
Instructor: Beth Glover Reed, 3736 SSWB, 763-5958 or 764-8342, bgr@umich.edu
Appointment times are listed on the door of 3736. Others are available if you request.

Course Description:

This course will examine concepts and techniques for organizing women at the community level. Students will learn about major models and methods of practice, interactional and analytical skills, and roles of women as organizers and constituents of community organization. The forces that facilitate and limit organizing of women in the community will be identified and general propositions and action guidelines from research and practice will be presented. While the focus of this course will be on women as community practitioners, the content is designed for both male and female students.

Course Content:

Several past, present and potential future strategies that address issues and inequities related to gender as an approach to community practice will be analyzed. Students will be prepared with knowledge and skills to solve problems, plan programs, and create changes responsive to women as organizers and constituents of practice. Special attention will be given to subgroups of women and the intersections of gender with race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, and other characteristics. Existing community organization theory and practice from a feminist perspective will be analyzed, and wherever possible. cross-cultural and cross-national comparisons will be provided.

Course objectives:

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

a) Describe the past, present, and future potential roles, options, strengths, problems and contributions of women as community organizers

b) Design several strategies for organizing women at the community level

c) Compare and contrast key structures and processes of women’s community organizations, and the gender-related dynamics of different contexts for organizing

d) Critically analyze existing community organization theory and practice from a feminist perspective
e) Identify critical value and ethical issues for women and men concerned with women’s issues and organizing, and develop alternative approaches to these issues.

**Course Design:**

Instructors will employ several strategies and formats, including readings, class demonstrations, self-assessments, case analyses, course projects in the community, written papers, didactic presentations, and video and computer-based resources.

**Relationship of the Course to the Curricular Themes:**

*Multiculturalism and Diversity* will be addressed in this course by examining organizing efforts by different subgroups of women, analyzing the theoretical issues raised when gender intersects with other social status dimensions and critiquing different models and cases vis-à-vis their multicultural competence.

*Social Justice and Social Change* will be emphasized in discussions of efforts to organize women at the community level.

*Promotion, Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation* will be emphasized throughout the course as inherent components of organizing women at the community level.

*Behavioral and Social Science Research* will be addressed through readings that summarize studies or organizing women at the community level. This course will also emphasize models for evaluation and knowledge development from the practice of community organization.

**Relationship of the Course to Social Work Ethics and Values:**

This course will address ethical and value issues related to women, women’s issues, and community organizing and present alternative approaches to these issues. The NASW Code of Ethics will be used to inform practice. Social emphasis will be placed on the social worker’s responsibility to promote the general welfare of society by preventing and eliminating discrimination, ensuring equal access to resources, expanding choices and opportunities for all persons, encouraging respect for diversity, advocating for changes in social policies, and encouraging informed participation by the public. In particular, this course will focus on ethical concerns that are related to women’s issues such as domestic violence, rape, pregnancy and reproductive rights and responsibilities, special protection of vulnerable populations such as homeless mothers, the labor force and social/economic justice for women, and oppressive work conditions such as exist in sweatshops.

What is written above is the official course description that was approved by the faculty and you should use this to determine whether the course as taught meets what was established by the faculty.

In addition to the above, we will use and critique feminist modes of thinking and working in the classroom, and practice analyzing how organizing processes are gendered, raced, and otherwise shaped by societal categories and assumptions. My assumption is that gender is a socially constructed basic organizing structure in the world, and relevant in all forms of community work. Some topics we will cover include: “community” as a complicated concept; the history or women and community organization; the implications of differences among women (economic class, race,
ethnicity, sexual identity, age, religion, disability status, citizenship, and so forth); feminist perspectives and critiques of feminism’ women, povery and grassroots organizing; violence, labor, power, conflict, and other critical issues for women.

Additional course objectives:

f) Use a framework for social justice-oriented social work practice that attends to questions of power, meaning, history, context and possibility to assess case examples of women’s community practice.

g) Engage in empowering and critical dialogue and practices within the classroom

We will spend the first component of the course reviewing women’s issues and considering the context of organizing with, for, and by women as well as gendering processes within community practice. Within this, each student will explore their own interests and background and identify key learning and change goals. A large component of the class will be focused on implementing an actual change project, collaborating with class members on planning, analyzing, implementing and evaluating community practice focused on women’s issues/gender-related analyses. We will confront questions of power and differences, and explore strategies to addressing these. Empowering approaches and alliance building will be especially emphasized.

This is a practice methods course and thus focuses on the development of skills for practice. The course will be highly participatory, and we will practice organizing skills (e.g., planning, assessment, analysis, group facilitation) within the classroom. Thus attendance and class participation are important criteria and elements within the course. Since a major strength of a practitioner is to know oneself well, and to be able to adapt theory, tactics, and skills to fit ones strengths, and to find ways to compensate for areas in which we are less strong, we will work in class and through assignments to identify who and where each of us is in each area. We will also be scrutinizing ourselves, our assumptions, and the readings for ways in which particular assumptions, goals, strategies, etc. may or may not be sensitive to ethnicity, gender and other aspects of the people and communities of concern. Additional responsibilities include doing the reading, completing assignments and activities--both in class and out of class--and struggling with the issues and challenges raised by the goals and objectives of the course.

I am open to considering assignments other than those I specify, but expect that any modifications or assumptions will be consistent with the goals of the course, spelled out in advance, and negotiated with me. I would love to collaborate with you in the design and implementation of the course, but do not react well if I feel you are avoiding major components of the course, or being evasive.

