Course Description

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the problems of our times. What can ordinary people do to bring about social change? How can they organize themselves effectively without sacrificing the very values for which they are fighting? This course combines: 1) reading, discussion, and writing about strategies for social change; 2) workshops on practical organizing skills like participatory decision-making, publicity and outreach, campaign research, nonviolent tactics, alliance-building, etc.; and 3) a collective action project which the class will research, design, and carry out together. Students should have either prior coursework in social issues/social movements or activist experience.

Course Format

The course is designed to have a strong experiential component. It is meant to give you practical knowledge of various kinds of organizing skills and hands-on experience using them in a collective project. At the same time, we will be discussing these issues and the various options we look at with an evaluative eye, considering the practical and ethical implications of various options available to organizers in terms of how to mobilize people, how to deal with the media, what strategies for social change work best, what tactics, etc. Also, many of the options that have been tried historically are either not within the scope of this course for us to try ourselves (developing a national coalition, for example) or are ethically/morally inappropriate to be carrying out as a class (e.g. violent tactics), yet it is important from an intellectual standpoint to understand what has been tried in the past and what has or has not worked in different situations. Consequently, the format of the course is designed so that the experiential parallel to each other over the course of the semester - in each class period, we will spend approximately half of the time discussing more abstract questions in the readings and the other half of the time working on the group project. In order for us to complete the project/action within the scope of the semester, I have built a number of benchmarks into the schedule for progress on the project.

Because of the collective nature much of what we will be doing this term, and because the goal of the course is to allow you to grow in your capacity to engage in issues of concern to you, I have designed the course to have a somewhat emergent character. While some things are less flexible than others (workshops done by outside trainers, for example), there is room in the syllabus for us to customize the readings and topics as the course unfolds, based on your needs and interests and the requirements of the project we choose. Consequently, I have left some of the reading assignments tentative or blank for now and after about the third week, you will get an updated syllabus based on the decisions we have made between now and then about the project (the required books will not change). Likewise, in weeks 6 or 7, we will take a look at the suggested topics for the last half of the course, and if the class has developed interests in other questions, we can reorganize things to work them in.
Course Requirements

1) **Participation and discussion questions.** These are especially important since so much of the class revolves around group work. I will *not* be taking roll each week, but your classmates will need you to be there for the project to come together well, so absences will be noticed. If you have to miss a class, please make sure to get notes from a fellow student and keep up with all readings and assignments. Participation, i.e. my assessment of your overall level of engagement with the class, will constitute a significant part of your grade. Things you can do to ensure a good participation grade include contributing to class discussions, email correspondence, coming to my office hours, and attending lectures or events on campus that pertain to the course and coming to tell me about them or writing up a page summarizing the event and giving your reactions. Also, three people each week will sign up to bring in discussion questions which we will use to guide discussion, and that will count toward your participation grade as well.

2) **3-page concerns paper.** For the third week of class, everyone will be asked to write a short (3 pages) paper on the social issue or problem you would most like to have the class address for the class project. It should be something you are really concerned about and that you think you would be passionate about working on. This exercise will help us facilitate our selection of an issue and a goal for the class project.

3) **Activist biography/autobiography report/presentation.** Each student will choose an activist they would like to learn more about and read either a biography or autobiography on that person and give an informal report to the class about that person’s life and your impressions/thoughts about the book. This can be done either in pairs, in which case the presentation should be about 10-15 minutes long, or individually, in which case it should be 5-7 minutes. Then you’ll turn in a short write-up of the presentation. We will figure out who will do which activist during the second week of class and sign up for presentation dates. I have compiled a list of as many activists I can think of and biographies and autobiographies written about them from which you can choose, or talk to me if you have another idea of someone else you would like to report about. Presentations will take place throughout the semester.

4) **Action plan.** Once we have chosen an issue and a goal for the action, the class will work in weeks 4-6 to create a detailed action plan, based on a worksheet with a series of questions to be answered about the issue, who the stakeholders are, what resources the class has, what exact action will be carried out, when and how it will happen, etc. The collectively written action plan, elaborating the details of the plan, will be due week 7 and everyone will get the same grade for this assignment.

5) **Final reflections paper (10-12 pgs).** At the end of the term, each student will write a 10-12 page final paper, reflecting on the action, your experiences in the group project aspect of the course, and what you learned through the readings and discussion.

