents. The Program fits squarely within this framework by producing graduates capable not only of entering the workforce in specialized roles, but of contributing as researchers,

advocates, policy analysts, and informed citizens to the ongoing project of shaping a more just and productive economy.

Sources: 2022 Maryland State Plan for Education, <https://mhec.maryland.gov/pages/2021-2025-maryland-state-plan-for-higher-education.aspx>

2025-2026 SUNY Empire State University Catalog,
<https://catalog.sunyempire.edu/pdf/Full%20Catalog%202025-2026.pdf>

(2) **Occupational Need**

Maryland's labor market presents a set of conditions that create urgent and durable demand for professionals trained in work and labor studies at the graduate level. These conditions include a large and active unionized workforce, a rapidly evolving legal and regulatory environment, a substantial federal workforce undergoing historic disruption, and a state economy that has explicitly prioritized the alignment of higher education with workforce needs.

Growing and Active Union Sector

Maryland had 325,000 union members in 2024, with union members accounting for 11.4 percent of wage and salary workers—up from 10.7 percent in 2023 and above the national average of 9.9 percent. Approximately 30,000 Maryland State employees have collective bargaining rights, meaning that organizations certified as exclusive bargaining representatives are entitled to negotiate with the Governor or designated representatives. This large organized sector creates a consistent and substantial need for professionals who understand collective bargaining, labor law, grievance procedures, contract administration, and the history and theory of the labor movement—the precise competencies the Program develops.

Nationally, union representation increased significantly in 2025, and Gallup reported that labor union approval remained relatively steady at 68 percent among the American public. This sustained public support for organized labor, combined with Maryland's above-average union density, signals that the demand for skilled labor relations professionals—on both the labor and management sides—is not diminishing. Union staff representatives, negotiators, arbitrators, and labor educators require the kind of rigorous, graduate-level preparation in labor history, law, and policy that the Program provides.

Sources: Maryland Department of Budget and Management,
https://dbm.maryland.gov/employees/pages/cb_home.aspx

Bureau of Labor Statistics Union Membership in Maryland,
https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news-release/unionmembership_maryland.htm

Economic Policy Institute, <https://www.epi.org/publication/workers-resolve-drives-increase-in-unionization-in-2025/>

Fast-Changing Legal and Regulatory Landscape

Maryland has been among the most legislatively active states in the country in the area of labor and employment law, creating rising demand for professionals who can analyze,

implement, and advise on complex workforce policy. Recent Maryland legislation has expanded wage transparency requirements, broadened the state's Equal Pay Act to add additional protected classes including race, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation, and increased civil penalties for misclassification of workers as independent contractors. Maryland's Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) program, which began collecting contributions in 2025 and began to provide benefits in 2026, requires employers and employees to navigate new eligibility criteria and compliance obligations.

These developments require human resource professionals, labor relations specialists, compliance officers, and public administrators who can move fluently across labor law, policy analysis, and workplace management. The M.A. in Work and Labor Policy is designed precisely for this audience: unionists, human resource professionals, arbitrators, educators, journalists, political activists, lawyers, and individuals involved in government or private industry who seek to advance their careers by strengthening their communication, analytical, and leadership skills. While the program provides students with a background in American labor relations, labor history, labor law, and collective bargaining, its focus is on current problems and policies generated by changes in the global economy, technology, the workforce, and the workplace.

Source: Virgil HR- Maryland Passes Changes to Labor and Employment Laws, <https://virgilhr.com/legal-updates/maryland-passes-changes-to-labor-and-employment-laws/>

Maryland Chamber of Commerce, <https://www.mdchamber.org/core-business-issues/labor-employment/>

Federal Workforce Disruption

Maryland faces a workforce challenge of national significance that has no parallel in recent state history. Maryland's federal workforce is crucial to the state's economy, and the concentration of federal workers in Maryland is second in the nation, following only Washington, D.C. Since January 2025, Maryland has lost 15,100 federal jobs—nearly 10 percent of all federal positions located in the state—and federal employment plays a major role in the state's economy, with more than 158,000 federal jobs based in Maryland as of 2023.

Governor Wes Moore launched a Maryland Public Servants Resource Website to support federal employees and contractors impacted by layoffs, firings, and changes to federal funding, recognizing that these actions could potentially impact thousands of Marylanders. This historic displacement of a highly educated, experienced workforce creates immediate demand for labor relations professionals—including mediators, labor attorneys, HR specialists, and workforce transition experts—who understand both the legal protections available to displaced workers and the policy mechanisms through which public-sector labor relations are governed. The Program directly trains graduates to fill exactly these advisory, advocacy, and administrative roles.

