SW 652: Organizing for Social and Political Action

Winter 2004
Instructor: Michael Reisch
Tuesdays, 11:00-2:00
Classroom: SSWB 2752

Course Description
This course examines methods of organizing people for social and political action on their own behalf or on behalf of others. Students will analyze methods of bringing people together for collective action, building organizational capacity, and generating power in the community. The course includes the study of skills in analyzing power structures, formulating action strategies, using conflict and persuasive tactics, challenging oppressive structures, conducting community campaigns, using political advocacy as a form of mobilization, and understanding contemporary social issues as they affect oppressed and disadvantaged communities. Special emphasis will be placed on organizing communities of color, women, LGBT populations, and other underrepresented groups in U.S. society.

Course Content
In this course students will learn that organizing for social and political action aims to create change by building powerful organizations at the community and societal level. This course takes the perspective that organizing can win improvements in people’s lives, make people aware of their own power, alter the relations of power in the community, and create a more socially just society.

The history of organizing for social and political action and its underlying theoretical assumptions about power, conflict, and change will be covered. This course will also examine the sociopolitical and political-economic arenas in which organizing operates; the roles and responsibilities of practitioners, several major strategies and tactics of organizing; forces that facilitate or limit organizing; ethical and value dilemmas of organizing; and lessons learned from research on social and political action and change. In addition, different schools of organizing thought and their approaches to the formulation of goals, issues, constituencies, targets, and tactics will be compared.

The course will also analyze strategies and tactics that employ conflict as a vehicle for generating power and creating change. Students will assess theories of conflict and power and ways of analyzing power structures at the community and societal level.
Political advocacy will be examined as an empowering process of strengthening solidarity and challenging oppressive structures, systems, and institutions. In contrast to viewing advocacy as a narrow approach to representing group interests in legislatures and established institutions, this course will consider advocacy as an empowering process by which traditionally excluded people advocates for themselves in ways which build organizations and develop communities.

**Course Objectives**

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

1. Understand and analyze the changing context of social and political action;
2. Understand contemporary social and political issues and their relationship to social and political action strategies and tactics;
3. Understand and apply social and political dynamics as they relate to issues of power, privilege, social justice, and resource distribution;
4. Analyze alternative models, strategies, tactics, and modes of social and political action directed towards these goals;
5. Demonstrate skills in community assessment, leadership and organizational development, planning and conducting campaigns, and evaluating their results;
6. Formulate strategies to engage constituencies in social and political action;
7. Identify and incorporate attention to issues related to race, gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, and other dimensions which are associated with privilege, discrimination, domination, and oppression;
8. Identify and analyze value and ethical dilemmas that arise in the course of organizing for social and political action;
9. Contribute to developing a climate in the classroom in which everyone can (a) experiment with new skills; (b) explore their own multicultural competence and the implications of one’s own background for developing and implementing social and political action strategies; (c) consult with each other on action projects and assignments; and (d) generate plans and strategies for future learning and development.

**Course Design**

The format of the course will include instructor lecture/class discussion, analysis of assigned readings, class exercises and simulations, and external individual and group activities. Speakers and videos will be used to augment other course materials.

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

**Privilege:** A critical, if often unacknowledged manifestation of social injustice is the difference in the degree of privilege experienced among individuals and groups in the U.S. on the basis of race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, and physical ability in their efforts to create social and political change. One goal of social and political action is to eliminate or reduce these disparities – through both ends and means. This course will explore how privilege, or its absence, influences the nature of social change at the community and societal levels and what can be done to overcome it.
Oppression: Social workers have an ethical obligation to work to overcome oppression in society in all its forms. This course will examine how social and political action can contribute to this goal by altering societal institutions, structures, policies, and processes, and by empowering oppressed communities to work on their own behalf.

Diversity: The course will focus on the issues involved in working for social change in a multicultural society and in engaging in social and political action in and with multicultural communities. It will also address the problems and potential of engaging in successful social and political action with diverse populations. Case examples of social and political action within multicultural communities will be used to illustrate strategic and tactical issues.

