

Fall 2021

SW 312: Grassroots Community Organizing in Detroit for Changing Times

Method Area: Community Organizing

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Schedule: Monday 10 am – 1 pm

Class Location: In person and remote

ZOOM: 10 am Join Zoom Meeting

<https://umich.zoom.us/j/93556851255> (Links to an external site.)

Course Description:

Learn directly from Detroit Grassroots Organizers in Detroit with site visits and workshops! Build organizing skills and your own tool kits from current local, national and worldwide movements, resistance, resilience, and liberation actions. This course concretizes critical organizing practices as you build your own theory of change. The course offered this fall with flexibility for remote students or living in Detroit or in Ann Arbor.

In this course we will learn about how different community organizations have responded to the COVID epidemic: 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. Each month we will meet for a site in Detroit (may view remotely via zoom), meet for a workshop in Ann Arbor (may view remotely via zoom) and have two asynchronous classes. The asynchronous classes 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 \(Links to an external site.\)](#), 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

This course may be taken from Ann Arbor, Detroit or remotely. There are three different types of course learning:

- **WORKSHOP** (In Ann Arbor and remotely) There will be 3 - 2.5 hour workshops in Ann Arbor. The three workshop units will be ***Environmental Justice and Grassroots Organizing 101; Race and Identity; and Storytelling and Organizational Communications.***
- **SITE VISITS:** We will have 3 site visits in Detroit: D-town Farms urban farms and gardens as a liberation strategy; 48217 and the Marathon Oil refinery toxic tour

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.

UNIT ONE: GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

WEEK 1 - SYNCHRONOUS ONLINE: USING CREATIVITY IN GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

ZOOM: 10 am Join Zoom Meeting

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SECTION A: Becoming familiar with course tools INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL CHANGE AND POWER.

The sessions in this unit 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.

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 - Asynchronous lesson – PRINCIPLES OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ORGANIZING

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> (Links to an external site.)

Joyful Militancy Blog: [Friendship is a root of Freedom](#) (Links to an external site.)

PODCAST:

Hidden Brain: YOU 2.0 (How design thinking can help you find your life's purpose) [You 2.0: Getting Unstuck | Hidden Brain](#) (Links to an external site.)

Hidden Brain: [Why Loneliness Is a Health Issue | Hidden Brain](#) (Links to an external site.)

Week 3: Site Visit for Marathon Oil Refinery (Detroit or remote)

This week we will visit Marathon Oil refinery and a variety of other toxic sites in 48217. If you have any pre-existing conditions (such as asthma or respiratory issues) I highly recommend taking this tour remotely.

Week 4: WORKSHOP (Ann Arbor or remote)

Environmental Justice 101. We will meet in Ann Arbor for a two our workshop about Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice

UNIT TWO: IDENTITY, RACE & RETHINKING LIBERATION

**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 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.

Week 5: Asynchronous lesson on race and identity

Place and Community Organizing - CASE STUDY - Eastern Market

We will explore gentrification as an expression of settler colonialism this week and art and activism. A case study in Art & Activism looking at the Eastern Market Murals as possible use of gentrification as an expression of settler colonialism. In contrast to the first session where art is a celebration of communities and neighborhoods, it can also be used as a tool, no matter how beautiful, to erase and displace.

Week 6: Site Visit to Dtown Farms

D-Town Farm - is a seven acre organic farm in Detroit's Rouge Park. We grow more than 30 different fruits, vegetables and herbs that are sold at farmers markets and to wholesale customers. The farm features four hoop houses for extended-season growing, bee-keeping, large-scale composting, farm tours and an annual harvest festival. A vision for Liberated Farms nationwide built on the foundation and lessons of Baba Malik Yakini and others in D Town Farms.

Week 7: Workshop in Ann Arbor on Race and Identity

Week 8: Asynchronous lesson on place and gentrification

UNIT THREE: STORYTELLING AND COMMUNICATION IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

WEEK 9: ASYNCHRONOUS lesson

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[\(Links to an external site.\)](#)

<https://umich.zoom.us/j/93556851255> [\(Links to an external site.\)](#)

ASYNCHRONOUS -

[\(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Required Reading:

- Joyful Militancy 2: Friendship, Freedom, Ethics and Affinity
- Entering, Building and Exiting Communities
- Joyful militancy Blog: [Happiness is bullshit \(Links to an external site.\)](#)
- Joyful militancy Blog: [The stifling air of rigid radicalism \(Links to an external site.\)](#)
(If I can't dance, it's not my revolution)
- Journey of the film-maker from The Happy Movie [A Filmmaker's Journey and Other Happy Endeavors - The Happy Movie \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Podcast: How To Measure Happiness from Planet Money

<https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2019/04/08/711132741/how-to-measure-happiness>
(Links to an external site.)

Movies: [Watch Happy \(2011\) Full Movie Free Online Streaming](#) (Links to an external site.)

WEEK 10: SITE VISIT - The Cass Corridor Commons - telling the story of place and learning from the community about disability justice

WEEK 11: Workshop in Ann Arbor

Week 12: Asynchronous lesson

Week 13: Group presentations