SW/UP 654
Concepts and Techniques of Community Participation

Barry Checkoway
Winter 2006

Course Description

This course examines concepts and techniques of community participation in diverse democracy. It analyzes the changing context and core concepts of participation, major models and methods of practice, and practical techniques for involving people in organizations and communities. It assesses formal efforts by agencies to involve people in their proceedings, indigenous initiatives by groups to influence institutions and decisions, and their potential for civic engagement in democratic societies which value diversity as an asset.

The course assumes that if democracy is about the participation of the people, and the people are becoming more socially and culturally diverse, then the future of democracy is inseparable from its diversity. Special emphasis is placed on increasing involvement of underrepresented groups in economically disinvested areas.

Course Objectives

1. Understand the changing context and core concepts of community participation in diverse democracy;

2. Analyze major models and methods of participation practice;

3. Develop knowledge of specific skills to promote participation, e.g., assessing community conditions, building organizational capacity, increasing intergroup dialogue, building constituency support;

4. Identify problems and issues of underrepresented groups in economically disinvested areas; and

5. Recognize issues of ethics and values arising in the field.

Course Design

Responsibilities include readings, participation in discussions, written assignments, and individual and group exercises related to course objectives. Community collaborators and guest speakers may address specific topics in areas of expertise.
Relationship of Course to Curricular Themes

**Multiculturalism and Diversity:** Students will develop the capacity to identify ways in which community participation can address race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, and other forms of stratification.

**Social Justice and Social Change:** Emphasis is placed on how community participation can strengthen social change and social justice.

**Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation:** The course will focus on how to prevent social problems and promote healthier communities in addition to treatment and rehabilitation activities.

**Behavioral and Social Science Research:** Relevant research from diverse social science disciplines and professional fields will contribute to understanding of empirically-based practice.
Guiding Questions

Opening and Orientation

• Why is it that in some of the world’s most disinvested areas, people participate actively in the community?
• Who are the participants, what are their characteristics, and what are their activities and outcomes?
• What are some specific strategies and steps for involving people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives?
• How would you assess formal efforts by agencies to involve people in their proceedings, and indigenous initiatives by groups to influence institutions?

• What are some ways to promote community participation in a democratic society that values diversity as an asset?
• Assuming that diversity will characterize society in the future, how will community participation look different from a more multicultural perspective?
• What are the elements of multicultural community participation, and how does it differ from approaches that are monocultural or pluralist?

Core Concepts

• How would you assess the case studies as examples of community participation? What were people trying to accomplish, and how well did they do?
• How would you assess these as examples of research? Can you visualize a way in which the research itself might have strengthened participation?

• What is community participation? What is meant by “community” and “participation”?
• What do Arnstein and other authors mean by participation? What are the similarities and differences in their definitions?
• What are the primary purposes of community participation? Why should we, or others, want to promote participation?
• What criteria should be used for assessing community participation, and why? What is the difference between the scope and quality of participation?
• Does community participation have “core concepts” and, if so, what are they?
• What do we know about community participation? What propositions are substantiated by research or practice? What are some unanswered questions that remain for future work?

• Does community participation change when you conceptualize community as pluralist or multicultural rather than as monocultural and, if so, how?

• What is the name of a group whose participation you care about? How would you assess its level of participation, and what might be done to strengthen its participation?

• What are some distinct characteristics of the group that affect its participation? What knowledge would you require about the group in order to strengthen its participation, and how would you gather this information?

**Grassroots Organizing**

• What strategy or strategies of participation are described in the readings? How would you assess them in terms of your chosen criteria?

• Which strategy has the most potential for empowering a group whom you care about?

• Are there participation methods that are culturally-competent and, if so, what are they?

**Municipal Participation**

• How would you assess municipal agencies as an approach to community participation?

• How would you assess them in terms of your criteria? Do they have potential for empowering a group that you care about?

• What can agencies do to involve people in their proceedings, and what can people themselves do?

• If a municipality were to make a serious commitment to community participation that is pluralistic or multicultural, what would it be?

• In your imagination, what would be a municipality that is truly participatory, and also pluralist or multicultural?

**Neighborhood Development**

• What is distinct about neighborhood as a unit of solution?

• Does community participation change when you conceptualize community as neighborhood?

• How would you assess neighborhood development as an approach to community participation? What are its strengths and weaknesses?

• What would a participatory – or pluralist or multicultural - neighborhood be? How about one that follows feminist principles?