Social Justice: An underlying assumption of the course is that the goals of social and political action are to promote social justice and produce positive social and political change. The course will explore the different meanings of social justice and social change, and their implications for the development of strategies and tactics of social and political action. Historical and contemporary illustrations will be used to analyze these concepts.

Relationship of the Course to Social Work Values and Ethics
The NASW Code of Ethics (revised 1996) establishes an ethical imperative for social workers to engage in social and political action on behalf of social justice and in support of the needs of diverse and disadvantaged populations. Since the emergence of the social work profession in the U.S., the pursuit of social justice through a variety of social and political strategies has been one of its fundamental tenets. This course reflects that heritage and applies those values in the analysis of contemporary social and political action efforts. It also discusses some of the ethical issues involved in pursuing social justice through social and political action.

Required Texts
The following book is available for purchase at Ulrich’s Bookstore, 549 East University Avenue:

- A course pack of required readings is available for purchase at Excel Coursepacks, 1117 South University Avenue.
- There will also be periodic handouts and web-based reading assignments.
- It is highly recommended that students read a daily newspaper (print or online), such as the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, or the Detroit Free Press.

Course Assignments
1. Analytic Paper: This 5-8 page paper focuses on the relationship between the nature of an issue, the action goals, and the change approach selected. It assesses the suitability of different approaches to social or political action in addressing a specific issue that affects a particular multicultural community or oppressed/disadvantaged population. It also includes a discussion of the readiness of an organization or
community for the initiation of a social or political action project. The paper briefly describes the organization or community in terms of the need and opportunities for social action organizing. Finally, it discusses what strategies and tactics are most appropriate for initiating and sustaining a social or political action effort in this context. Further details will be discussed in class. **Due: February 3 (20%)**

2. **Advocacy Work**  This assignment has three parts. Details will be discussed in class.
   - **Part 1** is a 2-3 page (single-spaced) intra-agency memorandum outlining a proposed advocacy campaign focusing on an issue of concern to an organization and the clients or constituents with which it works (10%). **Due: February 17**
   - **Part 2** is 2-3 pages (double-spaced) of written testimony regarding legislation or budget initiatives that affect this issue, to be presented before a legislative body at the local, state, or federal level (10%). **Due: March 2**
   - **Part 3** is an op-ed piece (of 750-1000 words) on the issue suitable for publication in a newspaper or on-line journal. (10%). **Due: March 16**

3. **Semester Assignment** There are **three options** to complete this assignment.
   **Option 1 – Group Project.** This option requires students to develop an action project focused on a social or political issue in the community or to become involved – as a group – in an ongoing social or political action effort. At the end of the semester, each group will present its experience to the class and analyze it in a group paper. Groups will be formed and topics selected by January 20. Further details will be discussed in class. **Presentation: 20%. Paper due: April 13 (20%).**

   **Option 2 – Individual Term Paper.** Students who select this option will write a journal length paper (15-20 pages) on one of the following broad topics:
   -- Issues in electoral politics  -- Coalition building/maintenance
   -- Ethical issues in social and political action  -- Social movement organizing
   Further details will be discussed in class. **Paper due: April 13 (40%).**

   **Option 3 – Sermon on a social/political issue.** Students who select this option will write a sermon (to the congregation of their choice) that will relate an issue of social and/or political change to the religious values and beliefs of the congregants. The sermon should be approximately 15-20 pages and should include a list of sources (secular and religious) used. Details will be discussed in class. **Due: April 13 (40%).**

4. **Class Participation:** Students are expected to come prepared for class and to engage actively and critically with the course readings and the material presented in class. Students will be evaluated on the quality, not the quantity, of participation (10%).

