COURSE TITLE: Organizing for Social and Political Change  
COURSE NUMBER: 652 (fall Term, 2016, Section 001, Class#17552)  
TIME & PLACE: Thurs 9:00am-12:00pm, Room B770, SSW Building  
CREDIT HOURS: 3  
PREREQUISITES: SW 560 or permission of instructor  
INSTRUCTOR: Maureen Okasinski, MSW, LEO Lecturer I  
CONTACT DETAILS: SSWB 3760  
E-mail: mokasins@umich.edu  
Phone: 313 303-8911  
OFFICE HOURS: Thurs: 12:15pm-1:15pm or by appointment  

Course syllabus based on previous work of Larry Gant, Charles Keiffer and Maureen Okasinski  

COURSE STATEMENT  

This course statement was approved by Governing Faculty on 9/3/2014.  

Course Description  

This course examines methods of organizing people for social and political action on their own behalf or on behalf of others. Students will analyze different approaches to bringing people together for collective action, building organizational capacity, and generating power in the community. The course includes the study of skills in analyzing power structures, formulating action strategies, using conflict and persuasive tactics, challenging oppressive structures, conducting community campaigns, using political advocacy as a form of mobilization, and understanding contemporary social issues as they affect oppressed and disadvantaged communities. Special emphasis will be placed on organizing communities of color, women, LGBT populations, and other under-represented groups in U.S. society.  

Course Content  

In this course, students will learn that organizing for social and political action aims to create change by building powerful organizations at the community and societal level. This course takes the perspective that organizing can win improvements in people's lives, make people aware of their own power, alter the relations of power in the community, and create a more socially just society. The history of organizing for social and political action and its underlying theoretical assumptions about power, conflict, and change
will be covered. This course will also examine the sociopolitical and political-economic arenas in which organizing operates; the roles and responsibilities of practitioners; several major strategies and tactics of organizing; forces that facilitate or limit organizing; ethical and value dilemmas of organizing; and lessons learned from research on social and political action and change. In addition, different schools of thought about organizing and their approaches to the formulation of goals, issues, constituencies, targets, and tactics will be compared. The course will also analyze strategies and tactics that employ conflict as a vehicle for generating power and creating change. Students will assess theories of conflict and power and ways of analyzing power structures at the community and societal level. Political advocacy will be examined as an empowering process of strengthening solidarity and challenging oppressive structures, systems, and institutions. In contrast to viewing advocacy as a narrow approach to representing group interests in legislatures and established institutions, this course will consider advocacy as an empowering process by which traditionally excluded groups advocate for themselves in ways which build organizations and develop communities.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to: 1. Understand and analyze the changing role of context of social and political action. (Practice Behaviors 5.CO, 9.CO) 2. Understand contemporary social and political issues and their relationship to social and political action strategies and tactics. (Practice Behavior 9.CO) 3. Understand and apply social and political dynamics as they relate to issues of power, privilege, social justice, and resource distribution. (Practice Behavior 5.CO) 4. Analyze alternative models, strategies, tactics, and modes of social and political action directed towards these goals. (Practice Behaviors 3.CO, 6.CO) 5. Demonstrate skills in community assessment, leadership and organizational development, planning and conducting campaigns, and evaluating their results. (Practice Behaviors 10.b.CO, 10.c.CO, 10.d.CO) 6. Formulate strategies to engage constituencies in social and political action. (Practice Behavior 10.a.CO) 7. Identify and incorporate attention to issues related to diversity dimensions such as ability, age, class, color, culture, ethnicity, family structure, gender (including gender identity and gender expression), marital status, national origin, race, religion or spirituality, sex, and sexual orientation, as well community of residence and other dimensions which are associated with privilege, discrimination, domination, and oppression. (Practice Behavior 4.CO) 8. Identify and analyze value and ethical dilemmas that arise in the course of organizing for social and political action. (Practice Behaviors 1.CO, 2.CO)

Course Design

The format of the course will include instructor lecture/class discussion, analysis of assigned readings, class exercises and simulations, and external individual and group activities. Speakers and videos will be used to augment other course materials. Students will contribute to developing a climate in the classroom in which everyone can (a) experiment with new skills; (b) explore their own multicultural competence and the implications of one's own background for developing and implementing social and political action strategies; (c) consult with each other on action projects and assignments; and (d) generate plans and strategies for future learning and development.

