

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING: EMPOWERING PEOPLE, EFFECTING CHANGE

Fall, 2008
JRC 203
T Th 8:00-9:50

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ext. 3135

Goals of the Course:

This tutorial has three major goals. Our first goal is to investigate community organizing – efforts by people working together to improve their neighborhoods, their communities, and their workplaces. "Organizing," writes activist Si Kahn, "is people working together to get things done."

We will focus our attention particularly on the organizer and on the organizing effort itself, asking such questions as: Why do people become community organizers, union organizers, or social activists? How does their activism affect them? What are the skills and roles of a good organizer? Since people have a lot of other things to do in their lives, how do effective organizers and leaders build organizations by getting people to participate actively? Should people "do" organizing? Whom should they organize?

We will try to answer such questions by analyzing a range of material on organizing, including biographical writings, case studies of organizing attempts, documentary films, and manuals for activists. I have selected written works which provide a sense of the experiences these people have undergone and which employ different ways of discussing such experiences: one of the books is journalistic, another one is autobiographical, one is a manual for organizers, some of the articles are sociological. In addition, we will view number of documentary films (for instance, on Boston's Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative) to obtain other perspectives on organizing; and you will be able to select from among other kinds of material, such as biographies, novels, and organizational web sites, for the final project of the tutorial. We will be interested in each work's form, as well as its content; in the difficulties of composition which it illuminates; and in its emotional and intellectual impact upon us.

The second goal of the tutorial is to improve your ability to write clearly, concisely, and correctly. In and out of class, we will discuss questions of writing, especially your own writing. In some cases, I will meet individually

with you to discuss your own papers; in other cases, we will meet in small groups or as one group to discuss papers and paper-writing. You will be able to read some of each others' work and to rewrite your papers after hearing how others react to your prose. In the process, we will focus on such issues as how your view of your audience influences how you write.

Because communication is often oral, rather than written, our third goal is to improve your ability to speak cogently and to participate effectively in class discussions. All of us need to become more comfortable and effective speaking in groups, so we will devote time in class and in small groups to working on our skill in discussion and presentation. Each of you will have the opportunity to make oral presentations in class, to act as the discussant of someone else's presentation, and to act as discussion leader.

Actually, we have a fourth goal as well: to facilitate your successful adjustment to college and to Grinnell College in particular.

Requirements of the Course:

You will write a number of graded papers during the course, at least two of which everyone will rewrite. Rewriting is a necessary element of good writing, but rewriting is a learned skill, so I may ask you to rewrite more than two of your papers. Most of these papers will be quite short (two to three pages) and will be based on the material we will discuss in class. One paper will be somewhat longer, from five to six pages, and will require additional reading.

I will ask you to reflect on your writing periodically during the semester, both in general appraisals at the beginning and end of the semester and in reflections about specific papers.

You will also write one short reaction paper, the "reading memo" I describe in the end of the syllabus. This memo will help you prepare for class discussion. I will read them and may comment on them but I won't grade them with a letter grade. We will share the reading

memos so you can see better how to write a useful memo.

In addition to these written assignments, you will have a number of oral and aural assignments. In some cases, you may act as a discussion leader or discussant, or participate in a debate or panel discussion in class. At the end of the course, you and two other members of the class will jointly prepare a presentation on one case which you have

chosen and which no one else in the class has studied. In fact, the final sessions of the course will focus on cases which members of the class will choose, with class discussion based on your papers and presentations.

I strongly recommend that everyone go to the Writing Lab early on in the semester to obtain more feedback on your writing. I may ask that some of you sign up for credit, as well.

Required Texts:

Stout, Linda. 1996. *Bridging the Class Divide and Other Lessons for Grassroots Organizing*.
 Rogers, Mary Beth. 1990. *Cold Anger: A Story of Faith and Power Politics*.
 Senu, Rinku. 2003. *Stir It Up: Lessons in Community Organizing and Advocacy*.

Recommended:

Fulwiler, et al. 1996. *The College Writer's Reference*.
 Fisher, Robert (ed). 1994. *Let The People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America*.
 Medoff, Peter & Holly Sklar. 1994. *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood*.
 Warren, Mark. 2001. *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy*.

Approximate Course Grade Calculation	
short papers (3)	x3
longer paper	x3
oral presentations	x1
class participation	x3
TOTAL	x10

Where appropriate, I will not stick strictly to this formula when I calculate course grades.

WEEK		READING ASSIGNMENTS & CLASS AGENDA	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
8/28	Thursday	Initial organizational meeting with introductions	Self-appraisal note: a brief (less than 1 page) statement on your own strengths and weaknesses, and plans this semester, as a writer and speaker (Thursday)
Week 1: 9/2	Tuesday	<i>Bridging the Class Divide</i> ix-46	Paper 1: Bring to class a one to two page essay describing your own experience with "organizing," or offering your initial ideas on the goals of "organizing" (& email to me by Tuesday at 5 pm)
9/4	Thursday	<i>Bridging the Class Divide</i> 47-85	

