

Mini-Course – Spring/ Summer 2016
SW799-003

SSW 799 Grassroots Community Organizing for Environmental Justice

Method Area: Social Policy and Evaluation, Community Organizing

Instructor: Diana Copeland

Schedule: 9am – 5pm Wednesday June 1 and Friday June 3rd

Class Location: 2816 SSWB

Course Description: This course looks at movements, resistance, resilience, and liberation. Community Organizing is one of the most popular areas of specialization to the school of social work. A growing body of evidence reveals that people of color and low-income persons have borne greater environmental and health risks than the society at large in their neighborhood, workplace, and playgrounds. Over the last decade grassroots activists have attempted to change the way governments implement environmental and health laws. Grassroots groups have organized, educated, and empowered themselves to improve the way government regulations and environmental policies are administered.

In a class setting we will connect history, current events, and real-life experiences to local organizing and movement struggles that build power for our communities. These courses will utilize highly interactive popular education methods where participants share political analysis, learn facilitation and organizing skills, and think together about long-term, transformative strategies to build environmental, racial and economic justice.

It is critical for organizers, activists, scholars and community members to come together, connect our work with each other, share our experiences and place our local organizing within a larger historical and political context. We can build deep and strong social movements that act strategically and collectively over the long term.

Course Objectives:

- Students will developing actual tools in popular education, facilitation and workshop organizing that can be applied immediately in the field
- Understand the roots of Environmental Racism/ Injustice

- Understand how organizing in grassroots communities is unique
- Understanding and practicing grassroots methods of organizing from the block to block and neighborhood to neighborhood level
- Understanding the differences between organizing methods: protests, campaigns, community organizing and movement building

Requirement for Academic Credit:

50% Class Participation: Attendance and participation in all class sessions are critical for the learning process in this course. For this reason, students are expected to attend all class sessions. Exceptions will only be made for extreme circumstances. There will be no make up for missed class sessions.

50% Group Presentation: Groups will create a presentation for an organizing campaign/ event.

SAMPLE IN CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

The courses relies on assignments to engage students and assess their comprehension of the course materials. For example:

1. **ORGANIZING ROLE PLAYS.** Early in the term students will be assigned to a small group of 4-5 persons that take on the identity of a community organizing group (either an actual organizing group from the community/region or a fictional one). From week to week, small groups will be given different scenarios and activities requiring them to implement various skills, analyses, and frameworks addressed in the class. For example, during a week covering grassroots fundraising, small groups could be tasked with creating a grassroots fundraising plan for the organization. Assignments related to campaign planning, issue identification, research and direct action can be organized on a similar basis.

2. **ORGANIZATION/ CAMPAIGN CASE STUDY.** Students will be asked to analyze news articles or videos related to a specific organizing campaign, and write a case study about the campaign, such as explaining how the issue was identified, writing out a campaign time line or strategy chart, or answering other questions designed to assess their understanding of organizing vocabulary and concepts.



CLASS UNITS (AGENDA)

DAY 1: May 15th 2015	INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL CHANGE AND POWER.
	These sessions provide students with a basic overview of a definition of community organizing, its main concepts, and introduce some historical and political context to the study of organizing.
9 - 11	COURSE INTRODUCTION & THEORIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE.
	The first week of the course will introduce students to the course, the instructor, and one another. We will use 1-2 icebreakers during the beginning of class this week. In addition to covering typical course business (syllabus, expectations, etc) we will allocate time for an exercise designed to introduce students to the basic ideas of community organizing, and how it differs from other approaches including transformative, direct service, advocacy, and electoral politics. Basic Environmental Justice timeline, course toolkits and the 12 roles of a successful organizer will be covered.
Films, Articles, chapters and in-class exercises:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction & icebreaking activities Recommended: Grassroots Policy Project, "Power and Social Change"—Introduces students to the basic principles of community organizing for social change. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cesar Chavez, "The Organizer's Tale" (1966)—A brief first person account of Cesar Chavez's early organizing lessons with the United Farm Workers—students might be asked to explore how it works with the reading and exercise above.
12 - 3	COMMUNITIES, POWER, AND THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF ORGANIZING (DEVELOPING FACILITATION AND POPULAR EDUCATION SKILLS)
	This session focuses on some contemporary debates within community organizing to help students engage the question, "what is organizing for?" Assigned readings ask students to identify key aspects or elements of different organizing models and consider the relationship between organizers and communities.
Films, Articles, chapters and in-class exercises:	Recommended: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sen, <i>Stir It Up</i>, "Introduction," "1. New Realities, Integrated Strategies." A critique of the main assumptions guiding Alinsky-style organizing)• Gary Delgado, "The Last Stop Sign." <i>Shelterforce Online</i>. Critique of organizing models that focus on place rather than identity.



DAY 2: May 21st 2015 9 - 11	COMMUNICATIONS
	<p>How does community organizing change and develop the way people view themselves and each other? How do those ideas integrate with beliefs about race, class, gender and sexuality? About power and privilege? These readings invite students to situate themselves in these discussions.</p>
Films, Articles, chapters and in-class exercises:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required: The Playbook Part 2: The Qualities p.103 - 136 • Center for Story Based Strategy Manual
11 - 1	MOVEMENT HISTORY
	<p>These sessions help to place the principles and practices of present-day community organizing in a deeper and wider historical framework. Ideally, students can use their own experiences (and/or those of friends and families) to help construct this framework through a sample timeline, as described below. Instructors should seek out resources about movement history relevant to their local communities.</p>
Films, Articles, chapters and in-class exercises:	<p>Recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syd Beane: "You learn organizing by doing organizing." <i>Twin Cities Daily Planet</i>, November 22, 2009. Biographical account of a longtime community organizer based in Minnesota. • Robert Jensen, "White Privilege Shapes the U.S." A brief and accessible essay about the often invisible role of white privilege in everyday life. • Angela Davis. "The Color of Violence Against Women." A short essay examining the connections between race, gender, and violence and the organizing that can be done to address violence against women of color. • Andrea Smith. "The Three Pillars of Privilege" • Journaling or personal reflection exercise asking students to reflect on their own social and political identities and communities, as well as their sources of privilege and power.
1 - 4	PRESENTATIONS
	<p>Group Presentations on organizing campaign – implementing tools from this course.</p>
	<p>Discussion and presentation: The United States Social Forum (USSF) in Atlanta and Detroit</p>
	<p>EMEAC was the anchor organization for the USSF in 2010 Detroit. Students will learn what the forum was, how it has influenced organizing and how it is shaping Detroit.</p>

