



Leadership and Social Transformation: SPARKING SOCIAL CHANGE

PADM-GP 2186

Spring 2020

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Meets: Tuesday, 6:45-8:25PM in Room 125, 60 Fifth Avenue (between 12th/13th)

Office hours: Tuesday 3-5PM and by appointment

Audience and enrollment. This course is for graduate students interested in how large-scale, transformative social change happens and how it can be sparked and shaped in positive ways. We will have a particular focus on strategies for reducing inequality or significantly mitigating its effects on human dignity, democracy and the environment. ***The course is designed primarily for students in the Law, Stern and Wagner schools and is capped at 30 students.*** But space permitting, the course is open to other students (please email the instructor).

Scope and Approach. From climate risk to extreme and durable social inequality, from entrenched social conflict to debates about AI and other technologies, change makers face complex challenges and exciting opportunities. And contrary to earlier claims, new technologies have not so much expanded the space for social change as transformed the landscape on which it gets defined, contested and championed in each generation—while posing new risks too.

We will focus on the role of change makers, strategy, and context in shifting big systems. The course explores how social actors in a range of positions, using a range of platforms and tools, work to conceptualize, animate and scale change, often through (a) cultural beliefs and norms, (b) markets and (c) public policy reform. We will synthesize an analytic framework and apply it to a diverse set of real-world cases of change happening — and often change resisted or redirected. And you will analyze your own chosen case in depth, in a small team, and develop recommendations. The course draws on a range of perspectives, for example social movements, social innovation and entrepreneurship, the politics of the policy process, impact litigation, moral philosophy, the long-run interplay of culture and institutions analyzed by sociology and other social sciences, paradigm shift, systems theory, strategic management and organizational development, media and information studies, and political economy.

In the Curriculum. The course complements other courses in leadership (including a very different course taught, in other semesters, under the same course number at Wagner) as well as more specialized courses on tools for creating change, from negotiation and policy analysis

to public interest law, strategic management and organizational development, impact investment, social entrepreneurship, marketing, and policy advocacy and civic organizing.

Course Objectives

Much valuable learning can be thought of as either *acquiring knowledge* (what you know that you didn't before) or *building capability* (what you can do that you couldn't before) or both. By the end of the course,

1. (Know) You will have a more critical, well-rounded and historically informed *understanding* of how social change gets defined and pursued;
2. (Do: Diagnostic) You will be able to *extract lessons* from varied cases of social change in progress, of setbacks or failures, and of specific kinds of change initiatives—questioning conventional wisdom and sensationalist portrayals of whether and how change came about or what was at stake; and
3. (Do: Generative) You will have a basic to intermediate, practiced mastery of the tools for defining social change goals, theories of action and theories of change to achieve those goals at scale, frameworks for gauging progress, and combining—into integrated strategies—multiple approaches to change, such as turning disparate like-minded actors into purposeful fields or movements, organizing and mobilizing stakeholders to advocate, shifting public opinion, engaging investors and public officials, developing new products or program interventions as proof points, producing and disseminating new knowledge about cause and effect, building broader coalitions to influence multiple centers of decision making power, and more.
4. (Do: Lifelong learning) You will have familiarity with, and a critical appreciation for, bodies of actionable knowledge as well as learning experiences that are out there and available for you, well beyond the limits of the course.

Requirements, Grading and Expectations

The course is centered on active learning. There are no lectures in the traditional sense, though we will have brief presentations of key concepts. Most class time will be devoted to case-method discussion, which is relatively Socratic (the instructor is posing questions and so are you) and applies concepts to real-world cases we have read or viewed. This is a demanding form of learning, because it does not lend itself to spectating and because it depends on your preparing the material effectively to participate actively in each and every class session.

Beyond class time and prep, the assignments focus on developing your mastery of core concepts and practicing the application of those concepts to real-world issues, players and choices (i.e., the same process we'll practice in class each week through the case discussions). There is one individual assignment and one capstone team assignment with several parts

(workshop-style meetings and submissions). As much as possible, we will work to match you with students who share your interests but bring different professional and academic backgrounds—whether in public policy, business, law or another degree program—to the work. See below.

