

Proposal to incorporate a "Labor Organization Representative" job title category in the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook

Proposal submitted May 30, 2003 by Lincoln Cushing (Electronic Outreach Librarian, Institute of Industrial Relations Library, U.C. Berkeley), with support from Terence K. Huwe (Director of Library & Information Resources, Institute of Industrial Relations Library, U.C. Berkeley)

1. What's in a Name?

To those in professions of cataloging and classifying, the absence or presence of accurate subject headings can mean the difference between access and obscurity. Within every facet of this craft certain institutions emerge as the authoritative source for standardized nomenclature. For bibliographic work, it is the Library of Congress Subject Headings. For human resources and labor studies, the official reference has been the Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) published biannually by the U.S. Department of Labor, and its predecessor, the United States Department of Labor Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT), last revised 1991. "The DOT was created by the Employment and Training Administration. It is a standard reference in several types of cases adjudicated by the Office of Administrative Law Judges, especially labor-related immigration cases."^[1]

Although these documents were the product of lengthy research and review by numerous professionals,^[2] they nonetheless inevitably contained weaknesses and oversights. A similar situation occurred in the early 1970s when librarian Sanford Berman^[3] and others noted serious flaws in the Library of Congress Subject Headings, many of which were eventually changed. After reviewing the existing occupational titles existing within the OOH, I have concluded that an entire genre of occupations that exist within labor unions is absent, and I would suggest that now is the time to rectify that.

2. The Current Descriptive Gap.

The University of California, Berkeley's Institute of Industrial Relations Library started a project in 2002 that put full text union contracts on the web. As part of that process, each contract is assigned relevant catalog information, including occupations of the workers represented in the contract. As an authority control source for this information we used DOL's OOH, issued since the 1940s and available in print and electronic format.^[4]

The OOH listings are built from the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system, used by all Federal statistical agencies to classify workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating, or disseminating data. All workers are classified into one of over 820 occupations according to their occupational definition. To facilitate classification, occupations are combined to form 23 major groups, 96 minor groups, and 449 broad occupations. Each broad occupation includes detailed occupation(s) requiring similar job duties, skills, education, or experience.^[5]

Professional, Technical, and Managerial Occupations

00/01 OCCUPATIONS IN ARCHITECTURE, ENGINEERING, AND SURVEYING

This division includes occupations concerned with the practical application of physical laws and principles of engineering or architecture for the development and utilization of machines, materials, instruments, structures, processes, and services. Typical specializations are research, design, construction, testing, procurement, production, operations, and sales. Also includes preparation of drawings, specifications, and cost estimates, and participation in verification tests.

001 ARCHITECTURAL OCCUPATIONS

001.061-010 ARCHITECT (profess. & kin.)

001.061-014 ARCHITECT, MARINE (profess. & kin.) alternate titles: architect, naval; naval designer

001.061-018 LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT (profess. & kin.) alternate titles: community planner; environmental planner; land planner; site planner...

Clerical and Sales Occupations
Service Occupations
Agricultural, Fishery, Forestry, and Related Occupations
Processing Occupations
[... and so on.]

The DOT used a similar, but much larger (over 12,000 codes) title set; these are some sample “A” listings:[6]

Abalone Diver (fishing & hunt.)
able-bodied seaman (water trans.)
ABLE SEAMAN (water trans.)
abrading machine tender (electron. comp.)
ABRASIVE-BAND WINDER (nonmet. min.)
abrasive-blasting equipment operator (any industry)
ABRASIVE-COATING-MACHINE OPERATOR (nonmet. min.)
ABRASIVE GRADER (optical goods)

The problem we have run up against is that we cannot properly classify the occupational titles for union contracts involving those who work within unions in many common occupations. For example, there is nothing in the OOH under “Union;” entries skip from “uniform-force captain (government ser.)” to “unit assembler (machinery mfg.)” Likewise, “Labor” yields no entries. Even the more generic categories of “business agent” and “organizer” are skipped (see following example of indexed titles).

Bushing-And-Broach Operator (metal prod., nec)
business agent (amuse. & rec.)
business and financial counsel (profess. & kin.)

organ transplant coordinator (medical ser.)
Organ Tuner, Electronic (any industry)
ORIENTAL-RUG REPAIRER (any industry)

The closest possible job title is “Human Resources, Training, and Labor Relations Managers and Specialists,” but the description is very heavily oriented towards a skill set and work environment that addresses the needs of management - e.g., “When a collective bargaining agreement is up for negotiation, labor relations specialists prepare information for management to use during negotiation...” The only concession to those that perform related duties for unions is the statement “Labor relations specialists who work for unions perform many of the same functions on behalf of the union and its members.”