5. **Extra Credit Assignment:** In conjunction with this course, there will be a semester-long series of films (both dramatic and documentary) focusing on social and political action that will be shown at the School of Social Work on Wednesdays, 5:00-8:00 p.m., in Room 2816, beginning January 14. The films will be followed by a discussion facilitated by faculty members. Students can earn an additional ten (10) points towards their grade in this manner by attending the films/discussions and
writing brief analytic reaction papers. The series will also be open (at no charge) to other students in the School and University, their families, and friends. Further details will be discussed in class.
Course Outline and Readings (* = Reading in coursepack)

Week 1/January 6  Introduction & Course Overview
The Roots and Context of Social and Political Action

Week 2/January 13  Models of Social and Political Action
Reading:


Week 3/January 20  Direct Action Organizing I: Identifying Issues
Reading:


** Group Topics Selected **

**TV Assignment:** Watch President Bush’s “State of the Union” Address Tonight

Week 4/January 27 Direct Action Organizing II: Developing Goals & Strategies

Reading:


**TV Assignment:** Watch Gov. Granholm’s “State of the State” Address Tonight

Week 5/February 3 Direct Action Organizing III: Building & Sustaining Organizations/Issues of Power and Privilege

Reading:


** Assignment #1 Due **

**Week 6/February 10**  
**Direct Action Organizing IV: Tactics**

*Reading*


** Paper # 1 Due **

**Week 7/February 17**  
**Advocacy & Political Action I: Legislative Advocacy**

*Reading*


** Assignment #2/Part 1 Due **

February 24  Semester Break – No Class

Week 8/March 2  Advocacy & Political Action II: Legal Advocacy

Reading:


Shaw, Randy (2001). “Lawyers: Allies or obstacles to social change?” in The activist’s handbook, 185-211.


** Assignment #2/Part 2 Due **

Week 9/March 9  Media Advocacy

Reading:


**Week 10/March 16  Coalition Work**  
*Reading:*


** Assignment #2/Part 3 Due **

**Week 11/March 23  Electoral Politics I: Ballot Initiatives**  
*Reading:*


Week 12/March 30 Electoral Politics II: Working with Political Parties Reading:
*Hanna, Mark, Buddy Robinson, and Michael Reisch (1994). “Should grassroots community organizations be linked to a political party to promote social change?” in Michael Austin and Jane Lowe, eds., Controversial issues in communities and organizations, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 38-58.


Week 13/April 6 Social Movements Readings:


Week 14/April 13  The Personal Side of Social & Political Action I: Resolving Ethical and Value Dilemmas

Reading:


** Assignment #3 Due **

Week 15/April 20  The Personal Side of Social & Political Action II: Balancing the Personal and the Political

Reading:


Recommended Readings


**Selected Internet Websites**
*(to be augmented throughout the semester)*

1. **General Statistical Data**
   U.S. Census Bureau: [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)
   
   
   Statistical Abstract of the U.S.: [www.census.gov/stat_abstract](http://www.census.gov/stat_abstract)
   
   
   
   Citynet: [www.city.net](http://www.city.net)
   
   Research Engines for the Social Sciences: [www.carleton.ca/~cmckie/research.html](http://www.carleton.ca/~cmckie/research.html)
   
   General Social Survey: [www.icpsr.umich.edu/gss/](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/gss/)
   
   Welfare Information Network: [www.welfareinfo.org](http://www.welfareinfo.org)

2. **Policy Analysis and Evaluation**
   Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation Research Department: [www.aspe.os.dhhs.gov/hsp/cyp/cyplist.htm](http://www.aspe.os.dhhs.gov/hsp/cyp/cyplist.htm)
   
   National Association for Welfare Research and Statistics: [www.ucdata.berkeley.edu/NAWRS/index.html](http://www.ucdata.berkeley.edu/NAWRS/index.html)
   
   Urban Institute: [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)
   
   American Public Welfare Association: [www.apwa.org](http://www.apwa.org)
   
   Economic Policy Institute: [www.epinet.org](http://www.epinet.org)
   
   Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)
   
   Center for Law and Social Policy: [www.epn.org/clasp.html](http://www.epn.org/clasp.html)
   