Three (3) main course requirements, with written submissions at our NYU Classes course website, where you will also find detailed instructions for each assignment:

- a. **Class Participation** (30% of your grade): My evaluation will focus on the quality and consistency of your participation, not the amount of “airtime” you had.
- b. **Problem Set** (25% of your grade): The capstone for part A of the course, this open-book assignment is a set of word problems that ask you to briefly apply core concepts to an argument or case situation and write up your answers clearly and concisely, within word limits.
- c. **Team Project** (45% of your grade): The capstone for parts B and C, this assignment will challenge you to work with two other students to analyze a problem and develop a change strategy for affecting it at scale (for systemic change). Phases: You will prepare and submit a “first look” framing of the problem (no more than 1-2 double-spaced pages, 10% of grade) and then an interim memo (4-6 pages, 10% of grade), meet with the instructor to “workshop” that write-up, then lead a portion of a class session (in workshop mode) to invite feedback from peers, and then submit a final paper offering analysis and recommendations (about 15-25 pages, 25% of grade).

Mapped against the course learning objectives:

<i>Graded Element</i>	<i>Course Objective Advanced</i>
Problem Set	1, 2
Team Project	1, 2, 3, 4
Class Participation (Discussions)	1, 2, 3, 4

Extensions for assignment deadlines: Will be granted only in case of emergency or special circumstances. Late submissions without extensions will be penalized.

Absenteeism, punctuality and in-class conduct: You are expected to attend all class sessions and arrive on time. If you have to miss a class for unavoidable reasons, contact the instructor as soon as possible, and contact another member of the class to get what was covered. Missing classes without excuse will affect your class participation grade, and missing team meetings or other project-related obligations will likewise affect your grade on the team assignment.

Tardiness, disruptive behavior, and using a cell phone, computer or other device in class, for tasks unrelated to class, are not acceptable and will likewise affect your grade.

Academic integrity: All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by [Wagner's Academic Code](#). Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated, and students in this class are expected to report violations to me. If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with me.

Feedback versus evaluation: Unlike some instructors, I focus more on providing intensive and clear feedback (coaching) than on evaluation (grading) per se. Though I work hard to grade fairly, feedback is the bigger source of your learning. This is especially true in the context of the written assignments, but I am also happy to meet and discuss your class participation and work together to strengthen it. I want you to be an active, engaged participant, for your own sake and that of your classmates, and one who feels supported to be that in your own best way.

Moses Center for Students with Disabilities: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities \(CSD\) website](#) and click the "Get Started" button. You can also call or email CSD (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Policy on Religious Holidays: [NYU's Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](#) states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Please notify me in advance of religious holidays that might coincide with due dates, to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.

Wellness: [NYU's Wellness Exchange](#) has extensive student health and mental health resources. A private hotline (212-443-9999) is available 24/7 that connects students with a professional who can help them address day-to-day challenges as well as other health-related concerns.

Required Materials

Most course materials will be available at the online course website (NYU Classes) or on the public web. Some of the most important material is in the read-ahead session guides, which offer a framing narrative, reading tips and questions to guide your preparation for each week's class.

These texts are also on reserve in hardcopy at Bobst Library and available from booksellers, often in print and e-book form as well (the hyperlinks lead to free downloads):

Green, Duncan. 2016. [How Change Happens](#) (New York: Oxford University Press). One of our core readings, this is an excellent introduction to creating change at scale, using a

“power and systems approach.” The author is a renowned strategist and thought leader in international development, he works for an international NGO, and most of the cases are set in the global South. The entire text is available free, as a PDF online.

Weiss-Wolf, Jennifer and Jeanine Plant-Chirlin, editors. 2015. [*Legal Change: Lessons from America's Social Movements*](#) (New York: Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law). Focused on the U.S., this is a collection of thoughtful essays on the relationship between change strategies centered on the courts, legislatures, and public opinion and societal norms. Its main focus is on fundamental *rights*, such as voting, marriage equality, reproductive choice, and fairness in criminal justice—not a much broader set of problems, such as economic inequality or the climate crisis, that include challenging distributional questions.