I teach based on principles of adult learning, and in a way that can lead to skill-based learning within the classroom setting, by using the class itself as an arena to practice and learn to observe and evaluate particular types of skills and tactics. I rarely review/lecture about assigned readings unless I know something is hard to grasp, or someone asks me to clarify something. Thus, I expect you to take responsibility for letting me know what assistance you may want, or what you would like to discuss, challenge, etc. in class, from the readings. In class, we will mostly spend time doing things together--to practice skills, consult with each other about projects, etc. I may also add some things not in the readings or to help you apply the readings, or work to help you integrate disparate materials. We are likely to have some guests from the community who are engaged in organizing, etc.
This term, the Martin Luther King Symposium falls on a Monday so there will be no formal classes. Usually, however, many sessions that occur as part of MLK symposium activities are relevant for social action, so I expect that you will attend at least one event and report on it to class, especially re: its relevance to social and political action and issues you care about.

**Course Resources:**

- Coursepack

**Recommended:**


**Course Requirements and Assignments:**

20% of your grade is allocated to class attendance and participation. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss assigned readings and other projects and activities.

My preference is for students to engage in team projects, since that is how organizing occurs, but I want to discuss the feasibility of this in the first classes, given students’ interests and logistics.

You will have a series of short assignments scattered over the term which will count for another 20% of your grade.

A large organizing assignment will focus on an organizing project focused on women, women’s issue(s), and/or a major gender analysis, so you should be thinking about issues and opportunities you will have this term to engage in organizing. In some cases, I will approve your observing an action already underway that you are not involved in, and/or analyzing/critiquing an action you have been involved with in the past. I will distribute more information about this next week.

**First task:**

Read bell hooks and other first readings (over the first two weeks of the course). Write a three to five page reflection that includes the following (plus anything else that interests you):

1) What topics and issues are of particular interest to you? Identify and describe these briefly.
2) What bothers, concerns, angers you, or otherwise “stirs you up”? Why?
3) What was new to you in these readings? What did these topics raise for you?
4) Identify key concepts, ideas, and questions that arise for you.
5) What about you and your positionalities helps to influence these reactions?

You should have notes for the first batch of readings on Jan 13. Turn in more complete version on Jan 20.
Syllabus, 658, Women and Community Organizing        Reed, Winter, 03

Coursepack I = *                                      All coursepacks are at Excel
                                                      1117 South University (upstairs)
Coursepack II = @                                     734-996-1500
                                                      Includes chapters from Naples & Desai: Women’s Activism and Globalization

January 6:  Introduction to the course and each other
January 13: Women’s Issues, women’s movements, social justice issues/critique

* bell hooks (2000) Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics. West End Press


**January 20:** Martin Luther King Education Day
Attend at least one session. Identify issues within this session relevant for this course (e.g., principles/issues for social justice, diversity, oppression, privilege, implications for organizing with women and on issues of importance for women; what subgroups of women, and other groups and issues? context issues?? definitions of power, models for change)

**January 27:** Women and Community Organizing—models, principles, history, contexts


Reisch, M. & Andrews, J. (2002) Radical social work in the progressive area (13-37) From The Road Not Taken: A History of Radical Social Work in the United States, Brunner-Routledge. This is a good context for understanding the video we watched on the “Women of Hull House” (in your boxes)
February 3: Intersectionality, Positionalities, Boundaries; [Ideology, Identity, Intergroup Relations. Implications for Gender and Group/Team Formation, Dynamics and Maintenance (Melissa Peet, guest instructor)

- Naples (text), Chapters one and two: Whose feminism, whose history? and Women’s Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism.
- Gender, groups and leadership (Reed): handout
- L Brown & W. Vega (1996) A protocol for community-based research (we will talk about this on 1/27)
- ben Asher, M (2002) Perspectives on theory and practice: A collection. http://comm-org.utoledo.edu/papers2002/benasher/benasher.htm This is an overview of a number of papers that are on this website. The website is also a goldmine of other very practical tools.

Another website that is a goldmine is one called Community Toolbox. by the Sherradens at George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis.

February 10: Women’s Agency, Power and Leadership: Transforming Politics I. Project proposal due?? Engagement, assessment and planning. Selection of topics, goals.

- Naples text: chapters 3 & 4.

Feb 17: Power & Leadership/Transforming Politics II. Entry and assessment
Project proposal due

- Naples text, Chapters 6 & 7


Feb 24: spring break


• Naples text chapters 8 & 9


• Reger, J. (2002) Organizational dynamics and construction of multiple feminist identities in the national organization for women, Gender and Society, 16(5), 710-727.


March 10: Networking for change II. Use of alternative strategies–community participation, public education, social action. Leadership and organization development First written component of project due

• Naples text, chapter 10.


• Markowitz, L. & Tice, K. W. (2002) Paradoxes of professionalization: Parallel dilemmas in women’s organizations in the Americas, Gender and Society, 16(6), 941-958.
**March 17:** Feminist participatory action research. Asian women and organizing. Constructing Community; coalition strategies and issues. Building in evaluation.

Mieko Yoshihama, guest presenter

- Naples text, chapters 11 & 12

**March 24:** Constructing Community II. Linking the internal & external

Organizing across differences. Specific tools and tactics.

Second written component of project due

- Naples text, chapters 13-14

We will jigsaw the following readings

**March 31:** Consciousness-raising and empowerment options; Bridging barriers
Specific tools and tactics (cont.)


**April 7:** Organizing in cyberspace and the internet
Revisiting each of our issues, skills, knowledge, consciousness
Assessing progress, considering next steps
Third written component of project due


**April 14:** (last class) Integrating, reflecting, planning next steps, evaluation
Visions of the future…

**April 21:** final revision to projects, other course elements/self reflection due.