P11.2106: Introduction to Community Organizing: 
How to Make Change Happen

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has. 
Margaret Mead

Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service
New York University

Winter, 2010
Monday January 11 – Thursday January 14  9:00 A.M.- 3:00 P.M.
Friday January 15    9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Professor David M. Elcott
Email: David.elcott@nyu.edu
Office: Puck 3068
Phone: 212-992-9894    mobile: 914-391-7503
Office Hours: immediately before or after class each day

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Introduction to Community Organizing is for those who could imagine running national or local advocacy organizations that make change happen or anyone who wants to understand the art of community organizing. It will provide an overview of and training in contemporary community organizing practice in the United States. This includes defining what community organizing is and identifying its value base; exploring the strategies, tactics and activities of organizing; and thinking about marketing, language and evaluation. We also will examine the transformations of civic engagement and voluntary associations in the United States and the impact of these transformations on the ways Americans organize and advocate for change.

But there is a larger lesson here: The skills of community organizing – listening, finding areas of consensus and building on that consensus, finding ways to make change happen – are skills that can be applied to all professional and life settings. Through readings, class activities, cases studies, speakers and reflection, students will examine skills and techniques for effective organizing, including building a membership base, developing ordinary people as community leaders and running member-led issue campaigns. Students will also have the opportunity to reflect on and strengthen their own skills as community organizers and advocates.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: During this week, we will work to:
• Distinguish community organizing from other approaches to addressing problems in communities.
• Examine the essential concepts of power – what it is, how it is used and how groups and communities expand and strengthen their political power through organizing – and consider how to apply this learning.
• Consider how changes in civic engagement and voluntary associations impact community organizing and grassroots mobilization.
• Determine how to identify and engage community members who will get involved in organizing campaigns and how to support their participation in decision making processes.
• Address the unique leadership skills that make for successful community organizing.
• Differentiate between the problems that affect communities and the issues around which communities organize, viewing social, economic and political problems from an organizer’s perspective.
• Learn about and apply principles of communication, marketing and branding to community organizing in general and specifically to the development and implementation of issue campaigns.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS INCLUDE:
1. Careful preparation for and serious involvement in all seminar sessions. This means reading the materials and thinking about the topic before the session. Having said that, because this is an intensive course, I realize you may not be able to handle all the reading. Try your best so that in class, you will be citing from the works that I assigned. In your reading, you are asked to:
   o Question the significance of the topic and the analyses you read – is the methodology solid; does the analysis comport with the results?
   o Search for what biases (and there are always biases) affect the choice of subject, data and analysis.
   o Check yourself out: In what ways do the evidence and analyses conform to your own experience and assessments, and in what ways do they challenge them?
   o Consider what institutional and organizational implications can be drawn from the readings, and what types of leadership responses would be most productive.
   o Think about what you learn as a leader and manager, policy analyst and community builder.
2. Class participation is crucial and the quality and thoughtfulness of your involvement will be reflected in your final grade. If speaking in public is difficult for you, please come to see me early on.
3. Assume leadership in class activities (alone or as part of a team) – there will be many opportunities for you to experiment with your own organizing skills.
4. Students will choose a reading, a quote or something said by one of the speakers each of the first four days that seems powerful, meaningful and/or problematic and then write a one page analysis after each of those days. This analysis, while reflecting rigorous and careful reading, allows you to explore what excites you intellectually and how you imagine applying what you read to professional areas that interest you. These four one-pagers should be submitted the day following the session (that means you will hand in these one-pagers on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday).
5. For the last session, you will prepare a plan for a grass-roots advocacy campaign or project as part of a team on an issue you consider to be significant for which community organizing could be effective. This means locating the challenge that must be faced, imagining the stakeholders and the conflicting issues, researching the topic, analyzing models that have succeeded or failed and developing one aspect of a community or organizational campaign or advocacy effort. Because the course is so intensive, do not try to accomplish too much in this design – let it be focused and
smaller in scope. The design will be presented as a group to the entire class the last day, accompanied by an outline form written description. The design can (and will most likely by necessity, given the shortness of the timeframe) be low-fidelity: You obviously do not have the time to develop a project the way you would if you were in the field, so write only enough to efficiently and clearly present your issue and provide pathways to address the questions that arise on the subject. Additional pages for the sake of volume are not a value here.

