



NYU

**ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE**

EXEC-GP/PADM-GP 2106.001

Organizing for Change: An Introduction to Community Organizing

Spring 2022

*(*subject to change as needed)*

**“It always seems impossible, until it’s done.”
Nelson Mandela, Former President of South Africa**

*“The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is – it’s to imagine what is
possible”.*

Bell Hooks

Instructor Information

- " Professor Janvieve Williams Comrie
- " Email: janvieve.williamscomrie@nyu.edu
- " Mobile: 404-610-2807
- " Office hours: by appointment
- " Class Sessions: Tuesdays, 4:55pm-6:35pm EST
- " Class Location:

Course Description

Organizing for Change will provide an overview and introduction to the fundamentals of organizing for community and systemic change. We will explore concepts such as what power, change, winning, and collaboration are and we will compare, contrast different forms of participatory community organizing and explore the linkages between community organizing and social movement building. We will probe the moral values and priorities imbedded in different organizing approaches and cultivate concrete skills in active listening, leadership development, strategic analysis, campaign design, research, coalition-building, mobilization, design and use of non-violent direct action, communication (including use of symbols and art), assessment,

role of funders, and, importantly, monitoring and sustaining change.

Through readings, class activities, speakers, reflections, and a final organizing project, students will emerge with an enlarged vocabulary and set of models for organizing, the skills to catalyze and build organizations, and the ability to design campaigns to achieve and sustain change.

Course and Learning Objectives

1. Understand different approaches to organizing and the role of the organizer within them.
2. Examine concepts of power – what it is, how it is used, and how groups and communities expand and strengthen their political power through organizing.
3. Consider how changes in civic engagement, voluntary associations, and cultural/political landscape impact community organizing and grassroots mobilization.
4. Determine how to identify and engage community members, develop leaders, and support participatory decision-making processes
5. Differentiate between problems that affect communities and issues around which communities can be organized.
6. Learn how to develop a campaign, message effectively, mobilize and evaluate.
7. Explore various ways to ensure gains that are won are implemented and monitored.
8. Understand the significance of non-violent direct actions, why they are used and how to design and carry out large-scale, multi-day engagements.
9. Learn how to build and manage coalitions of diverse partners toward a common aim.
10. Examine the funding landscape and different approaches to resource cultivation to promote social change.

Learning Assessment Table

Course Learning Objective Covered	Corresponding Assignment Title
#1 - # 10	Assigned Readings Notecards Post-class, one-page reflection papers Final reflection, three-page – synthetic.
#6	Final Project, Peer Reflection

Course Requirements

1. Careful preparation for and serious involvement in all seminar sessions. This means reading the materials and thinking about the topic before the session. In your reading, you are asked to:
 - a. **Question** the significance of the topic and the analyses you read – is the methodology solid; does the analysis comport with the results? Search for what biases (and there are always biases) affect the choice of subject, data, and analysis.
 - b. **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?
 - c. **Consider** what institutional and organizational implications can be drawn from the readings, and what types of leadership responses would be most productive.
 - d. **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 talk to 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. **By Thursday January 27th, please submit a bio** (no more than one page) that is suitable for sharing with the class using the Brightspace Discussion Forum. Please take a look at your classmates' bios before our second class on Tuesday February 1st. Your bio should include your name, your current profession or field of interest and a little bit about yourself. Let us know what stirred you to learn about organizing and what is one social change or policy that has impacted your life and how, as well as what you hope to gain from this class.
5. Students will choose an assigned reading, something said by one of the speakers, a lingering doubt, or meaningful interaction from class following each session that seems powerful and/or problematic and then write **a one-page, single-space analysis following the first – fifth classes.** This analysis, while reflecting rigorous and careful reading, allows you to explore what excites you intellectually and how you imagine applying what you read. Each **paper must also reference at least two of the readings for the class. These five one pagers should be submitted the Friday following the Tuesday class.** Please, please put your name on the paper itself and in

the file name!

