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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? In this two-part course you’ll learn about various organizing strategies through readings and discussion, and also gain practical skills in participatory decision-making, publicity and outreach, alliance-building, and more, through trainings and a hands-on collective action project. Over the course of the year, the class will choose an issue, set a goal, and design a campaign strategy, then work together to carry out the first steps of that campaign. Students should have either prior coursework in social issues/social movements or activist experience.

The Fall semester will be dedicated primarily to choosing an issue, researching it, and developing a campaign strategy, and collectively writing a detailed action plan for the campaign, including a media strategy and a general timetable for various events. We will hopefully progress quickly enough to be able to carry out the first step of the campaign during the Fall semester, but the bulk of the actual organizing work will take place Spring term. Since planning and doing are always interconnected, we will be involved in some of each in both semesters, but generally this term is for planning and next term is for learning the concrete organizing skills and carrying out the plan.

While you are not required to take the course both terms, I highly recommend that you do. Taking it only Fall term may leave you frustrated at not having actually done much, and you’ll be leaving just as the project gets going; and those who only take it Spring term will be jumping into a project they had no hand in creating and joining a group that has spent a whole semester working together, getting to know each other, and building a sense of community, which may make it very difficult to really feel a part of things and invested in the project. Nonetheless, if you are only able to take it one term or the other, I will do my best to make it a rewarding experience for everyone.

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 component and our consideration of historical approaches to social change run
parallel to each other over the course of the year - in each class period, we will spend
approximately half of the time discussing the readings and the other half of the time working
on the group project/campaign.

Because of the collective nature of 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. 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 (Semester I)

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. My assessment of your overall
level of engagement with the class will constitute a significant part of your grade. Things
that will count toward your participation grade are:
- participation in class discussions
- once during each term, you will sign up to bring in discussion questions which we
  will use to guide discussion that day
Other (optional) things you can do to ensure a good participation grade might be:
- email correspondence
- coming to my office hours
- attending relevant lectures or events on campus and talking to me about it in person or
  writing up a page summarizing the event and giving your reactions.

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.

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) Journaling. As a supplement to in-class discussion and as a way of processing the
materials we cover, I will ask each student to keep a journal, recording your thoughts and
reactions to the readings, our discussions, and your experience in the course. I have set up
the journaling tool on the Blackboard site for you to use, or if you prefer, you may buy a
separate spiral notebook or journal to use for this purpose. I will periodically read and
respond to the journals as a way of entering into a more individualized intellectual
dialogue with you. These won’t be graded on content, but on the degree to which you
seem to be consistently and thoughtfully engaging with the issues and ideas that come up.
4) **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.

5) **Action plan.** Once we have chosen an issue and a goal for the action, the class will work most of the semester to create a detailed action plan, laying out what the issue is we are working on, who the stakeholders are, and what resources the class has, and laying out a campaign strategy, including what exact actions will be carried out, when and how they will happen, etc. The collectively written action plan will be due no later than week 12 and probably earlier, depending on our rate of progress. Everyone will get the same grade for this assignment.

6) **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.

**Grading – Semester I**

Your final grade for the course will be derived according to the following weighting of individual requirements:

- Participation (including in-class/discussion questions and group project) 15%
- Concerns paper 5%
- Journal 10%
- Activist presentation/report 25%
- Action plan (collective) 20%
- Final paper 25%

**Academic Integrity**

It is each student’s 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. To see the College's policies in this area go to: [http://www.bc.edu/integrity](http://www.bc.edu/integrity). Two other 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](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](http://www.asanet.org/page.ww?section=Sociology+Depts&name=Quick+Style+Guide).

**A note about late papers (please read carefully!).** 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. If you miss your assigned day to give your presentation or to bring discussion questions, without arranging with me ahead of time, you will get a zero for those assignments, unless it was an emergency.

Readings
There are 4 required books for Semester I:


These books will be available at the Bookstore and on reserve at O’Neill Library. The Salzman and Shaw books will arrive in a couple of weeks. All other assigned readings will be on electronic reserve. 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.

