

Sociology/PJS 111– **Making Social Change Happen: Grassroots Activism and Community Organizing**¹ Fall 2011

Mon., Wed. -1:30 to 2:45, Eaton 124

Prof. S. Ostrander (susan.ostrander@tufts.edu) - Office hours: Wed. 10:30 to 12:00 *and* by appointment, Eaton 119

This course focuses on one of the most important and effective methods for creating social change: grassroots organizing. Models for how to do grassroots organizing are based on principles and practices long used to organize local communities. These principles and practices can be adapted for use in communities other than those defined by geographical space, and in communities that are global as well as local

The broad goals of organizing are social, economic, and political justice, and a stronger democracy. This method of social change organizes populations who have historically been excluded or marginalized from participation in mainstream politics and who have lacked access to valued resources and to equal opportunity.

The overall aim of organizing is for these groups to gain the power that is necessary for them to successfully create change. Other methods of social change (see below) are typically less concerned with this kind of empowerment and with strengthening democracy, though they may seek social justice, economic and political equality, and/or equal opportunity.

The guidance of professional organizers is important to the method of social change that is our focus this semester. As you may know, President Barack Obama began his career as a professional organizer.

Grassroots community organizing tries to alter the underlying conditions and circumstances in society that are the fundamental causes of various kinds of injustice. Criteria for successful organizing therefore include:

- (a) improving in observable ways the *real conditions* of people's lives;
- (b) addressing the *underlying causes* of those conditions so that the changes made are *sustained* over time;
- (c) changing the *relations of power* so that the people being organized can *continue* to be actively involved and influential in making future public decisions that affect their lives.

You will notice that this method of social change is different from other methods with which you may be more familiar. More common methods may see change as being brought about by formally educated influential experts and policy-makers such as politicians, lawyers, media figures, educators, researchers, service-providers, foundation executives etc.

¹ This syllabus is long, and it contains most of what you need to know to stay on track with Soc. 111. **Keep up with it and follow it carefully**. I will send you an e-copy and you may want to keep your own e-file of all the documents you need for this course in lieu of a Trunk site. Guest speaker dates are subject to change.

In the method we are studying in this class, “elite” professionals like these often serve as valuable resource people to grassroots organizing. They provide specialized knowledge, information, and monetary support; do research; offer legal and financial services etc. etc. However, they do not provide the leadership. Instead, the leadership in organizing comes from the people most affected by the issue or problem i.e. those who are being empowered to bring about change in relation to that issue or problem.

People with access to privilege and power (like many of us at Tufts) can be important allies (as well as resource people) to this kind of social change! However, it’s also true that while we may have one kind of privilege and power (e.g. racial or gender privilege), we may at the same time lack another kind of privilege and power (e.g. socio-economic class or sexual orientation or age). So in some ways, virtually *all* of us at one time or another is “eligible” to be an active agent in grassroots and community organizing.

Sociology major learning objectives: This course meets the following Sociology major learning objectives: <http://ase.tufts.edu/sociology/programsCoursesMajor.asp>

- the ability to examine social structures analytically and critically;
- an understanding of how social constructs such as gender, race, and class influence people’s social positions and organize their daily lives;
- knowledge of how people change society by forming social movements and using the media;
- in-depth knowledge of a subfield in the discipline.

Course requirements and format: The major written assignment is a step-by-step organizing *plan* around some issue of your choice. The plan includes: (a) how to recruit a grassroots constituency to work on your issue, (b) how to develop grassroots leaders to lead your effort, (c) how to define the specific social change goal you seek, and (d) how to design an organizing strategy to achieve that change.

Two-thirds of your final grade is based on the numerical average of all your grades in each of the seven approximately 3-page written assignments (see below).

You will receive detailed guidelines for each of the six assignments related to your organizing plan. The reading you do before you write these assignments plus information given in class will provide additional information you will need to complete them successfully.

The remaining one third of your final grade is based on your final paper. Here you have the opportunity to revise and integrate each of the shorter papers you have done for each step of your plan and to frame one comprehensive organizing plan.

***Each written assignment in your plan builds on the previous one. Information discussed in class is essential to your doing these assignments. It will, therefore, be extremely difficult if not impossible to catch up if miss classes or if you fall behind. Please see the instructor immediately if you are not clear about assignments or the

reading or you are having any sort of difficulty in attending class or completing work on time.