6) **Individual group project grade.** Lastly, everyone will get to suggest what grade they should receive for their work on the group project by writing up a one-page report explaining what role you played, what work you did on the project over the course of the semester, and what grade you think you deserve. I will then use these reports to inform my assessment of each person’s contribution.
Grading
Your final grade for the course will be derived according to the following weighting of individual requirements:

- Participation/discussion questions: 15%
- Concerns paper: 5%
- Activist presentation/report: 20%
- Action plan (collective): 25%
- Final reflections paper: 30%
- Individual group project grade: 5%

Academic Integrity
It is your responsibility to understand and adhere to the accepted norms of intellectual honesty in their academic work. Any form of cheating, plagiarism, dishonesty, or collusion in another’s dishonesty is a fundamental violation of these norms and will be handled through the formal disciplinary procedures laid out by the College. To see the College's policies in this area go to: http://www.bc.edu/integrity. This includes proper citation of sources. Two good sources to consult about proper citation rules and exactly what constitutes a breach of policy are: “Plagiarism Examples and Guidelines: A Quiz” at http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/polisci/integrity/quiz/#Example_four and the American Sociological Association’s “Quick Style Guide” at http://www.asanet.org/page.ww?section=Sociology+Depts&name=Quick+Style+Guide).

A note about late papers. Papers are graded down by 5 percentage points for each day they are late. If you must turn a paper in late due to an emergency (i.e. something that is both unavoidable and unforeseen), make sure to contact me by email as soon as possible. If you know about an unavoidable conflict ahead of time, let me know in advance, and we can arrange an extension.

Readings
There are 5 required books for this course:


These books will be available at the Bookstore and on reserve at O’Niell Library. All other assigned readings are available through electronic reserves. From the library home page (http://www.bc.edu/libraries), click on “course reserves” under “Find library materials,” log in, and look up the course under my name. Readings will be listed by the last name of the author of the individual piece (rather than the author of an edited book, for example).
Weekly Schedule of Readings and Assignments


2. Jan. 24    Motivation – Obstacles to Engagement
   - Training in Consensus Decisionmaking
   - Sign up for Activist Biography/Autobiography assignment
   - Sign up for Discussion Questions week.
   - *Soul of a Citizen*, Chapters 1, 2, and 4.

3. Jan. 31    Motivation – Overcoming Cynicism
   - Concerns papers due.
   - Decide on goal/issue for group project.
   - *Soul of a Citizen*, Chapters 3, 5, 6, 7.

4. Feb. 7     Organizing Models I
   - *Democracy in Action*, selections

5. Feb. 14    Organizing Models II
   - Workshop: Hip-hop culture, cognitive liberation, and environmental justice organizing. Mike Cermak, guest trainer.
   - *Democracy in Action*, selections

   - Gwyn Kirk. “Our Greenham Common: Feminism and Nonviolence” from *Rocking the Ship of State*.

7. Feb. 28    Media Work
   - Group Action Plan due.
   - Media training.
   - *Making the News*, selections.

   - Rhoda Linton. “Seneca Women’s Peace Camp: Shapes of Things to Come” from *Rocking the Ship of State*.
   - Jo Freeman. “The Tyranny of Structurelessness” and Cathy Levine “The Tyranny of Tyranny” from *Untying the Knot: Feminism, Anarchism and Organization*.

9. Mar. 20    NO CLASS – Easter Weekend

9. Mar. 27    Building Alliances Across Race & Class
   - Training in Diversity/Alliance Building w/ Betsy Leondar-Wright
• Betsy Leondar-Wright. *Class Matters*. Selections.

10. Apr. 3  **Strategy I: Historical Alternatives**

Readings:

11. Apr. 10 **Strategy II: Parameter Questions**

Readings:
• *Pacifism as Pathology*
• George Lakey. “Nonviolent Action as the Sword That Heals: Challenging Ward Churchill’s ‘Pacifism as Pathology’”
• Audre Lord. “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”

12. Apr. 17 **Strategy: What Is To Be Done?**

Readings:
• *The Trajectory of Change*

13. Apr. 24 **Debriefing, Wrap-up Discussion**

• Final Reflections Papers due.