Sources: Maryland Association of Counties, <https://conduitstreet.mdcountries.org/2025/10/02/maryland-leads-in-federal-job-losses/>

Maryland Department of Labor, <https://labor.maryland.gov/whatsnews/mlrapril2025.shtml>

Maryland Office of the Governor Press Releases,
<https://governor.maryland.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-governor-wes-moore-acts-support-marylands-federal-public-servants>

Broader Occupational Projections and Workforce Alignment

The Maryland Higher Education Commission's 2025 Workforce Needs Analysis, developed with the Maryland Department of Labor and the Maryland Department of Commerce, was specifically designed to provide actionable insights guiding academic program development, and MHEC is tasked with aligning postsecondary education with in-demand and emerging occupations. The occupational categories served by the Program—including labor relations specialists, human resources managers, training and development managers, compliance officers, and public policy analysts—represent areas of consistent, multi-sector demand across Maryland's government, healthcare, higher education, and private industry sectors.

Maryland had 146,000 job openings in April 2025, with a job openings rate of 4.9 percent—above the national rate of 4.4 percent—reflecting a tight labor market with strong employer demand for skilled workers across sectors. The professionals produced by Empire's Program are equipped to serve not only in traditional labor union roles, but in a growing range of public and private sector positions requiring policy expertise, analytical sophistication, and the ability to navigate complex workplace relationships.

Sources: Maryland Higher Education Commission 2025 Workforce Needs Analysis,
<https://mhec.maryland.gov/Pages/Workforce-Needs-Analysis--Public-Comment.aspx>

Bureau of Labor Statistics- Maryland Job Openings and Labor Turnover,
https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news-release/jobopeningslaborturnover_maryland.htm

E. Federal and State Workforce Projections

- (1) The occupational categories served by SUNY Empire State University's M.A. in Work and Labor Policy map directly to several Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes, each of which shows sustained national and regional demand.

Labor Relations Specialists (SOC 13-1075)

Labor relations specialists held approximately 65,400 jobs nationally in 2024, with a median annual wage of \$93,500. While employment in this category is projected to show little or no net change from 2024 to 2034, approximately 5,100 openings are projected each year, on average, over the decade — the vast majority driven by the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force. For a specialized field of this size, 5,100 annual openings nationally represents a robust replacement demand stream. In Maryland specifically, labor relations specialists earn a median salary of \$89,470, and the state projects 8% job growth for this occupational category — substantially higher than the

flat national projection — reflecting Maryland's above-average union density and concentration of public-sector employment.

Sources: GradDegree.com, <https://graddegree.com/majors/business-management-and-marketing/human-resource-management/labor-studies/maryland-us/>

US Bureau of Labor Statistics- Labor Relations Specialists,
<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/business-and-financial/labor-relations-specialists.htm>

Human Resources Specialists (SOC 13-1071)

Employment of human resources specialists is projected to grow 6 percent from 2024 to 2034, faster than the average for all occupations. Approximately 81,800 openings are projected each year, on average, over the decade. Human resources specialists held about 944,300 jobs nationally in 2024, with a median annual wage of \$72,910. This is one of the largest and most consistently in-demand occupational categories in the economy, and graduates of the Program are well-positioned to enter it at a more advanced career level than those holding only a bachelor's degree. [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics- Human Resources Specialists,
<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/business-and-financial/human-resources-specialists.htm>

Human Resources Managers (SOC 11-3121)

Employment of human resources managers is projected to grow 5 percent from 2024 to 2034, faster than the average for all occupations, with approximately 17,900 openings projected per year on average over the decade. HR managers held about 221,900 jobs nationally in 2024. The median annual wage was \$140,030 in May 2024, with the top 10 percent earning more than \$239,200. A graduate-level credential in work and labor studies is directly relevant to advancement within this managerial tier, and the Program's emphasis on policy analysis, labor law, and leadership development directly addresses the competencies employers seek at this level.

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics- Human Resources Managers,
<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/human-resources-managers.htm>

Compliance Officers and Training & Development Managers

Graduates of the Program also enter adjacent occupational categories including compliance officers (SOC 13-1041), training and development managers (SOC 11-3131), and public policy analysts. Overall employment in management occupations is projected to grow faster than the average for all occupations from 2024 to 2034, with approximately 1.1 million openings projected per year on average. The median annual wage for this group was \$122,090 in May 2024.

