SW 652.001 Organizing for Social and Political Action Fall 2004
Thursday, 2:00-5:00 p.m. Instructor: Michael Reisch
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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 different approaches to
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 under-
represented 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 thought about organizing 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 groups advocate 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 role of 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 progressive 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**
- A course pack of required readings. Available for purchase at Excel Test Preparation, 1117 South University Avenue.
- 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 framing of an issue, the goal of social and/or political action to attain it, and the change approach(es) selected. The paper should assess the suitability of different approaches to address a specific issue that affects a particular multicultural community or oppressed/disadvantaged population. It should also include a discussion of the readiness of an organization or community for the initiation of the proposed social or political action. The paper should briefly describe the organization or community in terms of the needs and opportunities for social and/or political action organizing. Finally, it should discuss 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: October 7 (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 or a press release 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: October 21.**
   - **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: November 4.**
   - **Part 3** is an op-ed piece (of 750-1000 words) on the above issue suitable for publication in a newspaper or on-line journal. (10%). **Due: November 18.**

3. **Social/Political Action Project.** There are **two options** to complete this assignment.

   **Option A – 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 September 16. Further details will be discussed in class. **Presentation: 20%. Due: TBA**  **Paper: 20%. Due: December 9.**

   **Option B – Individual Project/Term Paper.** Students who select this option will write a journal length paper with appropriate citations and sources, based on their analysis of a social change project in which they were involved or which they researched during the semester (15-20 pages). Possible topics include:
   -- Issues in electoral politics
   -- Ethical issues in social and political action
   -- Coalition building/maintenance
   -- Social movement organizing

   Further details will be discussed in class. **Paper due: December 9 (40%)**

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

**Course Outline and Readings** (All readings are in coursepack unless indicated)

**Week 1/September 9**

**Introduction & Course Overview**

**The Context of Social and Political Action**

**Reading (To be done in class):**


Week 2/September 16  Models of Social and Political Action

Reading:


Week 3/September 23  Electoral Politics I: 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.


** Group Topics Selected **
Week 4/September 30  Electoral Politics II: Ballot Initiatives

Reading:


Week 5/October 7  Coalition Work

Reading:


** Assignment #1 Due **
Week 6/October 14       Media Advocacy

Reading:


Week 7/October 21       Legislative Advocacy

Reading:


** Assignment #2/Part 1 Due **
Week 8/October 28 Other Forms of Advocacy

**Reading:**


Week 9/November 4 Direct Action Organizing: Identifying Issues

**Reading:**


**Assignment #2/Part 2 Due**

Week 10/November 11 Developing Goals & Strategies

**Reading:**


**Week 11/November 18**  
Building & Sustaining Organizations  
Issues of Power and Privilege

**Reading:**


**Assignment #2/Part 3 Due**

**Week 12/November 25**  
Thanksgiving Holiday: No Class

**Week 13/December 2**  
Developing Effective Tactics

**Reading:**


**Week 14/December 9 The Personal Side & Ethics of Social & Political Action**

Reading:


**Assignment #3 Due**
Additional Recommended Readings on Social & Political Action
(to be augmented during the semester)


Hurtado, Aida (1996). “Relating to privilege and political mobilization,” and “An invitation to power: The restructuring of gender in the political movements of the 60s,”


**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

Urban Institute: www.urban.org

American Public Welfare Association: www.apwa.org

Economic Policy Institute: www.epinet.org

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: www.cbpp.org

Center for Law and Social Policy: www.epn.org/clasp.html

Families USA: 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

U.S. Conference of Mayors: www.usmayors.org/home.html

American Public Welfare Association: www.apwa.org

Council of State Governments: www.csg.org

National Association of Counties: www.naco.org

National Conference of State Legislatures: www.ncsl.org

5. National Research and Policy Organizations

Cato Institute: www.cato.org

Institute for Research on Poverty: www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp

Joint Center for Poverty Research: www/spc.uchicago.edu/PovertyCenter/

Brookings Institutes: www.brook.edu

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation: www.mdrc.org

Urban Institute: www.urban.org

Hudson Institute: www.hudson.org/hudson

Heritage Foundation: www.heritage.org

American Enterprise Institute: www.aei.org
Alliance for Justice: www.afj.org/fai/nonprof.html

National Academy of Sciences: www.nas.edu/news.nsf

6. Selected Federal Agencies

Department of Health and Human Services: www.os.dhhs.gov

Administration for Children and Families: www.acf.dhhs.gov

Agency for Health Care Policy and Research: 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/opfa/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
9. **Social Policy and Social Services Networks**

 Linking the Human Services Community Online: [www.handsnet.org](http://www.handsnet.org)

 Electronic Policy Network: [www.epn.org](http://www.epn.org)

 The Policy Community On-Line: [www.policy.com](http://www.policy.com)

 Townhall: [www.townhall.com](http://www.townhall.com)

 Contacting the Congress: [www.visi.com/juan/congress](http://www.visi.com/juan/congress)

 Action without Borders (volunteering): [www.idealist.org](http://www.idealist.org)

 List of Nonprofits: [www.nonprofits.org](http://www.nonprofits.org)

 Children, Youth, and Family Consortium: [www.cyfc.umn.edu](http://www.cyfc.umn.edu)

 AIDS Clearinghouse: [www.edcnac.org](http://www.edcnac.org)

 Social Work Access Network (SWAN): [www.esd.sc.edu/swan](http://www.esd.sc.edu/swan)

 Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Information: [www.health.org](http://www.health.org)

 Child Prevention Network: [www.child.cornell.edu](http://www.child.cornell.edu)

 Violence and Abuse Clearinghouse: [www.umn.edu/mincava](http://www.umn.edu/mincava)

 World Wide Web Resources for Social Workers: [www.nyu.edu/socialwork/wwwrsw](http://www.nyu.edu/socialwork/wwwrsw)

 National Association of Social Workers: [www.naswdc.org](http://www.naswdc.org)

 Council on Social Work Education: [www.cswe.org](http://www.cswe.org)

 League of Women Voters: [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)

 Michigan League of Women Voters: [www.mi.lwv.org](http://www.mi.lwv.org)

 Research Engine for the Social Sciences: [www.carleton.ca/~cmckie/research.html](http://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.milegislativencouncil.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/