Spring 2021

Grassroots Community Organizing in Detroit for Changing Times

Method Area: Community Organizing

Instructors: Diana WasaAnung’gokwe Seales (810-240-7459), dseales@umich.edu

Schedule: Monday and Wednesday 10 am – 1 pm

Class Location: ONLINE

ZOOM: 10 am Join Zoom Meeting

https://umich.zoom.us/j/93556851255  

Course Description:

This online course will focus on emerging work during the COVID-19 epidemic specifically as it relates to Detroit. Metro Detroit hospitals are quickly hitting capacity for COVID-19 patients as the city becomes one of the nations “hot spots” for the virus. What does this mean for a major city that was already battling the impacts of poverty, racism, and a lack of healthcare access? In this course we will learn about how different community organizations are responding: some are shutting down operations while others are transforming their organizations completely to meet the needs of the community in innovative and creative ways. Students will have opportunities to join efforts happening in Detroit now and remotely connect with organizations working on the ground. Projects range from helping the efforts to turn the water back on for the 10s of thousands of residents without water to orgs running town halls for mental health and grief and getting families and kids into remote sports activities to keep little league teams (and families) together. Students in this course will have access to a number of online organizer tool kits and class conversations will also cover self-care for yourself as an organizer and providing care for others in the community. Everyone will come out of this class making a meaningful contribution to the current crisis in Detroit, build their own “organizers tool-kit” full of activities to take with them into any community organization scenario, and a number of self care sessions.

This course looks at movements, resistance, resilience, and liberation. Community Organizing is growing as an academic field, especially as it relates to urban studies. A growing body of evidence reveals that people of color and low-income persons have borne greater environmental and health risks than 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 develop 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 the neighborhood level
- Understanding the differences between organizing methods: protests, campaigns, community organizing, and movement building

**Requirements for Academic Credit:**

40% Class Participation: Attendance and participation in all online 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 certain circumstances. There will be no make up for missed class sessions. We will meet via zoom every Monday day at 10am for 2 hours. Everything else will be done online and at your own pace. There will be a weekly discussion prompt. Everyone is expected to at least pose one question and respond to two other prompts.

40% Individual Final Project: Everyone will work with a group of your choice remotely (Choices below). Upon completion of your remote project you will create a creative ‘final product’ - This can not be a term paper or report it needs to be something that upon looking at it for a few minutes anyone could get a good idea of the work and lessons gleaned from your work. This product is at your discretion, but this could be a GOOD powerpoint, zine [https://www.kekemagazine.com/zine-library/](https://www.kekemagazine.com/zine-library/), Prezi, comic book. **Due last day of class.**

20% Reflection Paper: Students must turn in a completed paper by the last day of class. To complete the assignment, turn your paper as an MS Word attachment into Canvas, Assignments, Credit Paper.
Write a three-page, double spaced, paper reflecting on what you learned in this class and how you anticipate integrating this learning into your perspectives and practice as a social worker. Incorporate at least three required readings into the reflection, referencing specific quotes, and include a list of sources at the end.

*Please address the following questions in your paper:*

What course content had the most impact on your learning and why?

What that you have learned, if anything, has surprised or inspired you?

Think about the questions you had and assumptions you about grassroots organizing and environmental justice before you came into the course. What has shifted for you over the week?

How do you think your learning in this course will affect your current or future career?

**SAMPLE IN CLASS ASSIGNMENTS**

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

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.

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 timeline or strategy chart, or answering other questions designed to assess their understanding of organizing vocabulary and concepts.

**SYNCHRONOUS - WEEK 1 May 10: CLASS UNIT ONE: USING CREATIVITY IN GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING**

**SECTION A: Becoming familiar with course tools**

**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.

**ZOOM: 10 am Join Zoom Meeting**

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Week 1: 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:

- Introduction & ice-breaker activities. Please bring an object as a way of introducing yourself (this can be something that speaks to how you found your purpose in life, who your people are, where you come from....)

Required Reading:

none

Week 2 - MAY 12 Asynchronous lesson

Required Reading:

- EJ Principles
- Purdy, Jedeiah. 2016. Environmentalism was Once a Social-Justice Movement. The Atlantic
- Joyful Militancy ch. 1: Empire, Militancy and Joy

BLOG READINGS:

Adrienne maree brown, PANDOWRIMO: Conversation between the crisis and the virus [http://adriennemareebrown.net](http://adriennemareebrown.net/)

Joyful Militancy Blog: [Friendship is a root of Freedom](https://joyfulmilitancy.com/2017/12/11/friendship-as-a-root-of-freedom/)

PODCAST:

Hidden Brain: [YOU 2.0](https://www.npr.org/transcripts/546716951) (How design thinking can help you find your life’s purpose)


Week 2: May 17 and 19 COMMUNITIES, POWER, AND THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF ORGANIZING (DEVELOPING FACILITATION AND POPULAR EDUCATION SKILLS)