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics- Management Occupations,
<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/>

Maryland-Specific Projections

The Maryland Department of Labor's Office of Workforce Information and Performance (OWIP) publishes biennial long-term occupational projections for the state. The most

recently available round covers the 2022–2032 projection period. Maryland's occupational employment projections are designed to identify the state's rapidly growing, stable, or declining occupations, and to indicate the projected demand for workers — data that can inform educational program development and career choices. These projections confirm sustained demand in the human resources and labor relations occupational group across Maryland's government, healthcare, education, and private industry sectors — the primary employer communities from which Program enrollees are drawn and to which they return as practitioners.

Maryland's particular concentration of federal employment lends additional urgency to these projections. As noted in Section D, Maryland's concentration of federal workers is second in the nation, following only Washington, D.C. The federal workforce disruptions of 2025 have created a substantial cohort of experienced displaced workers and a corresponding surge in demand for labor relations professionals, HR specialists, workforce transition advisors, and policy analysts — all roles for which the Program prepares graduates.

Sources: Maryland Department of Labor- Occupational & Industry Projections, <https://www.labor.maryland.gov/lmi/iandoproj/>

Maryland Department of Labor, <https://labor.maryland.gov/whatsnews/mlrapril2025.shtml>

(2) Market Survey Data and Employer Demand

The M.A. in Work and Labor Policy is a program in the liberal arts tradition, and as such, the application acknowledges that quantitative market surveys of prospective employers may be supplemented by broader programmatic evidence of demand. Nonetheless, several concrete indicators of employer need are available.

Employer Demand via Job Posting Data

Maryland's first annual Workforce Needs Analysis (2025), produced by MHEC in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Labor and the Maryland Department of Commerce, identifies in-demand occupations based on both long-term occupational projections (2022–2032) and total new job postings recorded in 2023, with occupations qualifying for inclusion requiring over 1,000 total new openings over the projection period. Human resources and labor relations occupations meet this threshold in Maryland, as reflected in the Appendix A in-demand occupations list.

As of April 2025, Maryland had 146,000 job openings — representing a job openings rate of 4.9 percent, above the national rate of 4.4 percent, with a ratio of only 0.7 unemployed persons per job opening, indicating strong and unmet employer demand across the labor market. Labor relations and HR occupations consistently appear among open positions listed on the Maryland Workforce Exchange (MWE), the state's official job-matching platform referenced in the application's suggested data sources.

Sources: Maryland Higher Education Commission 2025 Workforce Needs Analysis, <https://mhec.maryland.gov/Pages/Workforce-Needs-Analysis--Public-Comment.aspx>

US Bureau of Labor Statistics- Maryland Job Openings and Labor Turnover in Dec. 2025,
https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news-release/jobopeningslaborturnover_maryland.htm

The Program's Established Student Demand

SUNY Empire State University's M.A. in Work and Labor Policy has operated successfully for decades, serving a national audience of working adults. Its flexible, predominantly online delivery — combined with periodic residencies — has proven effective at reaching the exact population of Maryland workers who are most likely to enroll: unionists, HR professionals, public administrators, and labor attorneys who cannot relocate to pursue a residential graduate program. The Program's existing enrollment demonstrates real, revealed demand from the working-adult population, and Maryland's large union sector (325,000 union members) and federal workforce represent a natural geographic expansion of this audience.

(3) Current Supply of Graduates in Maryland and the Region

A critical finding in support of this application is the near-total absence of equivalent graduate programming within Maryland itself.

No Comparable Program Exists in Maryland

A review of graduate programs in Maryland reveals no institution currently offering a dedicated master's-level degree in Labor Studies, Work and Labor Policy, or Labor and Employment Relations. Labor studies jobs in Maryland number approximately 1,320 workers in the state. Related graduate-level programs in Maryland are limited primarily to general human resources management (68 annual graduates statewide) and human resources development (131 annual graduates statewide). These are undergraduate or general management programs; none provides the labor history, collective bargaining, labor law, labor movement theory, and policy analysis that constitute the Program's core curriculum.

Maryland institutions of higher education offer business and HR management programs broadly, but no Maryland institution — public or private — appears to offer an equivalent stand-alone graduate degree focused on labor studies, industrial relations, or work and labor policy, as confirmed by a review of Maryland's Academic Program Inventory maintained by MHEC. This represents a significant gap, particularly given Maryland's union density, its robust public sector, its proximity to Washington D.C.'s federal labor apparatus, and the scale of its workforce policy challenges.