We will meet several guest speakers, see films, and have small group discussions as well as full class ones.

Two required books are available for purchase in the university bookstore. Additional readings will be provided or can be accessed on line, see links below. (Note there is no Trunk site for this course.)

-Kristina Smock. 2004. *Democracy in Action: Community Organizing and Urban Change*. Columbia University Press.

-Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, Steve Max. 2010 (4th edition). *Organizing for Social Change*. Santa Ana, CA: Seven Locks Press.

COURSE OUTLINE:

I. Why are you in this course? What do you want to learn? What background, experiences, skills, interests, and questions do you bring? (Wed. Sept. 7)

II. What does organizing for social change look like and what do organizers do? What is social change from the point of view of a grassroots organizer? How is this similar and different from how you have previously thought about social change?
Mon. Sept. 12- Read for today: Randy Stoecker, "Community Organizing and Social Change," 2009. *Contexts* vol. 8, no. 1: 21-25 (handout).

Wed. Sept. 14 - VIDEO in class - "Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street" This one hour video tells the story of a successful community organizing project and how it continues today to create social change in the Dudley Street neighborhood of Boston.

*Find information about what has happened at the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) since this film was made. You might search past issues of *The Boston Globe* plus the DSNI website.

****ASSIGNMENT ONE** due at the beginning of class on Mon. Sept. 19. In about three double-spaced pages, name/identify a specific social change of the sort we are focusing on in this class that has occurred in your lifetime. Use the three criteria for successful organizing stated above as your criteria for this type of social change. If the change you choose does not address all three, say what you think about that.

Explain why you think the change is important, and what groups are most affected and how. By groups, I mean in terms of e.g. age, race, gender, socio-economic class, etc. This will require a bit of *research*.

Finally find out what you can about what made this change happen, e.g. *who* made it happen, and *what* they did to bring it about. *Provide sources* giving author, date

of publication, title of book or article, name of journal if appropriate, publisher if a book. If a website, give link and organization sponsoring site. *We will discuss these in class.*

III. Brief overview of community organizing and activism from the 1960's to now

Wed. Sept. 21 – Bobo, Kendall, and Max (Preface, Introduction, Chapter 2 (22 pgs.). *You need not agree with all that you read here!*

VIDEO in class. “The Democratic Promise: Saul Alinsky and His Legacy”

IV. Introduction to debates about different approaches to organizing

Mon. Sept. 26 - Smock, chap. 1, “Popular Democracy and Urban Change” (7 pgs); Stall, S. and R. Stoecker, 1998. “Community Organizing or Organizing Community?” *Gender & Society* 12: 729-756. See link below:

<http://gas.sagepub.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/content/12/6/729.full.pdf+html>

For class discussion today, also see:

http://colorlines.com/archives/2010/09/enough_already_lets_drop_the_i-word_hate_speech.html (What do you think about this campaign? Does it meet our criteria for social change? What other examples of this kind of media campaign do you know about? Where do you see grassroots organizing? What changes in societal conditions and circumstances are being sought?)

V. Overview of different models and examples of organizing

Wed. Sept. 28 - Smock, chap. 2, “Models of Community Organizing: An Overview”

Which of these models, if any, seem familiar to you? Which one or two do you presently feel a preference for and why?

Monday, Oct. 3 – GUEST SPEAKER: Rebecca Johnson, Sarah Lawrence College on organizing women for economic justice.

Wed. Oct. 5 - Read Chap. 3 “Choosing an Issue” in Bobo et al. At this point in the course, you will choose a specific problem (what Bobo calls an “area of concern”) and begin to consider a partial “solution” (what Bobo calls an “issue”) to address that problem. Your organizing plan will be organized around this problem and its “solution.” (Note: As your progress in your plan, it is likely the both problem and solution will be *revised* but should not change entirely. *Choose carefully*, then, since you will be working on this issue all semester!)

*No class on Mon. Oct. 10. Tufts closed for Columbus Day

**ASSIGNMENT TWO due at the beginning of class on Wed. Oct. 12. In about three pages identify the specific problem your organizing plan will address and provide some basic information about how many people and what groups (e.g. gender, race, age, socio-economic class, etc.) are most affected by this problem. Consider the different ways this problem has been defined. Then identify (based on your research) a specific partial “solution” to this problem. This will become your “issue” around which to develop your

organizing plan. See the list in Bobo on p. 27 for choosing an issue and address what you think are the most important criteria for your issue and why. Class discussion of your problem and issue papers.