This week focuses on some contemporary debates within community organizing to help students...
This week 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:

Monday – May 17th

ZOOM: 10 am Join Zoom Meeting

Required Reading:

- Joyful Militancy 2: Friendship, Freedom, Ethics and Affinity
- Entering, Building and Exiting Communities
- Joyful militancy Blog: Happiness is bullshit
- Joyful militancy Blog: The stifling air of rigid radicalism
- Journey of the film-maker from The Happy Movie A Filmmaker's Journey and Other Happy Endeavors - The Happy Movie
- Podcast: How To Measure Happiness from Planet Money
- Movies: Watch Happy (2011) Full Movie Free Online Streaming

WEEK 2 May 19th - ASYNCHRONOUS -

WEEK 3: May 24th & 26th What is the role of joy and happiness in organizing?

ASYNCHRONOUS - MONDAY May 24th

ZOOM: 10 am Join Zoom Meeting
Zoom agenda:

- Check in: what brings you joy?
- Activity: how can we measure happiness
- Entering, Building and Exiting Communities
- Small group activity: community organizing
- Check in on final projects

**WEDNESDAY May26th - Art & Activism workshop with Alejandra**

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**WEEK 4: May 31 & JUNE 2nd We are the future: How can we use Sci-fi, Afro & Indigenous Futurism to work with Communities to envision a better future?**

Creative use of narrative to work with community to imagine a better future. This week we will look at Afro and Indigenous Futurism and how these stories use lessons from the past, tradition, and hope for the future to inform community action.

**SYNCHRONOUS - May 31st**

**ZOOM: 10 am Join Zoom Meeting**

[https://msu.zoom.us/j/91365487130](https://msu.zoom.us/j/91365487130)

[https://umich.zoom.us/j/93556851255](https://umich.zoom.us/j/93556851255)

Zoom agenda:

- check in question: time capsule
- small group exercise: planet Z (large group report back to compare to facilitation guidelines and EJ principles)
- small group discussions on readings
  - What required media (video, reading, podcast blog) has inspired you the most? - please share the lessons and main points with other members
  - What required media has challenged you the most?
  - what are some of the main themes or threads can your group identify that are emerging from the presented course media?
- check in on out of class project (larger check in next week)

**ASYNCHRONOUS - JUNE 2nd**

**Readings:**

Joyful Militancy ch. 3: Trust and Responsibility as Commons Notions
Blog: “Your mind will tell you lies but your body can’t” – An interview with Zainab Amadhy

Short videos about Zainab’s Amadhy’s Afro-Futurism book, Moons of Palmares:

- **What inspired Moons of Palmares?** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=49&v=WAZspItCNas&feature=emb_logo)

Short Indigenous-Futurism films:

- Wakening
- Biimadizowin
- **How to Steal A Canoe** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1vCPVviNiY)

Podcast: This American Life **We Are in the Future** (https://www.thisamericanlife.org/623/we-are-in-the-future)

https://umich.instructure.com/courses/482124
WEEK 5: June 7th & 9th Place and Community Organizing - CASE STUDY - Eastern Market

We will explore gentrification as an expression of settler colonialism this week and art and activism.

SYNCHRONOUS - Monday, June 7th

ZOOM: 10 am Join Zoom Meeting

[https://msu.zoom.us/j/91365487130](https://msu.zoom.us/j/91365487130)

[https://umich.zoom.us/j/93556851255](https://umich.zoom.us/j/93556851255)

Zoom agenda:

- Check in question
- Speaker: Adela Nieves, Indigenous healer & Founder of Healing by Choice (women of color healing justice collective)
- Question and answer session

ASYNCHRONOUS - Wednesday, June 9th

Required Reading:

- Cp. 5 Joyful Militancy

Murals in the Market Exploration and Journal Activity - Asynchronous lesson for WEEK 5

Spend about 30 minutes or so exploring the Murals in the Market website [https://www.muralsinthemarket.com/](https://www.muralsinthemarket.com/) or in person (explore around eastern market 2934 Russell street), particularly the murals themselves, as well as the artist bios for those murals that speak to you. Just let yourself go and enjoy the exploration.

After you've spent this initial time with the artwork and artists, select 3 murals that stand out to you the most. Take out your journal and consider the following questions for each of the 3 murals you selected. Just let your writing flow, using the questions as a general guide. There’s no right or wrong here; the idea is to use writing to explore your thoughts about each of the 3 murals.

1. What individual parts can you identify that make up this mural?
2. How have these parts been put together to make something larger happen?
3. If the mural were an object with moving pieces, what are the key pieces and how have they been fit
together to make the thing work?

4. Ultimately, what does this thing do? What purpose does it serve?

If you have the ability to explore the city on foot or by bike I would also invite you to check out the **Heidelberg Project** (3600 Heidelberg st) (https://www.heidelberg.org/) and **Dabls** (6559 Grand Blvd Ave) (http://www.mbad.org/).