Weekly Schedule of Readings and Assignments

1. Sept. 8  Introductions.

2. Sept. 15  Motivation – Obstacles to Engagement I
   - Workshop: Consensus Decisionmaking
   - Sign up for Activist Biography/Autobiography assignment
   - Sign up for Discussion Questions week.
   - *Avoiding Politics,* Chapters 1-3.

3. Sept. 22  Motivation – Obstacles to Engagement II
   - Concerns papers due.
   - Decide on topic for Future Workshop.
   - *Avoiding Politics,* Chapters 5, 7, 9.

4. Sept. 29  Motivation – Overcoming Cynicism I
   - *Soul of a Citizen,* Chapters 1-3.

5. Oct. 6   Motivation – Overcoming Cynicism I
   - *Soul of a Citizen,* Chapters 4-7.
Oct. 13  **COLUMBUS DAY – NO CLASS**

6. Oct. 20  **Educating Ourselves About Our Issue I – Causes & Consequences of the Problem.**
   - Readings to be assigned based on the issue we choose

7. Oct. 27  **Educating Ourselves About Our Issue II – State of the Movement: What’s Been Tried, and What Can We Do?**
   - Readings to be assigned based on the issue we choose

8. Nov. 3  **Developing Our Campaign Strategy: Who Do We Have to Influence and What Would it Take?**
   - *Activist’s Handbook*, Chapters 1 & 8

9. Nov. 10  **How the Media Work & What Gets Covered**

10. Nov. 17  **Developing a Media Strategy: Framing the Argument**
   - **Workshop**: Using the Media in Grassroots Campaigns.
   - *Activist’s Handbook*, Chapter 5

11. Nov. 24  **Tactics: Inside the Box (Pushing the Envelope w/out Breaking the Rules)**

12. Dec. 1  **Models of Community Organizing**
   - **Action Plan due.**
13. Dec. 8  Wrap-up Discussion
   •  Participation Reports due.

Final Reflections Papers due: Thursday, December 11, by 5pm

Overview of Discussion Topics for
Social Change in Action II, Spring ‘09

1. Intro
2. Fundraising
3. Media: Nuts & Bolts of Campaign PR
4. Mobilizing Turn-out: Getting to “Yes”
5. Issues of privilege: w/in the group
6. Issues of privilege: w/in the movement
7. Strategies for Social Change: Historical Dilemmas (revolution vs. reform, parliamentary vs. extraparliamentary…)
8. Movement democracy (autonomy vs. oligarchy)
9. Strategies for Social Change (new conditions, new ideas?)
10. Organizing Ourselves: Organizational Structure
12. Tactical Issues: the Master’s Tools? (Inside vs. Outside)
13. Tactical Issues (Nonviolent Outside vs. Militant Outside)
14. Staying Involved: How to Maintain Hope and Avoid Burnout

Semester II Requirements and Grading

Participation:
   In-class/discussion questions    10%
   Group Action Project           25%
Strategies for Social Change paper   10%
Journal                           10%
Presentation/report on a current movement 20%
Final paper                       25%

Books for Semester II (tentative):


•  (And we’ll continue to use the Salzman and Shaw books from first semester)
Bibliography for Activist Lives Assignment

19th and early 20th Century US

Frederick Douglass. Born a slave and escaped to freedom in the North to become a famous orator, author, and one of the most influential leaders of the abolitionist movement.


Paul Robeson. World famous African-American singer, actor, professional football player, graduate of Columbia Law School, and communist activist.


Carlos Bulosan. Filipino-American novelist and labor activist with the ILWU (longshoremen’s union) on the West coast before World War II.


Eugene V. Debs. Labor and political leader, co-founded the International Labor Union and the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Also ran for president five times – once from jail – on the Socialist Party ticket.


John Reed. Turn of the century American journalist, Harvard graduate, poet, communist activist, and husband of feminist activist, Louise Bryant. Went to Russia to document and support the Bolshevik revolution with Emma Goldman, where he died of the flu and was buried near Lenin.


Emma Goldman. Turn of the century Lithuanian-born anarchist, feminist, essayist, orator. Imprisoned several times for her activism and deported to Russia in 1919, where she was an outspoken critic of Lenin’s brutal suppression of dissent. Lived in several countries and participated in Spanish Civil War with the anarchists against Franco.