Theme Relation to Social Justice

An underlying assumption of the course is that the goals of social and political action are to promote social justice and produce positive social change. The course will explore the different meanings of social
justice and social change, and their implications for the development of strategies and tactics of social and political action. Historical and contemporary illustrations will be used to analyze these concepts.

**Theme Relation to Behavioral and Social Science Research**

The course includes the analysis of contemporary and historical research on the application of theoretical models of social action and social change. Case examples of social and political action efforts will be evaluated in terms of the validity of their theoretical premises and their effectiveness in achieving stated ends. Issues for further research will also be identified.

**Relationship to SW Ethics and Values**

The NASW Code of Ethics (revised 1996) establishes an ethical imperative for social workers to engage in social and political action on behalf of social justice and in support of the needs of diverse and disadvantaged populations. Since the emergence of the social work profession in the U.S., the pursuit of social justice through a variety of social and political strategies has been one of its fundamental tenets. This course reflects that heritage and applies those values in the analysis of contemporary social and political action efforts. It also discusses some of the ethical issues involved in pursuing social justice through social and political action.

1. **RELEVANT POLICIES**

   a. **Religious Holidays**

   Students who observe a religious holiday on the same day as class will have access to the class materials covered that day. Students are expected to notify the instructor if they plan to miss class. The official University of Michigan policy on religious holidays, and a list of possible conflicts with classes, can be found at: [http://www.provost.umich.edu/calendar/religious_holidays.html](http://www.provost.umich.edu/calendar/religious_holidays.html)

   b. **Learning Needs and Disabilities**

   Students with specialized learning needs are requested to make an appointment with the instructor to discuss the necessary arrangements. If you have a disability or condition that may interfere with your participation in this course, please schedule a private appointment with the instructor as soon as possible to discuss accommodations for your specific needs. This information will be kept strictly confidential. For more information and resources, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities office at G664 Haven Hall, (734) 763-3000.

   Beyond these, if you have any concerns, anxieties or other challenges with the course content or instructional style, see me right away. While some things can be adjusted and other cannot, it works best if we can discuss these matters to determine a possible resolution and avoid further problems.

   c. **Academic Integrity**
All students should be familiar with and take seriously the School of Social Work’s standards regarding intellectual honesty and plagiarism. These standards are published in the MSW Student Handbook (http://www.ssw.umich.edu/studentGuide/2007). Detected and documented plagiarism for any class related assignment leads to automatic failure of the course. I want your own learning, writing, and thinking in the class.

d. Electronic Devices

In consideration of your classmates and your own learning, please mute all devices during class. If you must be on call for personal or work reasons, let them know this is only for emergencies that no one else can handle. Personal communications such as texting or surfing are fine during breaks and are not acceptable during class time. Interruptions, no matter how brief, affect your ability to focus and research has found that it takes 20-40 minutes to get back to your level of productivity prior to the interruption. Computer use during class time that supports the mission of the course (e.g. taking notes) is encouraged. There will be times that I ask for screens down during some parts of the class and I expect ready compliance with that request. Your final grade will be affected by your use of electronics during class time for activities not relevant to the course as commensurate with my observed frequency of these activities.

e. Pedagogical approach and classroom environment

This classroom is a learning community in which integrates academic resources, dialogue, practice applications and project-based learning. During class, I set processes and structures to promote active and cooperative learning. I believe the process of plan-do-review-do again is necessary for growth. Project-based learning meets diverse learning styles and build professional competency. The projects are based in students’ individual professional interests and most deliverables are in a professional format that can be used in a portfolio which demonstrates your professional skills. As consistent with learning theory, class time is divided between large, small and individual groups, and between lecture, discussion, in-class practice and group project. I encourage students to meet with me to discuss any stumbling blocks in learning and assignment completion.

f. Required Readings

Students should complete readings & digital media viewing prior to the class for which they are assigned. Required readings are identified in this course syllabus. I prefer to consider the
list of required readings/views as dynamic—meaning that I may modify the dates or readings in response to student interest, new material availability or shifts in the schedule. Canvas will contain the up-to-date requirements. Supplemental readings are also posted for student use and enrichment. Students are encouraged to share new and useful material—I can upload these into our Canvas site. Periodic handouts and additional required readings may be assigned during the term. All will either be distributed in class and/or posted on Canvas.

\[ g. \text{ Attendance} \]