5. Read Joyful Militancy Chapter 5: Undoing Rigid Radicalism, Activating Joy. Where do you see yourself and/or organizations/actions you’d worked with in the past or currently? What stood out to you in a way that challenged you in this chapter?

6. What concept/idea stood out to you the most from Monday’s workshop (eastern market murals and gentrification as an expression of settler colonialism)?

7. Please write a short proposal on your final project (this only needs to be a few sentences) - this should be based on the issue/organization you chose last week. Please let me know if this will be an individual, pair or group project. There are examples of past projects under “student showcase” in files on canvas.

Suggested reading:

- Stall and Stoicker, “Community Organizing or Organizing Community?” Gender and the Crafts of Empowerment
- Sen, Rinku “Back of the House, Front of the House – What a Campaign to Organize New York Restaurant Workers Tells us About Immigrant Integration”

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**WEEK 6: June 14th & 16th Intersectionality, Race, Class and Privilege in Organizing**

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.

**SYNCHRONOUS - Monday June 14th**

**ZOOM: 10 am Join Zoom Meeting**

(https://msu.zoom.us/j/91365487130)

https://umich.zoom.us/j/93556851255  (https://umich.zoom.us/j/93556851255)

Zoom agenda:

**ASYNCHRONOUS - Wednesday June 16th**

**Required Reading:**

- Andrea Smith. “The Three Pillars of Privilege”
- Alicia Garza. Herstory of #BlackLivesMatter
WEEK 7: June 21st & 23rd Using narrative in organizing

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 a framework. We will look at the creative use of storytelling and narrative that shapes organizations and community organizing. 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.

Required Reading:

- Center for Story-Based Strategy Manual
- And the People Shall Lead
- Copeland, “Detroit USSF”

ZOOM: 10 am Join Zoom Meeting

https://umich.zoom.us/j/93556851255

LAST DAY OF CLASS June 24th

DUE:

- Evaluation & Reflection
- Reflection Papers
- Final Project

REQUIRED TEXT:

Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times (Anarchist Interventions) by Carla Bergman and Nick Montgomery

“Absolutely what we need in these days of spreading gloom. A very well argued case for joyful militancy.”
Absolutely what we need in these days of spreading gloom. A very well argued case for joyful militancy, and against the dead hand of puritanical revolution. Read it, live it!”—John Holloway, author of Crack Capitalism

Why do radical movements and spaces sometimes feel laden with fear, anxiety, suspicion, self-righteousness, and competition? Montgomery and bergman call this phenomenon rigid radicalism: congealed and toxic ways of relating that have seeped into social movements, posing as the “correct” way of being radical. In conversation with organizers and intellectuals from a wide variety of political currents, the authors explore how rigid radicalism smuggles itself into radical spaces, and how it is being undone.

Interviewees include Silvia Federici, adrienne maree brown, Marina Sitrin, Gustavo Esteva, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Walidah Imarisha, Margaret Killjoy, Glen Coulthard, Richard Day, and more.

PLEASE PURCHASE BEFORE THE START OF CLASS: May be purchased on Amazon.com for $10 - $13 or online independent booksellers. Kindle version available to circumvent handling


https://www.akpress.org/joyful-militancy.html

https://joyfulmilitancy.com/2017/09/04/intro/

This is the first time we have used this text in this course. Other books that have been used and are very useful for the topic at hand are adrienne maree brown’s book, Emergent Strategy and Eric Mann’s book, Playbook for Progressive’s.

Possible groups or events to look into for your final project:

POSSIBLE GROUPS:

*BIRWOOD HOUSE*


*DETOUR POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE*

Increase the University of Michigan’s impact in Detroit by focusing on 3 emerging areas (and anchor groups).

**FORGOTTEN HARVEST**

https://www.forgottenharvest.org/covid19/  (https://www.forgottenharvest.org/covid19/)

**DETOUR COVID19 RESPONSE**

https://www.facebook.com/groups/2554127328195074/  (https://www.facebook.com/groups/2554127328195074/)

CONNECT2COMMUNITY

https://connect2community.umich.edu  (https://connect2community.umich.edu)

Noteworthy workshops and events: (attend one or all as your final project)

**The Wilds Beyond Climate Justice**

A gathering at the end of hope, happening 31 May to 4 June 2021. The Wilds Beyond Climate Justice is a global online event for us to engage each other in activities, actions, and conversations that boldly defy Western logic and sing new possibilities into being. One part ceremony, one part workshop, and one part creative arts project, the Wilds Beyond Climate Justice will feature presentations and workshops from a number of Detroit artists, culture creators, and healers. More information can be found here:


**Narration workshop (panel of Detroit and Flint activists)**

**Course Summary:**

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<td>Mon May 17, 2021</td>
<td>🥤 Week 1 asynchronous lesson</td>
<td>due by 11:59pm</td>
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*MOVEMENT GENERATION*

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*Grassroots International*

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