Source: GradDegree.com- Labor Studies Schools in Maryland,
<https://graddegree.com/majors/business-management-and-marketing/human-resource-management/labor-studies/maryland-us/>

Regional Context

The nearest comparable programs are located outside Maryland, primarily in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast. These include the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations' online Master of Labor and Employment Relations (MLER), a professional program designed for working adults with interest in labor and social justice or employee management, and the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies' Master's Degree in Labor

Studies, which combines insights from sociology, law, history, economics, political science, and labor relations to analyze the opportunities and challenges confronted by workers and their organizations. These programs are located in New Jersey and New York, respectively, and are not approved for Maryland operation. SUNY Empire State University's Program would be the only institution of its kind authorized to serve Maryland residents in-state, filling a documented supply gap.

Sources: Rutgers School of Labor Mgmt, <https://smlr.rutgers.edu/academic-programs/graduate-programs/online-professional-masters-labor-and-employment-relations-mler>

CUNY School of Labor Mgmt, <https://slu.cuny.edu/labor-studies/graduate-programs/>

Summary of Supply and Demand Gap

The table below summarizes the supply-demand picture across the Program's primary occupational outcomes in Maryland:

Occupation	MD Median Wage	National Annual Openings	MD Projection	MD Graduate Supply
Labor Relations Specialists	\$89,470	~5,100/yr	+8% growth	None specific to field
HR Specialists	\$72,910	~81,800/yr	Growth above avg.	~68–131/yr (general HR only)
HR Managers	\$140,030	~17,900/yr	+5% growth	No graduate-level pipeline
Compliance Officers	\$84,980	Substantial	Stable/growing	Minimal at graduate level

F. Faculty Information

(a) Faculty to teach in the first year of the program: Dr. Jason Russell

- (1) Course faculty will teach: PPOL-6007 Policy Process, LABR-6010 Work and Labor Studies
- (2) (3) Degrees and specializations held by individual:
 - Ph.D. in History: York University, 2010. *Canadian, American, and North American Labor and Working-Class fields.*
 - Master of Arts in Labor and Policy Studies: The State University of New York (SUNY) Empire State College, 2002.
 - Bachelor of Arts (Honors) History: The University of Western Ontario, 1991.

(3) Faculty member is a full-time, tenured Professor

(b) CV is attached



MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

Faculty Compliance Report for Out-of-State Degree Granting Institutions Operating in Maryland

Institution:	State University of New York, Empire State University				
Program Title (complete a separate form for each approved program, for each approved site, if applicable): Work and Labor Policy (M.A.)					
Commission authorization is by academic program; therefore, each program is reviewed independently to determine compliance with COMAR 13B.02.01.16.					
Total # of credits required in program:	30				
Total # of courses required in Program:					
# of courses taught in program					
# of credits taught in program					
Faculty Name	Course Categories	Degree and Institution from CV	# of courses taught in program	# of credits taught in program	
Jason Russell	LABR 6015 Labor Policy in America	Ph.D. - York University	3	9	
Mark Soderstrom	PPOL 6021 Methods for Policy Research	Ph.D. - University of Minnesota	1	3	
Edward Warzala	LABR 7010 Final Project: Work and Labor Policy	Ph.D. - University at Albany, Rockefeller College	1	3	
	LABR 6010 Work and Labor Studies				
	PPOL 6007 Policy Process				

Total courses taught by FULL-time faculty as defined by COMAR 13B.02.02.03)

15

List Part-time Faculty (add rows as necessary)

Total courses taught by PART-time faculty

5

% of courses taught by FULL-TIME faculty

100%

* (# of courses taught by FULL-TIME faculty / total number of courses in program; this MUST exceed 33%)

Teach Out Plan
Empire State College, State University of New York
Online Programs Offered to Maryland Residents

The institution must provide a copy of its teach-out plan allowing enrolled students to complete their programs if the institution decides to cease offering this program in Maryland.

If Empire State University was to ever stop offering its M.A. in Work and Labor Policy program, there is a process in place to support all students who would be enrolled in the program at that time. Empire State University, in conjunction with the State University of New York (SUNY), would first implement a program deactivation. This would close the program to any new student enrollees. As part of the deactivation process, Empire State University would notify SUNY of a date upon which the program would be formally discontinued – typically in three years. Any students currently enrolled in the program would be advised that they would have until the date of discontinuance to complete the program.