6. Please submit all written assignments electronically (hard copy as well, if you choose).
7. Your grade will reflect your participation in class sessions, your thoughtful planning and facilitation of a part of one session, your four one-page analyses and your final group design. The combination thus reflects your analytic skills, your ability to cogently present and also participate in discussions, and your ability to link your study to anticipate future community building.

Blackboard:
1. Much of the reading, many announcements, class related documents and other useful class information will be posted to the class Blackboard site at http://classes.nyu.edu/ so make sure to check that our regularly.
2. Also, check your NYU email regularly for any other announcements.
3. You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader in order to view some of the materials. Make sure that you have it installed.

Readings:
1. Please get Saul Alinsky’s Rules for Radicals, N.Y.:Vintage Books, 1989 because it is the Bible on the subject, used by radicals on the left and right and everyone in between. Also, Michael Gecan, Going Public: An Organizer’s Guide to Citizen Action (Anchor Books, 2005) is the next generation. You can get them both used on Amazon very cheap if you order in advance. Over the first part of winter break, read as much as you can. You will be able to engage more and feel less pressured during the week of class.
2. Everything else will be available on Blackboard or on the Internet as noted. Otherwise, books will be placed on reserve in the library.

Academic Integrity
As a professional, you will need to use many resources that have been developed, authored and/or organized by others. Making great use of the work of others is a valuable professional tool – originality is not axiomatically a virtue. Honoring the hard work of those who prepared what you borrow and use is an issue of integrity. That lesson begins in your academic work. To refresh yourself on the rules of academic integrity, see https://wagner.nyu.edu/current/policies/
COURSE SESSIONS:

Day I  Monday, January  11, 2010

UNIT I  Morning Session
Introduction and Overview.
Students will refresh or acquire the basic vocabulary that is critical to community-organizer training such as: deep listening and collaborative skills, standing on the balcony and turning up the heat, dialogue and debate, SWOT and other strategic-change models, and identifying techniques and “killer phrases” people use to block change.

We also will explore the ways that Americans organize, the web of relationships and a network of associations that provide significant benefits of social capital, personal meaning and tribal affiliation well beyond the confines of any particular institution. What roles do voluntary associations and social capital derived from participation in voluntary associations play in fostering civic engagement in the context of American democracy? Of particular interest is whether voluntary associations, the core of American public service commitment, demand participatory behavior in a world moving from a place in time to virtual associations no longer dependent on geography. The core questions:

- What impact will the shifts in the ways Americans participate as active citizens have on grassroots mobilization and community organizing?
- What is community organizing and how it is different from other approaches to addressing community problems.

In anticipation of this session, list all your voluntary associations and bring the list to class.

Readings:

- Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life*, Univ of Oklahoma Press, 2003, chapter 6 “What We Have Lost.”
- Minieri, J. *Tools for Radical Democracy*. Introduction - Chapter 2;
- Alinsky, S. *Rules for Radicals*, The Purpose; A Word About Words;

UNIT 2  Afternoon Session  Monday, January  11, 2010
Power and the Community Organizer
We will focus on a definition of power and the ways that power is used in the world of community organizing. In this context, we will begin to explore the role of an organizer and begin to assemble the qualities and skills that are crucial for a successful organizer.
Guest speaker: Benjamin Cokelet founded the Project on Organizing, Development, Education, and Research (PODER) in 2008. PODER is a corporate accountability firm whose mission is to strengthen democracy and development in Latin America.