   Families USA: [www.epn.org/families](http://www.epn.org/families)
Cato Institute: www.cato.org
Empower America: www.empower.org
Institute for Research on Poverty: www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp
Brookings Institution: www.brook.edu
National Conference of State Legislators: www.ncsl.org
Agency for Health Care Policy and Research: www.ahecpr.gov
National Center for Children in Poverty: www.cait.cpmc.columbia.edu/dept/nccp
National Child Care Information Center: www.ericpos.ed.uiuc.edu/nccic/nccichome.html
Dept of HHS Central Database: www.os.dhhs.gov
Progressive Policy Institute: www.dlcppi.org
Center for Child and Youth Policy, University of California-Berkeley: www.csr.berkeley.edu/CCYP

3. Legislative Information and Updates
American Public Welfare Association: www.apwa.org
National Association of Counties: www.naco.org
National Association of State Budget Officers: www.nasbo.org
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: www.cbpp.org
Center for Law and Social Policy: www.epn.org/clasp.html
National Conference of State Legislatures: www.ncsl.org
Children’s Defense Fund: www.childrensdefense.org
Child Welfare League of America: www.cwla.org
The Library of Congress (Thomas): www.thomas.loc.gov
Department of HHS: www.os.dhhs.gov
Administration for Children and Families: www.acf.dhhs.gov
4. **Organizations of State and Local Officials**
National League of Cities: [www.nlc.org](http://www.nlc.org)
U.S. Conference of Mayors: [www.usmayors.org/home.html](http://www.usmayors.org/home.html)
American Public Welfare Association: [www.apwa.org](http://www.apwa.org)
Council of State Governments: [www.csg.org](http://www.csg.org)
National Association of Counties: [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org)
National Conference of State Legislatures: [www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org)

5. **National Research and Policy Organizations**
Cato Institute: [www.cato.org](http://www.cato.org)
Institute for Research on Poverty: [www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp](http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp)
Joint Center for Poverty Research: [www.spc.uchicago.edu/PovertyCenter/](http://www.spc.uchicago.edu/PovertyCenter/)
Brookings Institutes: [www.brook.edu](http://www.brook.edu)
Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation: [www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org)
Urban Institute: [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)
Hudson Institute: [www.hudson.org/hudson](http://www.hudson.org/hudson)
Heritage Foundation: [www.heritage.org](http://www.heritage.org)
American Enterprise Institute: [www.aei.org](http://www.aei.org)
Alliance for Justice: [www.afj.org/fai/nonprof.html](http://www.afj.org/fai/nonprof.html)

6. **Selected Federal Agencies**
Department of Health and Human Services: [www.os.dhhs.gov](http://www.os.dhhs.gov)
Administration for Children and Families: [www.acf.dhhs.gov](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov)
Agency for Health Care Policy and Research: [www.ahcpr.gov](http://www.ahcpr.gov)
National Child Care Information Center: www.ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/nccichome.html

Department of Labor: www.dol.gov

US Department of Labor Employment & Training Administration: www.doleta.gov

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning & Evaluation: www.aspe.os.dhhs.gov

Department of HHS Database: www.os.dhhs.gov

General Accounting Office: www.gao.gov

Administration for Children and Families Fact Sheet: www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/opa/facts

Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov

Department of Justice: www.usdoj.gov

Department of Housing & Urban Development: www.hud.gov

HUD Library Page: www.hud.gov/toolkit.html

HUD Research Site: www.huduser.org

Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community Program: www.ezec.gov