**Pluralist and Multicultural**

• What are some ways to promote community participation in a democratic society that values diversity as an asset?

• How about a society that is becoming more racially segregated and also more multicultural?
• Assuming that diversity will characterize society in the future, how will participation look different from a more pluralist or multicultural perspective?

• What is the name of a group whose participation you care about? How would you assess its level of participation, and what might be done to strengthen its participation?
• What are some distinct characteristics of the group that affect its participation? What knowledge would you require about the group in order to strengthen its participation, and how would you gather this information?

Starting with People

• If you were to reduce community participation to its basics, what would it be? Are there essential steps of community participation that fit all situations and, if so, what are they?

• A core concept of community participation is “starting with people,” but who are they? Do some people tend to participate more, and others less? Why?
• How would you assess your own personal readiness for participation practice? What are your strengths and limitations, and what remains for future work?
• What are your social identities, and how do these affect your practice? How do you normally assess the social identities of other groups, and how does this affect your work with them?

Assessing Community Conditions

• What is meant by assessing community conditions? Why is assessment important? What should people assess?
• What are some assessment methods, and are there some that are more participatory, or more pluralist, or more multicultural?
• Which methods best fit a group whose participation you care about?

Building Organizational Capacity

• What are some ways of building organizational capacity for community participation? Are there basic elements for regularizing the roles required for participation over the long haul?
• If you were to conceive of participation in terms of stages of development, what would it be?
• If you were asked to assess or strengthen meetings or task groups as methods of participation, what would it be? How could you make them more pluralist or multicultural?

Increasing Intergroup Dialogue

• What are some methods for increasing intergroup dialogues?
• What are some ways to enable people to recognize their social identities, or to communicate with others who are different from themselves, or to discuss issues that affect them, or to find common ground?
Building Constituency Support

- What is meant by building constituency support, why is it important, and what are some steps in the process?
- How can this approach be made more participatory, or more pluralist, or more multicultural?

Participatory Evaluation

- What is participatory evaluation? Why is it important, and for whom?
- What are some ways for increasing participation in knowledge development?
- Is there a culturally competent or multicultural evaluation methodology and, if so, what is it?
- How does this approach compare to the one that is usually taught in school?

Strengthening Civic Engagement

- What is democracy? What are its core concepts? What about diverse democracy?
- What is civic engagement? How does it compare to community participation? How would you assess its present pattern? Is there a problem? If so, why, and what is to be done?
- Do you agree with Putnam’s analysis and his proposed solution?
- What are some ways to strengthen civic engagement in diverse democracy?

Education for Diverse Democracy

- What is education for diverse democracy? What competencies are needed, and why?
- What are some ways to prepare people for participation in a democratic society that values diversity as an asset?
- What is meant by education for diverse democracy? If you were asked to design an initiative for this purpose, what would it be? What can be done by the schools, whether through curricular or cocurricular activities?
## Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>January 11</td>
<td>Opening and Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>January 18</td>
<td>Core Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>January 25</td>
<td>Core Concepts*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>February 1</td>
<td>Grassroots Organizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Municipal Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>February 8</td>
<td>Neighborhood Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>February 15</td>
<td>Pluralist and Multicultural**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>February 22</td>
<td>Starting with People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 1</td>
<td>Spring Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>March 8</td>
<td>Assessing Community Conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>March 15</td>
<td>Building Organizational Capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>March 22</td>
<td>Increasing Intergroup Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>March 29</td>
<td>Building Constituency Support***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participatory Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>April 5</td>
<td>Strengthening Civic Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>April 12</td>
<td>Education for Diverse Democracy****</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reading List

Core Concepts


Grassroots Organizing


Home Page of Southern Echo at www.southernecho.org

**Municipal Participation**


**Neighborhood Development**


**Pluralist and Multicultural**

Rivera & Erlich, passim.


**Starting with People**


**Assessing Community Conditions**


Hope & Timmel, Chapter 2.


Lum, Chapter 4.

**Building Organizational Capacity**


Anner, J. Having the tools at hand: Building successful multicultural social justice organizations. In Adams, Chapter 95.

Chambers, Chapters 12-14.

**Increasing Intergroup Dialogue**


**Building Constituency Support**


**Participatory Evaluation**


**Strengthening Civic Engagement**


**Education for Diverse Democracy**

School of Unity & Liberation. (n.d.). Training New Leaders...Building Movement. Oakland: Author