Readings:
- Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, chapter on Tactics, pg. 125
- The Fishtank (power point), AFL-CIO Solidarity Center
- Women Organizing Women: How Do We Rock the Boat Without Getting Thrown Overboard
- David Cohen, Margo Hittleman and Jennifer Dodge, Reflections on Social Justice Organizing and Leadership, RCLA (not yet published), NYU

For Tuesday: Choose a quote that speaks powerfully to you (download from the Quotes on Blackboard for Tuesday)

Also For Tuesday: Fill out self-assessment survey (download from Blackboard for Session II)

Day II Tuesday, January 12, 2010

UNIT 3 Morning Session
Engaging A Community
Who are the stakeholders, where do we find them and how do we engage communities and work with new constituencies? We will look at various recruitment techniques and methods to get people involved, as well as how to build coalitions. As part of this session, we will also consider the assumptions people make when they meet others (think about race, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual identity, nationality) and pose the question: “How does a community organizer create community and coalitions out of diversity?”

Readings:
- Minieri, J. Tools for Radical Democracy. Chapters 3-4;
- Alinsky, S. Rules for Radicals. The Education Of An Organizer; In the Beginning
- Smock, K. Democracy in Action. Introduction, pp. 3-34.
- RCLA Leadership for a Changing World Program publications:
  - Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities
  - Don’t Just Do Something, Sit There

UNIT 4 Afternoon Session Tuesday, January 12, 2010
Developing Community Leaders
The first task is to identify potential leaders. The second is to convince them that they are leaders and should take on responsibilities. We will examine the types of training models you can use to support leaders to run their own campaigns and organizations.

Readings:
Day III  Wednesday, January 13, 2010

UNIT 5  Morning Session
Identifying Issues and Strategies for Organizing

How do we distinguish between problems and issues, something that often gets in the way of effective organizing and successful change? We will develop techniques on how to do effective research and power analysis with community members toward establishing communal and/or organizational goals. We will learn effective narrative skills on “how to tell the story.” Based on a clarified mission, we will work on the skills of choosing target, strategy and implementation options.

Readings:

- Kristina Smock, Democracy in Action, Chapter 7
- Sen, R. Stir it Up. Chapter 5
- Minieri, J. Tools for Radical Democracy, chapters 7-9
- Elcott and Rosenthal, Engaging America: Unit VI
- RCLA: Social Change Leadership from the Inside (Overview: pp. 7 and 8; Integrating Culture and Values to Support Collective Action: pp. 24-37)

UNIT 6  Afternoon Session  Wednesday, January 13, 2010
Reach Out: The Art of Building Partnerships and Coalitions

Leading "without easy answers" often requires eliciting the collaboration of groups, organizations and constituencies that speak different languages (literally and figuratively) and that have never cooperated in the past. This includes ethnic and immigrant communities, religious communities, groups divided by class, race or geography, particularly significant in urban areas. We almost always need partners to be effective and partnership is hard work. How can we partner with other groups using a model of shared
power and equitable decision-making and problem-solving? Are we prepared to address dynamic
tensions that will be inherent in our partnerships? Joint initiatives often are great ways to deepen
partnerships. We therefore need to be mindful of structures and processes that can minimize conflict
and maximize our individual contributions. Thinking win/win, we can create programs that advance
our advocacy agenda while deepening relationships with important allies

Readings:

- Sen, R. **Stir it Up.** Chapter 7 and Intro XLIX-LV
- Minieri, J. **Tools for Radical Democracy.** Chapters 14
- RCLA Leadership for a Changing World Program
  - Lynn Stephen, et. al, **Building Alliances, A Leadership for a Changing World**
    collaborative ethnography

Speakers: Cidra M. Sebastien, co-director, The Brotherhood/Sister Sol, and her coalition building
students

For Thursday: Choose a quote that speaks powerfully to you (download from **Quotes** on Blackboard
for Thursday)

Day IV Thursday, January 14, 2010

UNIT 7 Morning Session
**Getting the Message Cross: Communication, Marketing and Branding**
What if you call for a grassroots community advocacy campaign and nobody comes? The reasons may
not be apathy but a failure to move effectively from vision to implementation. At the core of an
effective implementation strategy is branding and marketing. While corporations may have millions to
invest in marketing and branding, community organizers and grassroots organizations generally have to
work with less. Yet we have many cases of successful grassroots campaigns that were smart in their use
of networking, media presence and on-line activity. Here is our chance to learn techniques and skills
that can be applied in a wide range of professional settings.