Alice Paul. Early 20th century Quaker leader of the suffragist movement, founder of the National Women’s Party, jailed for picketing the White House during World War I.


The Interwar Years

Joe Hill. Swedish-born labor organizer and songwriter, active with the International Workers of the World, convicted of murder in a controversial trial and executed. His arrest was widely believed to be politically motivated, with many well-known people, including Helen Keller,
pleading for clemency on his behalf. The story is captured in several well-known protest songs.


Dorothy Day, Pacifist, anarchist, Catholic journalist, anti-poverty activist, and advocate for the homeless during the Great Depression. Founded the Catholic Workers movement and started a string of “houses of hospitality” and communal farms for the poor.


Myles Horton, Theologian, educator, socialist, and founder in the late 1930s of the Highlander Folk School, an organizer training center where many leaders of the civil rights and southern farm-workers movements were trained, including Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.


Dorothy Healey, Well-known labor organizer in California with a 40-year career. Eventually a national leader of the American Communist Party. Strong advocate for the rights of Black and Chicano farm and factory workers.


**The 1960s: New Left & Civil Rights Activists**

Tom Hayden, Student, civil rights, anti-war, and anti-poverty activist. Founder of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the largest student activist organization in US history. Defendant in the Chicago 8 conspiracy trial, who later became a California State Congressman.


Abbie Hoffman, Colorful co-founder of the countercultural anarchist group, the “Yippies.” Anti-war activist and one of the Chicago 8 defendants.


Bill Ayers, Member of SDS turned co-founder of the Weather Underground Organization.


Carl Oglesby, Copywriter for a military defense contractor turned anti-war activist and early leader of SDS. Great speaker and writer.

Cathy Wilkerson. SDS member turned member of the Weather Underground Organization.


Martin Luther King, Jr. Does he need an introduction?


Stokely Carmichael. Early civil rights activist in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) turned militant leader who sparked the Black Power movement.


Daniel and Phillip Berrigan. Civil rights and anti-war activists from the 1960s-1990s, Christian anarchists, co-founders of the Ploughshares movement. Phillip Berrigan was a Josephite Priest and Daniel Berrigan is a Jesuit Priest. Both served time in prison for repeated acts of civil disobedience, Phillip served a total of 11 years at different times.


**Black Panthers**


Assata Shakur. Charismatic speaker, East Coast leader of BPP, jailed for armed robbery, escaped to exile in Cuba, mother of Tupac Shakur.


Elaine Brown. Leader of BPP for a time while Huey Newton was in prison.


Angela Davis. BPP member, orator, political candidate in Oakland. Now a leading Black intellectual and academic.

Mumia Abu-Jamal. Member of BPP in Philadelphia, journalist, radio personality, convicted of murdering a police officer in highly controversial trial, still on death row. World-wide movement exists to free him.


**The American Indian Movement**

Leonard Peltier. A leader of the American Indian Movement (AIM), tried and convicted of murdering two FBI agents in controversial trial. Serving life in prison. Also focus of world-wide movement to free him.


Dennis Banks. Early leader of AIM.


Russell Means. Early leader of AIM.


**Since the 1960s**


Cesar Chavez. Founder of the United Farmworkers Union for migrant workers, organizer of a national boycott on grapes and lettuce that forced agribusiness concerns to recognize the first agricultural workers union in the US.


**International**

Che Guevara. Author, Marxist leader of the Cuban revolution, and revolutionary activist in many countries in Central and South America. Killed in Bolivia in 1967.


Subcommandante Marcos. Masked leader of the Mexican Zapatista movement for autonomy of indigenous peoples of Mexico, famous orator who drew lots of media attention and built an international netowrk in support of the movement.

**Nelson Mandela**, Leader of the resistance to Apartheid in South Africa. Served 20 years in prison and emerged to become the first president of South Africa after Apartheid fell.


**Mohandas Gandhi**, Author, activist, spiritual and political leader of the anti-colonial independence movement in India. Pioneer of nonviolent philosophy of Satyagraha and proponent of mass civil disobedience. Assassinated in 1948.


**Lech Walesa**, Nonviolent labor and pro-democracy activist, founder of the “solidarity” movement in Poland which helped to bring down the Communist regime in the 1980s.