Briggs, Xavier de Souza. 2008. *Democracy as Problem Solving: Civic Capacity in Communities across the Globe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press). This is about creative social change happening across government, civil society and markets, in cities in the U.S., Brazil, India, and South Africa—and what those developments imply about the active use of democracy as a tool for making the world better, not just steering government or sharing formal political power. It defines problem solving as the effective combination of learning and bargaining to change important outcomes and looks at the tricky interplay of promoting empowerment along with accountability for measurable results. [Download intro chapter for free here.](#)

Cels, Sanderjin, Jorrit de Jons, and Frans Nauta. 2012. *Agents of Change: Strategies and Tactics for Social Innovation* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press). This is an excellent introduction to the pursuit of innovation in the public sector, especially in the delivery of core government services. It looks in depth at concepts such as defining a value proposition, assessing and building support, and ensuring the operating capacity to execute delivery innovations, which are often controversial and disruptive, at scale. [Download intro chapter for free here.](#)

Schedule: Session Topics and Cases plus Key Assignment Dates

We will begin with foundational concepts, then move to specific approaches and tools—using case discussions all along the way—and then welcome guests for “live” case discussion. We will wrap up the semester focused on the capstone assignment, with a series of workshopping sessions in which student teams will present their analyses-in-progress and invite feedback.

NOTE: The schedule for this new course is subject to some changes in the case material and other contents, both when and how they are used. Details, including required reading, videos, or other media are on NYU Classes and described in the session guides for each class meeting.

1. (January 28th) **Course introduction:** What is the work and how will we do it? In-class video case: Climate justice in the global South.
2. (February 4th) **Foundational concepts (A):** A power and systems approach. *Mini-cases in How Change Happens.*
3. (February 11th) **Foundational concepts (B):** Finding leverage points to shift systems. *Case: Marriage equality and the broader movement for LGBT rights and inclusion in America.*
4. (February 18th) **Approaches and Tools (A):** Building and renewing sectors or fields. *Mini-cases (Green Revolution, public broadcasting, financial inclusion) in The Foundation: A Great American Secret, How Private Wealth is Changing the World plus media excerpts.*
5. (February 25th) **Approaches and Tools (B):** Building movements and coalitions. *Case: Advancing worker justice and labor standards in a low-wage economy.*

March 2nd: Problem set questions distributed, due March 12th

6. (March 3rd) **Approaches and Tools (C):** Shifting the dominant narrative. *Case: #MeToo.*
7. (March 10th) **Approaches and Tools (D):** Linking the inside and outside games. *Case: Winning federal civil rights reforms in America in the 1960s & Advancing social and economic rights in post-apartheid South Africa.*

March 12th: Problem set due

8. (March 24th) **Synthesis (E):** Combining and sequencing the approaches, linking the inside and outside games. *Case: Decarceration (or: unwinding mass incarceration) in America.*

March 27th: First-Look Problem Framing due from teams

9. (March 31st) **Synthesis (F):** Scaling and renewing a “change sector.” *Case: Microfinance in the global South.*
10. (April 7th) **Synthesis (G):** Combining and sequencing the approaches, creating and entrenching a dominant system model. *Case: Making neoliberalism the dominant ideology and model for market economies.*

April 10th: Team problem memo due

11. (April 14th) **Advanced cases with guests (A):** *Case: From the global Internet rights movement to launching the field of public interest technology.*

Week of April 20th: Team meetings with Xav (workshopping your memo and approach)

12. (April 21st) **Advanced cases with guests (B):** *Case:* Campaign first or narrative change first?
The Narrative Initiative lands in the Midwest.
13. (April 28th) **Workshopping team cases/projects (1st of 2):** Read student team memos to prep for discussion
14. (May 5th) **Final class:** Workshopping part (2nd of 2) and course synthesis

May 19th: Final team papers due in lieu of final exam