Readings:

- George Lakoff “Don’t Think of an Elephant” (preface and Chapter 1)
- Stuart Himmelfarb Power Point

Speaker: Alan Jenkins, executive director of The Opportunity Agenda, a communications, research
and advocacy organization with the mission of building the national will to expand opportunity in
America

UNIT 8 Afternoon Session Thursday, January 14, 2010
**Determining Success: Funding Proposals, Evaluation and Other Assessment Criteria**
There is an additional skill to acquire, for constant self-evaluation (personal and institutional) demands are ubiquitous and come in a variety of ways – 360 degree personal/professional evaluations, group assessments, responses to funding proposals, donor and government driven evaluations, media scrutiny, successful or failed elections and advocacy campaigns. Community organizers and their organizations often feel that providing proposals and delivering evaluation assessments negatively affects their capacity to do the work that needs to be done. Yet evaluation is a crucial tool, allowing organizations and individuals to know where they are going and whether they are on track or, if not, to change course as needed. We will try to understand what funders look for in proposals and evaluations, and provide feedback loops and analytic techniques that allow for serious but not debilitating methods of evaluation.

Readings:

**Speaker**: Talia Milgrom-Elcott, Program Officer in Urban Education, Carnegie Corporation, focusing on human capital and data and accountability

**For Friday**: Choose a quote that speaks powerfully to you (download from **Quotes** on Blackboard for Friday)

**Late Afternoon Session**:
Small groups will develop a grass roots advocacy plan that will be presented on Friday to the class (see below).

**Friday, January 15, 2010**

**Running a Community Organizing Advocacy campaign**
Each group will develop a community member-led grassroots project or advocacy plan of their choosing that will offer a clear mission, a narrative, methods of assessment, potential stakeholders, a strategy to achieve their objectives and ultimate goal, and examples of implementation. These will be presented in class and provide the resource for assessing what has been learned during the week. Ben Cokelet will join me in helping make the most of your presentations.

As you prepare, you may want to consider some of the following questions:
- What is the problem experienced by members of the community?
- What is the issue in the campaign (the solution to the problem)?
- Who are the stakeholders: the constituents affected by the issue, the leaders of the campaign (describe some of their characteristics and/or positions), the potential opposition, the allies?
- What are the roles of any professional organizers or staff? How is their role different from that of other stakeholders and how will they carry out their roles?
who is the specific person or people, organization or governmental body target of the campaign?
how will you brand and market this campaign?
what strategies does the campaign use? what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?
what are the specific demands that would fulfill the mission and meet the goals?
describe in as much detail as possible some key action or actions of the campaign, such as a mass accountability session with a public official, a public demonstration, a media or email campaign, or whatever actions flow from the strategy.
what kinds of choices has the organization faced in developing, planning and implementing this campaign? how can members, leaders, and staff address these choices?
how would you assess the effectiveness of this campaign, according to the goals of community organizing (such as building a base of power, winning concrete demands)?
A Limited Bibliography:


Sen, R., **Stir it U: Lessons in Community Organizing and Advocacy,** San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, 2003.


Annotated Bibliographies:
Additional extensive, annotated bibliographies about community organizing are available as library reserves on Blackboard. See the following:

Smock, Kristina. Bibliography
Szakos, Kristen. What Organizers Read And Watch; Where Organizers Work
Welton, Nina. Resources
Brown, Michael. Bibliography and Other Resources

Online Resources:

www.comm.org (Articles; queries; discussions about organizing; national job listings.)

www.citylimits.org (Under-the-radar news items; event announcements; listings for social change jobs, primarily in New York City.)

www.fcyo.org (see Resources: Occasional Papers Series. A series of reports about youth organizing – origins; connections with youth development; regional applications.)

www.midwestacademy.com and www.ctwo.org (The Midwest Academy in Chicago and the Center for Third World Organizing in Oakland – National listings for organizer trainings and social change jobs.)