Week 2: 9/9	Tuesday	Discussion in class of paper 1 with instructor from Writing Lab; plus discussion of academic honesty & the exercise Individual meetings on paper 1 scheduled this week	Paper 1 required rewrite due Saturday 9/13 (email to me by noon 9/13)
9/11	Thursday	<i>Bridging the Class Divide</i> 86-116 Video?: <i>Rough Side of the Mountain</i> (57min)	Email completed Academic Honesty Exercise to me by 5 pm on 9/16
Week 3: 9/16	Tuesday	<i>Bridging the Class Divide</i> 117-155	Bring to class your notes on key issues in chapter 7 of <i>Bridging</i>
9/18	Thursday	<i>Bridging the Class Divide</i> 156-192	Paper 2: two page paper evaluating a key issue in organizing discussed in <i>Bridging</i> (email to me by noon on Saturday 9/20)
Week 4: 9/23	Tuesday	No Class: Individual meetings on paper 2 scheduled this week and next	
9/25	Thursday	<i>Cold Anger</i> 1-64	
Week 5: 9/30	Tuesday	<i>Cold Anger</i> 65-101	Reading memo (group 1): email to me by 8 pm Monday night
10/2	Thursday	<i>Cold Anger</i> 104-154 Time in class for team meetings to select possible cases or topics for final papers / presentations	Reading memo (group 2): email to me by 8 pm Wednesday night
Week 6: 10/7	Tuesday	<i>Cold Anger</i> 157-199	Reading memo (group 3): email to me by 8 pm Monday night
10/9	Thursday	Video: <i>Holding Ground</i> (58 min) & discussion	Paper 3: three page paper, analyzing lessons from <i>Cold Anger</i> and <i>Bridges</i> on challenges of organizing (email to me by 5 pm today)
Week 7: 10/14	Tuesday	Continued discussion of <i>Holding Ground</i> Cortés, "Reweaving the social fabric" [pdf] Individual meetings on paper 3 scheduled this week	Email team proposal describing case for final presentation to me by noon on Thursday or earlier We may have a visit today from Diedre Murch '03, an alumna who is a community organizer.
10/16	Thursday	NO CLASS: HAVE A GREAT BREAK!	

Week 8: 10/28	Tuesday	Burling Library (in IIF): Team Sessions with Reference Librarian (Julia Bauder) Possible Video: <i>Union Maids</i> (50 min)	Email brief initial bibliography (by 5 pm on Thursday) Interview two returning students about "burning" issues on campus
10/30	Thursday	<i>Stir It Up</i> xv-lxv (skim), 1-23	[Daylight Savings Time ends Sunday 11/2; clocks "fall back" one hour]
Week 9: 11/4	Tuesday	<i>Stir It Up</i> 24-78	ELECTION DAY Bring notes on your interviews on issues to class.
11/6	Thursday	<i>Stir It Up</i> 79-115	Final paper: Email your final paper's opening paragraph (stating your thesis) to me by Thursday at 5 pm
Week 10: 11/11	Tuesday	NO CLASS: individual preregistration meetings with me this week	Email your four year plan to me by the day before our meeting
11/13	Thursday	NO CLASS: individual preregistration meetings with me this week	
Week 11: 11/18	Tuesday	<i>Stir It Up</i> 116-147 Deborah Gould, "Life During Wartime: Emotions and the Development of ACT UP" [pdf]	
11/20	Thursday	<i>Stir It Up</i> 148-182	Possible Extra Video: <i>Live Nude Girls UNITE!</i> (70 minutes; I'll explain the title, honest) Final paper: Email complete draft of your final paper to your discussants (and to me) by Thursday 11/20 at 5 pm
Week 12: 11/25	Tuesday	Team meetings to discuss drafts of final papers and the oral presentations	Read drafts of two papers and email your reader responses to authors and to me by Sunday 11/23 at noon

11/27 - 30

Thanksgiving Recess

Week 13: 12/2	Tuesday	Oral presentations with discussion	Email an abstract of your final paper to the whole class at least one day before your team's presentation
12/4	Thursday	Oral presentations with discussion	Give your printed critique to paper's author and to me when you serve as discussant
Week 14: 12/9	Tuesday	Oral presentations with discussion	Final paper: Email to me the

12/11 Thursday Final class meeting

revised and polished version of your final paper by two days after your oral presentation

Email to me your self-appraisal note: a brief statement on your own strengths and weaknesses as a writer and speaker now that the semester is over

READING MEMOS

[This description is loosely adapted from a 1996 syllabus by Stephen Kulis, Arizona State University.]

Reading memos are short essays limited to no more than two, typewritten, double-spaced pages, which are intended to help focus your reactions to the readings and to facilitate discussion of the readings. While your reading memos may include “personal” reactions, you should be willing to share them with others in the class.

Reading memos should be a creative response to the reading(s), not simply a rehash or summary of them. For instance, you might:

- Identify a claim in a reading that you dispute, and explain why you disagree with the logic or the facts of the claim.
- Describe a major point of disagreement between two of the assigned readings.
- Pose an interesting unanswered question and show how it follows from the reading.
- Suggest a method for resolving an issue raised by the readings.
- Describe a current event or news item that is an excellent example of an idea in the readings. Show how the example embodies or illustrates the author's idea.
- Show how something in the reading connects to “real” life, your own or someone else's.
- Show how something in the reading connects to information you have located on another community organizing effort , perhaps from a web site.
- Write a poem or a story or a dialogue which captures your reaction to the reading.

Obviously, a variety of reading memo formats are possible. You might be more comfortable using a “traditional” formal paper format, with thesis statement plus discussion plus conclusion, or you might want to experiment with other forms. I encourage you to experiment!

I will read reading memos primarily for content, focusing on such issues as the clarity, insightfulness, and persuasiveness of your ideas, and the extent to which they focus on our reading and effectively incorporate material from the readings. I won't grade them formally, with a letter grade, but I will record a “check” for good memos, a “plus” for particularly insightful or intriguing memos, a “minus” for memos which reflect poor effort, and a “zero” for missing memos. I will consider these reading memos part of the class discussion part of your course grade.

Advice on Writing Available on the Internet

Grinnell College Writing Lab:

<http://www.grinnell.edu/writinglab>

Purdue University Writing Center:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

Southeastern Louisiana University Writing Center Handouts:

<http://www.selu.edu/Academics/Depts/WritingCenter/handouts.htm>