VI. Building grassroots leadership

Mon. Oct. 17– Smock ch. 3; Bobo, Kendall, and Max ch.10, 11. *Handout of guidelines for graded assignment three (see below).*

Wed. Oct. 19 -GUEST SPEAKER; Antonieta Gimeno, Community Educator Consultant on using popular education organizing methods.

****ASSIGNMENT THREE due in class on Mon. Oct. 24.** In about three pages, write your plan for building grassroots leadership around the issue/problem you have identified following the guidelines handed out on Oct. 19. Discuss in class.

VII. Building commitment and community; Networks, coalitions, and partnerships

Wed. Oct. 26 - Smock, ch. 6 and 7; Bobo, Kendall, and Max ch. 9, 20, 21, 22. *Handout and discussion of guidelines for assignment four, see below.*

****ASSIGNMENT FOUR due in class on Mon. Oct. 31.** In about three or four pages, lay out your plan for how you will build and sustain a sense of belonging, commitment, and connectedness among the people you have organized; and for what potential networks, coalitions, and/or partnerships would be useful in developing and carrying out your organizing plan. As always, follow the guidelines from Oct. 31!

VIII. What will be your group's structure? How will you make decisions?

Wed. Nov. 2 - Smock, ch. 5; Bobo, Kendall, and Max ch. 6, 12, 18, 23, 24, 25. *Handout and discussion of guidelines for assignment five, see below.*

**** ASSIGNMENT FIVE due in class on Mon. Nov. 7.** In about three pages, lay out your plan for the kind of organizational and decision-making structure you will build to address your issue/problem. Discuss in class.

IX. Gathering information and resources to help you refine your issue and later to develop strategies for successfully achieving your social change goal

Wed. Nov. 9– Smock, ch. 6; Bobo, Kendall, and Max ch. 3, 17, 19, 20. *Handout and discussion of guidelines for assignment six, see below.*

Mon. Nov. 14- GUEST SPEAKER: Steve Schnapp, United for a Fair Economy (UFE). Read Bobo, Kendall, and Max chap. 16, 27 (workshops on the economy). Please check out the UFE website at <http://www.faireconomy.org/>

No class Wed. Nov. 16 – Use time to work on next assignment.

Mon. Nov. 21 – Sign up for optional individual meetings with instructor regarding your progress in this course and any questions, suggestions, concerns.

****ASSIGNMENT SIX due in class on Mon. Nov. 28.** In three or four pages, elaborate (*based on research* you conduct on your own) what resource “experts” have found about the *root causes* of the problem you have defined. Staff at Tisch Library may be useful to you in locating this information. This may result in revising/specifying your partial solution (your “issue”) aimed at addressing one or more of these root causes.

CITE ALL OF YOUR SOURCES COMPLETELY AND CAREFULLY. Include all of the following: author, date of publication, title of article or book, where article published or (if a book) name of publisher. You need not include the actual database where you found this source. If your source is the website of an organization, be very careful to choose reputable research organizations (e.g. government sources, foundations, research centers at universities, etc.)

Be cautious about information from organizational websites that “have a stake” in *their* own point of view about a problem and what they think is *the* correct solution to that problem, that is, use these sources but include a caveat.

X. Designing strategies and actions toward achieving the social change issue

Wed. Nov. 30 - Smock, ch. 7; Bobo, Kendall, and Max ch. 4, 5, 7, 8. *Handout and discuss guidelines for assignment seven, see below.*

****ASSIGNMENT SEVEN due in class on Mon. Dec. 5.** In about three pages, lay out your strategy and the main specific actions you and your group will conduct to reach the social change goal you have set. Discuss in class.

XI. Connecting your organizing issue to broader and long-term change

Wed. Dec. 7 - Smock ch. 8 and 9; Bobo, Kendall, and Max ch. 13, 14, 15, 26. Discuss in class on Mon. Dec. 12 how you will connect your organizing plan to broader social change. Include written discussion in final plan.

Your **final comprehensive organizing plan** combining revised versions of all sections from assignment two to seven is due no later than **Monday, December 19** by noon in **Professor Ostrander’s mailbox in Eaton 102**. The plan should be **about 15 to 18 pages in length, with appropriate citing of sources**. Hard copy only accepted.