REQUIRED READINGS (PROVIDED 1st day):

- **Project South, Popular Education for Movement Building, Vol. II**
 - A valuable tool for new organizers or seasoned veterans. The second volume includes facilitation tips, group guidelines, and three new workshops with timelines on Work & Wages, Public Education, and Movement Building. Also contains descriptions of 8 new popular education tools developed at the 2nd Southern Institute for Popular Education. If you have the first volume, consider completing the set for your popular education toolbox.

- **Center for Story Based Strategy (CSS) Curricula**
 - CSS' multi-media, interactive curriculum focuses on in-depth analysis of power, story, and memes in the context of grassroots social change work. Trainings provide participants with comprehensive frameworks to create more holistic social change narratives, while integrating messaging and storytelling with solid grassroots organizing and effective campaigning.

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- **Eric Mann. *Playbook for Progressives: 16 Qualities of a Successful Organizer* (Beacon Press 2011)**
 - "This comprehensive guide articulates pragmatically what is required in the often mystifying and rarely explained on-the-ground practice of organizing. Mann distills lessons he learned from over forty years as an organizer, as well as from other organizers within the civil rights, labor, LGBT, economic justice, and environmental movements." Especially useful for connecting the political dimensions of organizing to effective strategy and tactics, especially in relation to the role of the organizer.

- Rinku Sen, *Stir It Up: Lessons in Community Organizing and Advocacy*. (Jossey-Bass, 2003).
 - Examines the primary components of community organizing, using case examples of several initiatives to organize women, including exploring race and gender in organizing. Worksheets and tools provided.

- Szakos & Szakos, *We Make Change: Community Organizers Talk About What They Do—And Why*. (Vanderbilt University Press, 2007).
 - Fourteen in-depth profiles tell the life stories of a cross-section of the diverse people who choose the life of an organizer. Other chapters, focused on issues of organizing, are tapestries of experience woven from the 81 interviews the authors conducted. Provides a useful introduction to what organizers do in their daily lives.



- Michael Jacoby Brown *Building Powerful Community Organizations: A Personal Guide to Creating Groups That Can Solve Problems and Change the World* (Long Haul Press, 2007) \$14
 - A guidebook with stories, personal exercises and lessons learned from direct experience. Provides worksheets, activities and includes an annotated bibliography.

- Mark Warren and Karen Mapp. *A Match on Dry Grass: Community Organizing as a Catalyst for School Reform* (Oxford, 2011)-
 - Case studies of community organizing throughout the United States to improve and reform public education. Not necessarily an introductory text, but provides excellent examples and descriptions of contemporary organizing campaigns. Companion website also available.

- Si Kahn. *Creative Community Organizing: A Guide for Rabble-Rousers, Activists, and Quiet Lovers of Justice* (Berrett-Koehler, 2008)
 - "Organizer and musician Si Kahn regales us with entertaining, funny, sad, dramatic, and inspiring tales of his work in some of the most important progressive struggles of the past fifty year — the Southern civil rights movement, the Harlan County coal miners' strike, the fights to abolish prison privatization and immigrant family detention."

- Midwest Academy Organizing for Social Change: *Midwest Academy Manual for Activists* (4th Edition—Forum Press, 2010)
 - A comprehensive manual produced by the Midwest Academy for grassroots organizers working for social, racial, environmental and economic justice at the local, state and national levels. Includes skill-based chapters with extensive practical examples.

- Larry R. Salomon *Roots of Justice: Stories of Organizing in Communities of Color* (Josey-Bass, 1998)
 - "These are the stories of people who fought back against exploitation and injustice--and won. From the Zoot Suiters who refused to put up with abuse at the hands of the Navy, to the women who organized the welfare rights movement of the 1970s." Provides useful historic examples of organizing in communities of color in the US.

- Joan Minieri & Paul Getsos. *Tools for Radical Democracy: How to Organize for Power in Your Community* (Josey-Bass, 2007)
 - "An essential resource for grassroots organizers and leaders, students of activism and advocacy, and anyone trying to increase the civic participation of ordinary people." Links both skill-based trainings and content as well as many examples of effective organizing campaigns.

- Lee Staples. *Roots to Power: A Manual for Grassroots Organizing* (Praeger, 2004)
 - "This how-to manual presents strategies, tactics, methods, and techniques that community members can use to set their own goals, select issues, campaign for these issues, recruit members, develop leaders, hold effective meetings, conduct research, lobby politicians and legislators, and get the word out to the media.

- Loretta Pyles *Progressive Community Organizing: A Critical Approach for a Globalizing World* (Routledge 2009)
 - "This interdisciplinary textbook offers a comprehensive view of the central issues facing progressive community organizers who seek to mobilize those negatively impacted by local, national, and global social policies and practices. Intended for both undergraduate and graduate students in social work, it aims to articulate the depth of the subject by introducing students to the philosophical, political, and sociological theories that inform community organizing and advocacy."