The School of Social Work attendance policy can be found in the Student Guide. Attendance will be recorded in this course and is part of the participation grade. For each class missed beyond one, the participation grade will drop by 1 point. Late arrivals and early departures, depending on their length and frequency may also affect this grade.

\[ h. \text{ Participation} \]

Students are expected to fully engage in the course through discussion, activities, listening and leadership. Everyone should feel safe and respected throughout the semester. We are all learners and should be able to count on each other, as part of a learning community to support this process. Each of us has a responsibility to listen, ask questions and reflect in order to provide this. Communication can be complicated and easily misunderstood. Please take time to understand what others are saying in spirit and word.

\[ i. \text{ Grading System} \]

A 100-point system is used. At the end of the semester, the project points earned will be translated into letter grades according to the following formula:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{A+} & \quad 98-100 \\
\text{A} & \quad 94-97 \\
\text{A-} & \quad 91–93 \\
\text{B+} & \quad 87-90 \\
\text{B} & \quad 84-86 \\
\text{B-} & \quad 81-83 \\
\text{C+} & \quad 77-80 \\
\text{C} & \quad 74-76 \\
\text{C-} & \quad 70-73 \\
\text{D} & \quad <69 \text{ (no credit)}
\end{align*}
\]

2. Incompletes

Incompletes are not granted unless it can be demonstrated that it would be unfair to hold the student to the normal expectations of the course. The student must formally request an incomplete with the instructor prior to the final weeks of class. Please review the Student Guide section on Ethical Conduct in the University Environment. This section addresses plagiarism, harassment and discrimination policies.

3. Assignments

The assignment description in the syllabus is a general overview. Details, formats and rubrics are found in Canvas. I grade assignments using rubrics. The rubrics are in our Canvas course site. Following the rubrics leads to good scores on assignments, as does beginning your assignments early. I expect your work to demonstrate thoughtful, evidence-based, integrative and deep work—this is difficult to do in a short period of time.
Drafts: students may submit a draft of their assignment for review in advance of its due date. I will provide ungraded feedback based on the rubric. The latest you may submit a draft to me is one week before its due date-this provides me with the time necessary to provide quality feedback and you with time to respond to it. Most students have found this helpful in producing a quality paper that earns the grade they desire.

Peer review: As part of my intentional learning strategies, we use peer review sessions. You must have a paper copy of a draft of your assignment ready at the beginning of class on the day of peer review. The process of peer review aids you in further developing your thoughts and ideas, provides you with a pre-graded check of your understanding of the assignment requirements and gives you a chance to develop your critical thinking and feedback skills with peers in a supportive environment.

Due dates: All assignments are due on the date listed in the course outline. However, I will grant a grace period of one week in which you can submit your assignment. I will not accept a draft for review during the grace time. While I will accept the assignment, the points awarded will be reduced by the equivalent of ½ letter grade. Assignments submitted after the one-week grace period will be accepted and have their points reduced by the equivalent of ½ letter grade for each day beyond the grace period. Exceptions to this will need permission of the instructor one week prior to the due date and will only be made in extenuating circumstances.

Resubmission: Sometimes despite your best effort, the peer review, and/or your submission of a draft to me for review, your assignment misses the mark. You may choose to resubmit one assignment (note: you must have submitted an assignment in the first place). If you would like to resubmit, you will let me know prior to the last scheduled date of class. To resubmit, you must meet with me or have received significant written feedback about the needed improvements to the assignment. A resubmitted assignment will be accepted up until one week past the last class date.

Submission format: all assignments are submitted via Canvas assignments. Documents should be 12-point font and the narrative portion within 2 pages of the recommended length. Some submission will use APA style and others a professional style-depending on the assignment. Cover pages, executive summaries, extensive use of graphic elements, references and appendix are not part of the length of the paper. The principles of good design are expected in assignments and accounted for in the rubrics. Additionally, well-written, error free free narrative using professional language and tone are expected. Beyond traditional document formats, you can use more creative media formats for your assignments—I will use the same grading rubric regardless. A less traditional format may require a bit of conversation about length and submission format.

Group projects are used in this class. In the structure and grading of these, I seek to balance accountability and professional performance expectations. Sometimes, based on your interests, skill level and time availability, a group project is an undue burden for you. If you think your learning would be best served by working alone on a designated group project, schedule a meeting with me and I will consider this.