7. Newspapers

8. Generic Search Sites
Yahoo: www.yahoo.com

Altavista: www.altavista.digital.com

Google: www.google.com

Northern Light: www.nlsearch.com

9. Social Policy and Social Services Networks
Linking the Human Services Community Online: www.handsnet.org

Electronic Policy Network: www.epn.org

The Policy Community On-Line: www.policy.com
Townhall: www.townhall.com

Contacting the Congress: www.visi.com/juan/congress

Action without Borders (volunteering): www.ideal.org

List of Nonprofits: www.nonprofits.org

Children, Youth, and Family Consortium: www.cyfc.umn.edu

AIDS Clearinghouse: www.cdcnac.org


Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Information: www.health.org

Child Prevention Network: www.child.cornell.edu

Violence and Abuse Clearinghouse: www.umn.edu/mincava

World Wide Web Resources for Social Workers: www.nyu.edu/socialwork/wwwrsw

National Association of Social Workers: www.naswdc.org

Council on Social Work Education: www.cswe.org

League of Women Voters: www.lwv.org

Michigan League of Women Voters: www.mi.lwv.org

Research Engine for the Social Sciences: www.carleton.ca/~cmckie/research.html

PRAXIS: www.ssw.upenn.edu/oth.html

Influencing State Policy (based at Virginia Commonwealth University):
www.statepolicy.org/

Center for Child and Youth Policy, University of California-Berkeley:
www.cssr.berkeley.edu/CCYP

10. Community Network Resources

From the UM School of Information & Library Sciences:
www.sils.umich.edu/Community/Community.html

From the WWW Virtual Library: www.rmsd.com/comnet/wwwvl_comnet.html
Directory of Public Access Networks from the Morino Network: 
www.cais.com/morino/htdocs/pandhome.htm

Freenets & Community Networks from Peter Scott: 
www.duke.usask.ca/~scottp/free.html


11. Social Security and Elderly Information Sites
Social Security Administration: www.ssa.gov

National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare: www.spry.org/nc.html

Benefits: www.benefitscheckup.org

National Council of Senior Citizens: www.ncsinc.org

12. Political Parties
Democratic Party: www.democrats.org/index.html

Republican Party: www.rnc.org

Green Party: www.greens.org

Libertarian Party: www.lp.org

Natural Law Party: www.natural-law.org

Socialist Party: www.sp-usa.org

Democratic Socialist Party: www.dsausa.org/dsa.html

Social Democrats: www.idsonline.org/sdus

Reform Party: www.reformparty.org

Communist Party: www.hartford-hwp.com/cp-usa/

13. General Voting Relating Sites
Project Vote Smart: www.vote-smart.org

E-The People: www.e-thepeople.com

Democracy Net: www.dnet.org

Web, White & Blue 2004: www.webwhiteblue.org

League of Women Voters: www.lwv.org

Rock the Vote: www.rockthevote.org

14. **Other Health Issues**
Initiative to Eliminate Racial & Ethnic Disparities in Health: www.raceandhealth.hhs.gov

15. **Criminal Justice**
FBI Crime Reports: www.fbi.gov/ucrpress.htm

16. **Political Commentary**
TomPaine.Com: www.tompaine.com

The Progressive: www.progressive.org

Eat the State: www.earthstate.org

Grassroots.com: www.grassroots.com

The Nation: www.thenation.com

Gallup Poll: www.gallup.com

17. **Reproductive Rights**
Planned Parenthood Affiliates of Michigan: www.miplannedparenthood.org

Planned Parenthood Federation of America: www.plannedparenthood.org

The Alan Guttmacher Institute: www.agi-usa.org

18. **Legal Cases**
Jenkins: www.jenkinslaw.org

19. **Comprehensive Sites**

How to Effectively Locate Federal Government Information: www.library.ucsb.edu/universe/dedecker.html

FedWorld: www.fedworld.gov

FedStats: www.fedstats.gov
U.S. Census Bureau: www.venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup

20. Regulations
National Archives and Records Administration: www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/cfr-table-search.html

National Center for Children in Poverty: www.cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/roleCDC.html

21. State of Michigan Sites
State of Michigan: www.michigan.gov/

Michigan House of Representatives: www.house.state.mi.us/

Michigan Senate: www.senate.state.mi.us/

Michigan Legislature: www.michiganlegislature.org/

Michigan Legislative Council: www.milegislativecouncil.org/

Library of Michigan: www.libofmich.lib.mi.us/

22. General U.S. Government Websites

The White House: www.whitehouse.gov/

U.S. Senate: www.senate.gov

U.S. House of Representatives: www.house.gov/

Library of Congress: www.loc.gov/