3. The Opportunity for Change.

Fortunately, these resources are publicly accountable and open to change. The foreword of the current DOT states “The revision has enhanced information contained in the occupational definitions in response to user feedback. A number of new occupations have also been added that were originally identified by DOT users and given temporary codes and titles under the Occupational Code Request program. We thank previous users for these improvements. We hope that users of this revised Fourth Edition will continue to help us keep the DOT up to date.” Rather than make changes to the current OOH, the Department of Labor is creating a new reference, O*NET (Occupational Information Network).[7] Whereas the OOH had approximately 800 occupational titles, O*NET has approximately 1,000.

4. Model language examples from Canada and the Economic Policy Institute.

Canada's National Occupational Classification system lumps together "labour organization negotiator," "labour organization business agent," "labour union liaison officer," and "labour organizer" all under the catch-all classification 1121, "Specialists in Human Resources".[8]

1121 Specialists in Human Resources[9]

Specialists in human resources develop, implement and evaluate human resources and labour relations policies, programs and procedures and advise managers and employers on personnel matters. Specialists in human resources are employed throughout the private and public sectors, or they may be self-employed.

Example Titles:

business agent, labour organization
classification officer
classification specialist
compensation research analyst
conciliator
consultant, human resources
employee relations officer
employment equity officer
human resources research officer
job analyst
labour relations officer
mediator
union representative
wage analyst

Unofficial professional sources in the U.S. also include a relevant title. The Economic Research Institute Salary Assessor lists "union business representative" as an occupation[10]:

Union Business Representative
eDOT: 187.167-018
SOC: 113040
ERI code: 3122

Alternate Titles (none)

Overview

Manages business affairs of labor union.

Typical Functions

- Coordinates and directs such union functions as promoting local membership, placing union members on jobs, arranging local meetings, and maintaining relations between union and employers and press representatives.
- Visits work sites to ensure management and labor employees adhere to union contract specifications.
- May assist in developing plant production and safety and health measures.
- May negotiate with management on hours, wages, individual grievances, and other work-related matters affecting employees.

5. Recommendation: Adopt new model language.

The Economic Policy Institute's description of a "Union Business Representative" encompasses a broad variety of tasks that are performed by labor union employees. However, it is too restrictive in the scope of the occupations it encompasses, and we have revised it as follows:

Labor Organization Representative

Alternate Titles (Labor Organizer, Union Organizer, Labor Business Representative, Union Business Representative)

Overview

Manages business affairs of labor organization.

Typical Functions

- Coordinates and directs such labor organization functions as promoting local membership, placing members on jobs, arranging local meetings, and maintaining relations between labor organizations and employers.
- Participates in the planning and implementation of organizing campaigns.
- Contributes to electoral and other political advocacy on behalf of the interests of working people.
- Visits work sites to ensure management and employees adhere to contractual specifications and labor codes.
- May assist in developing plant production and safety and health measures.
- May engage in collective bargaining with management on hours, wages, individual grievances, and other work-related matters affecting employees.

We recommend that O*Net adopt this language. Given the consideration that there are many citizens employed in this line of work, it strikes us as highly advisable to revise the index accordingly.

Document maintained on the Web by Lincoln Cushing, Docs Populi <<http://www.docspopuli.org>>

Footnotes:

[1] <http://www.oalj.dol.gov/libdot.htm>

[2] "This revision of the Fourth Edition culminates a decade of research and verification by more than 40 job analysts at five Occupational Analysis centers across the Nation and reflects the changing skills, knowledges and abilities of the American workforce." – from the DOT website.

[3] Prejudices and Antipathies- A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People, by Sanford Berman, 1971, McFarland & Company.

[4] <http://www.bls.gov/search/ooah.asp?ct=OOH>

[5] <http://www.bls.gov/soc/>

[6] http://www.occupationalinfo.org/dot_a0.html

[7] <http://online.onetcenter.org/>

[8] e-mail from Elizabeth Perry, Head, Library and Information Service, Centre for Industrial Relations, University of Toronto, May 23, 2003.

[9] <http://www23.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/2001/e/generic/welcome.shtml>

[10] e-mail from Suzanne Cohen, Reference Services Coordinator, Martin P. Catherwood Library, ILR School, Cornell University, May 27, 2003