Required Assignments

1. Participation 15%
   Class time is planned to make the most of being together in a group—here we discuss, make plans, reflect and practice our knowledge and skills. Thus your preparation, attendance and
participation are essential to learning. Students are expected to attend every class session, come on time, complete the required out of class learning: readings, film, podcasts, and participate in class discussions and exercises. Participation and class attendance are professional responsibilities. They are critical elements of this class and essential to its effectiveness. It is important to be prepared to discuss assigned readings and to share experiential knowledge. To maximize individual and group learning, attendance, and participation are expected. If you are unable to attend a session, please communicate with me in advance if possible, contact a peer to ask about what you missed and review the readings, handouts and materials from that session. Students who are using electronic devices in ways not related to class activities will see their grade impacted.

Your participation grade will be based on your:
1. Attendance
2. Active participation in class and small group discussions, even if that means getting out of the comfort zone.
3. Ability to discuss ideas with colleagues in a respectful manner
4. Ability to engage in reflective learning
5. Sharing of examples from your experiences (field placement and others), current events, or literature related to course topics.
6. Demonstration that required readings have been completed by sharing examples or asking relevant questions in class.

**Points are awarded thus:**
Up to 7 points for attendance: being here, being on time and staying until the end
Up to 8 points for participation: I make notes each week about student contributions and level of engagement in the materials and rate these from highly prepared/engaged to minimal contributions.

7. **Campaign for Change Project (group project) 55%**

Students will work in small groups over the semester on a specified organizing campaign-this can be a simulation or a current local effort. The project begins with the team identifying a change goal and drafting a strategy chart. Their strategy will develop over the course of the semester as the team research similar campaigns from the past and learns through coursework and self-directed learning. The final strategy chart will demonstrate how students have integrated their research and learning. The team will design some key elements of this campaign- an online, offline and event/action element. Both the strategy chart and design projects are shared with the class at the end of the semester through poster/media presentations.

**Points are assigned thus:**

a. Strategy chart draft: 5 points
b. Online design element: 5 points
c. Offline design element: 5 points
d. Event or action design element: 10 points
e. Strategy chart final: 10 points
f. Poster/media presentation: 10 points
g. Individual documentation of your effort: 5 points
h. Team review of your effort: 5 points
8. **weekly self-selected reading, review & discussion 35%**

Each week you will select a reading, listening or viewing item to further your learning on the week’s assigned theme. You can select from the recommended reading/viewing/listing list or seek new sources for learning based on what best meets your need for growth. You will write a ½ page journal entry that is turned in to me about this. Students will meet in small groups to discuss what they’ve learned from their reading about the week’s topic. Details and reflection questions will be posted in Canvas for each week. Approximately 20 minutes each class period is devoted to small group discussion of this. The discussion should contribute to your overall understanding about organizing for change as well as the specified course objectives. Each week’s journal & discussion is worth 3 points.

- a. Week 1: planning to learn (1 pt; done in-class)
- b. Week 2 & 3: Model of organizing (Smock or approved alternate)
- c. Week 4 & 5: Approaches/schools of organizing (PICO, Gamliel, Midwest Academy, Highlander, or approved alternate)
- d. Week 6-8: organizing in the news (each week select a current organizing campaign and review media coverage of this)
- e. Week 9-11: Interview, observation, case study or documentary film review (select one each week to share)
- f. Week 12: reflections on your learning for the semester

4. **ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION SCHEDULE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-directed learning and discussion</td>
<td>Weekly from 9/15-12/1</td>
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<td>Documentation of your individual effort</td>
<td>bi-weekly write-up</td>
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<td>9/29, 10/13, 10/27, 11/10,12/1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Draft strategy chart</td>
<td>9/15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online design element</td>
<td>10/20, 11/3 or 11/17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offline design element</td>
<td>10/20, 11/3 or 11/17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action/event/activity element</td>
<td>10/20, 11/3 or 11/17</td>
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<td>Final strategy chart</td>
<td>12/1</td>
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<td>Poster presentation</td>
<td>12/8</td>
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<td>Review of team member’s efforts</td>
<td>12/8</td>
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<td>Resubmission deadline</td>
<td>12/13</td>
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5. **REQUIRED TEXT**

Other readings are in the Canvas site for 652

articles

• FCYO. (2011). Youth Leading the Way for a Sustainable Planet.

