Spring 2023

Grassroots Community Organizing in Detroit

Method Area: Community Organizing

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

Schedule: May 13th & 14th

Class Location: ONLINE& Field dates May 13 & 14th

ZOOM: 10 am Join Zoom Meeting

https://umich.zoom.us/j/9278398274  (https://umich.zoom.us/j/9278398274)

Description:

This course looks at movements, resistance, resilience, and liberation. Community Organizing is growing as an academic field, especially as it relates to social work and 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. There will be an in-person weekend intensive in Detroit working directly with community organizers. Other components of the course will be taught through online and in-person workshops. The weekend intensive will take place May 13th & 14th.

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.

Logistics:

- This course will be an immersive experience in Detroit working directly with community organizers
We will spend 2 - 8 hour days (Saturday and Sunday May 13 & 14th).
3 - 3 hour synchronous (zoom & recorded) lessons before the weekend intensive. (May 10th)
There will be 2 - 3 hour workshops (recorded) in the Detroit center or Ann Arbor at the end of the semester (June 12 & 14th)
The course will also consist of asynchronous work for the remaining credit course hours.
Transportation from Ann Arbor will be provided from Ann Arbor for the Detroit intensive and workshop. You may also coordinate meeting the class in Detroit.

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:

50% 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 the 2 day field study May 13th & 14. Exceptions will only be made for certain circumstances. There will be no make up for the missed field. There are 2 zoom sessions and everything else will be done online and at your own pace. There will be a weekly discussion prompts. Everyone is expected to at least pose one question and respond to two other prompts.

50% Individual Final Reflection Project: Everyone will create a field reflection project (this may be done in pairs or groups - just let me know if you would like to go that route). Upon completion of your project you will create a creative ‘final product’. This can be a wide variety of things and I encourage you to be creative. It can be a reflection paper, an expression of gratitude to our field site guides and hosts (thank you notes, video expressions of thanks sharing what you learned, a comic book dedicated to D-town farms)-it just 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/), Prezi, comic book. Due last day of class.

*If you would just like to go a simple route and do a reflection paper you may 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 semester?

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

SECTION A: Introductions and becoming familiar with course tools

INTRODUCTION & Overview of Field days (May 13th and 14th)

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.

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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:**

James, Donald. *District Detroit’s Neighborhood Advisory Council Signs $167 Million Package to Benefit the Community*. Michigan Chronical March 19th 2023


**Required Video:**

*Malik Yakini and Food Apartheid*

[https://www.google.com/search?q=malik+yakini+video&rlz=1C1RXQR_enUS999US999&oq=malik+yakini+video&aqs=chrome..69i58#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:9e09886a,vid:IUeFtaujl7E](https://www.google.com/search?q=malik+yakini+video&rlz=1C1RXQR_enUS999US999&oq=malik+yakini+video&aqs=chrome..69i58#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:9e09886a,vid:IUeFtaujl7E)

*Cass Corridor Commons and Youth Climate Justice (video made by youth after their People’s Movement Assembly):*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sEspGBZk6k&t=3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sEspGBZk6k&t=3s)

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**Saturday, May 13**

Meeting Point: In front of the School of Social Work Building  
Time: 9 am

- Our first stop will be at the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network’s D-Town Farms. We are fortunate to have Malik Yakini, world-renowned food justice advocate, as our tour guide for this visit.
Additionally, we will have a volunteer/service task at D-Town Farms, allowing us to contribute to their mission.

- For lunch, we have made arrangements at the Cass Cafe, located in the Cass Corridor Neighborhood. You can choose to dine at the cafe, which has outdoor tables, or use the community space across the street if you have brought your lunch. It will be a great opportunity to relax and connect with fellow classmates.
- Following lunch, we will have a brief tour of the Cass Corridor Commons Community Space, providing us with insights into the local community initiatives and projects.
- In the afternoon, we will embark on an Environmental Justice and Community Benefits Agreement Tour of Southwest Detroit. This tour will showcase various community action sites, and we will be accompanied by members of the Detroit Community Benefits Coalition, who will share their firsthand experiences and knowledge.

On Sunday, May 14th, we will have a synchronous Zoom session featuring guest speakers Piper Carter and Bryce Detroit, who will discuss Art and Activism in the Climate Movement. They were selected based on your interests from the survey results, and I'm certain their insights will be both inspiring and informative.

The requirements for this course are:

- Attend the field study weekend
- Complete a reflection based project

You are also welcome to attend the follow up workshops (these are completely optional for you all but required for the Undergrads). Below is an abbreviated schedule. Please let me know if you are interested in receiving the readings and lectures that go along with the below units.

ABRIVIATED SCHEDULE

**week of 5/15** => Field study week. This week is to be used to work on your final reflection project (while the field study is fresh in your mind)

**week of 5/22** => *History of Environmental Justice*. Readings will be sent out and 2 discussion prompts will be posted on Monday. We will have a zoom call for field reflection on Wednesday.

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5/29 => *ART & Activism in Detroit*. Readings will be sent out and 2 discussion prompts will be posted on Monday. There is an asynchronous lesson on Wednesday about the Eastern Market Murals (as a visual point around art, coaptation, and gentrification).
6/7 => *Community organizing strategy* and People's Movement Assembly. Readings will be sent out and 2 discussion prompts will be posted on Monday. There is an asynchronous lesson on Wednesday on the People's Movement Assembly community organizing and facilitation.

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6/14 => Creativity in Visioning a new world through organizing. Readings will be sent out and 2 discussion prompts will be posted on Monday. Last week of class.

### Course Summary:

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