Video
• Taking Root, streamed through course site
• Pray the Devil Back to Hell, stream through course site
• TED Talk: Zeynep Turfeki  https://www.ted.com/talks/zeynep_tufekci_how_the_internet_has_made_social_change_easy_to_orGANIZE_HARD_TO_WIN/transcript?language=en
• Film: Standing Tall: Women Unionize the Catfish Industry  http://search.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/flon/view/work/1652597
• The Interrupters  http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/interrupters/
• No Justice, No Peace  http://search.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/flon/view/work/1650454
• Rebuilding of Rascal Flats  http://search.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/flon/view/work/1655037
• Temporary Dwellings  http://search.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/flon/view/work/1655769
• The Last Abortion Clinic  http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/clinic/
• Mural Arts Project  http://video.whyy.org/video/2262964945/
• Who’s Afraid of Ai WeiWei?

Podcast
RadioLab The Imperfect Plaintiffs  http://www.radiolab.org/story/more-perfect-plaintiffs/
6. COURSE SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/Date</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Out-of-class learning</th>
<th>Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sept 8</td>
<td>Course overview</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Elements of Organizing</td>
<td>• Checkoway and Gant articles</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Review MAM Chapters 2-6</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Watch in class: United in Anger: ACT-UP</td>
<td>• Draft strategy chart</td>
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<td>• Continue reviewing Bobo, Chapters 2-6</td>
<td>• ½ page journal about self-selected reading</td>
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<td>• Complete review of Midwest Academy Manual 2-6, 17</td>
<td>• CFC individual effort doc.</td>
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<td>• Self-directed select PICO, Gamaliel, Midwest Academy, The Highlander School or other approved alternate and review one article, website, podcast or other media-each person in small group selects a different one</td>
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<td>5. Oct 6</td>
<td>Recruitment, popular education</td>
<td>• MAM 10, 12, 16</td>
<td>• ½ page journal about self-selected reading</td>
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<td>• Continue self-selected: PICO, Gamaliel, Midwest Academy, The Highlander School or other approved alternate and review one article, website, podcast or other media-each person in small group selects a different one</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Assignment Details</td>
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<td>7. Oct 20</td>
<td>Recruitment and outreach materials, accountability sessions and town hall meetings</td>
<td>- Review good design materials and samples&lt;br&gt;- MAM, chapters 7, 8, 14&lt;br&gt;-½ page journal about self-selected reading&lt;br&gt;- CFC design element</td>
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<td>8. Oct 27</td>
<td>Online materials, ballot initiatives</td>
<td>- Bobo, Chapter 17&lt;br&gt;- TED talk, Zeynep Turfeki&lt;br&gt;- Stone article, Dominant Tactics&lt;br&gt;-½ page journal about self-selected reading&lt;br&gt;- CFC design element</td>
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<td>9. Nov 3</td>
<td>Coalitions, legislative action</td>
<td>- MAM chapter 9, 20&lt;br&gt;- Bailey et al, Community Grassroots Coalition&lt;br&gt;- Film: The Last Abortion Clinic&lt;br&gt;-½ page journal about self-selected reading&lt;br&gt;- CFC design element</td>
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<td>10. Nov 10</td>
<td>Unions, labor, Boycotts &amp; strikes</td>
<td>- Bobo, Chapter 21 &amp; 22 -local unions &amp; labor partnerships&lt;br&gt;- Review website and activities for Coalition of Imokolee Workers <a href="http://www.ciw-online.org/">http://www.ciw-online.org/</a>&lt;br&gt;- Labor organizing article Yu or Denisse&lt;br&gt;-½ page journal about self-selected reading&lt;br&gt;- CFC design element</td>
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<td>11. Nov 17</td>
<td>The arts, judicial tactics</td>
<td>- Lorenz Hip Hop Alliance&lt;br&gt;- Radiolab podcast The Imperfect Plaintiffs&lt;br&gt;-½ page journal about self-selected reading&lt;br&gt;- CFC design element</td>
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<td>12. Dec 1</td>
<td>Praxis review</td>
<td>- 2-page journal about your learning effort and outcomes of the semester&lt;br&gt;- Final strategy chart&lt;br&gt;- CFC design element</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Dec 8</td>
<td>Student presentations and course wrap up</td>
<td>- Poster/media presentations&lt;br&gt;- Ratings for each of your CFC team members</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Dec 13</td>
<td>Exam week-no class</td>
<td>Resubmission</td>
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LEO Lecturers' Employee Organization, Local 6244, AFL-CIO