6. For the last session, you will prepare a plan for a grassroots advocacy campaign as part of a team on an issue you consider to be significant for which community organizing could be effective. You will choose a project that most interests you from among case studies provided. You'll have chosen your case study by early March allowing time for you to plan and develop your team's campaign plan. 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, as part of the in-class presentation, dramatizing one aspect of the organizing process. On the last day, your team will present to the class a summary of your campaign, accompanied by an outline from a written description, and then a dramatization of one point in the organizing process. These are not exhaustive campaign plans (no more than 5 pages, single spaced), but rather informed designs which efficiently and clearly present your issue and provide pathways to address the questions that arise on the subject.
7. You will have until **Tuesday May 3rd at 11:55pm**, to offer a final reflection on the course and your experience what you learned, what you wished you would have learned, what you plan to explore, and what readings or experiences had a particular impact. This is a synthetic paper – please do not cut and paste from earlier weeks' reflections. This paper should be **no more than three-four pages single-spaced maximum**; additional pages for the sake of volume are not of value here. **You must also reference and cite at least five of the readings** for the course.

Please submit all written assignments electronically via Brightspace.

Grading

Your grade will reflect your participation in class sessions, your thoughtful planning and facilitation of the activities in the class sessions, your five one-page analyses, your five note cards, your final group design and presentation, and your final reflection. 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.

Assignments are due as listed below. For the one-page reflections you'll write following every class, they are due on the Wednesday following the Saturday class at 11:55pm.

Late assignments: We all have emergencies and unexpected difficulties. If you will not be able to hand in your assignment on time, please email me at janvieve.williamscomrie@nyu.edu to discuss options. If your assignment is 1-3 days late and you did not communicate with me, your grade will be diminished by 1 numeric

grade (e.g. an excellent paper that would have received a 4 will receive a 3). If it is 4-7 days late, it will be diminished by 2 grades. If it is more than 7 days late it will be diminished by 3 grades. Please communicate with me if something unexpected arises or if you know in advance that due to work or some other situation you cannot deliver on time. I am committed to working with you, but it is your responsibility to reach out.

Individual Class Participation (20%). You are expected to complete all readings in advance of the class, to attend all classes, and to thoroughly engage in discussions and activities. The use of electronic devices for purposes other than taking notes is not appropriate. Peer reflections on your participation in the teams for the final project will be factored into this grade.

Notecards (5%). In preparation for each class (except the last) you will prepare a notecard/index card with (a) one salient quote from the week's readings/video (b) the significance of the quote in relationship to the broader argument of the reading/video (c) a specific question about the quote. You should take a photo and submit them via NYU Brightspace to the appropriate Notecard folder in the Discussions section. These are graded Pass/Fail. The idea here is that notecards can only contain a little bit of info on them! If you don't want to put it on a notecard and would prefer to type on a page, that's fine, but keep it short – as if you WERE writing on a notecard! ☺

One-Page, Single-spaced Reflections in 12-point Times New Roman Font, (25%).

After each of the first five classes, (not the sixth or seventh) you will choose an assigned reading, something said by one of the speakers, a lingering doubt, or meaningful interaction from class following each session that seems powerful and/or problematic and then write a one-page, single-space analysis paper. This is a tightly written piece – you can't say everything; focus on responding to one aspect/argument that made you intellectually curious or "hit home." For example, the synopsis will likely be one to two sentences. Writing tightly is challenging and it is a critical organizing skill. If you're not used to it, don't worry, you'll get lots of practice in this class! See below for the reflections' grading rubric. And please take a moment and read the "paper guidance" document that will walk you through examples.

Final Project (30%). Following the third class, you'll be notified by email that the case studies for the final project will be opened on Brightspace. **You'll have the opportunity to read these case studies and choose one case study to work on with others.** Your teams will be finalized by March 8th. The teams for each case study will work together to develop and present a community member-led grassroots organizing campaign and/or advocacy plan of your choosing that will offer a clear mission, a narrative, methods of assessment, potential stakeholders, a strategy to achieve your objectives and ultimate goal, and an ideal example of implementation and how your achievement would be sustained. These will be presented in class and provide the resource for assessing what has been learned through the course.

The final project outline and summary description are due April 12th and should be submitted via Brightspace by a designated individual from your group. Outlines should be no more than 5 pages, single spaced, 12-point font. The file name should include your group identification as well as the assignment and all team members

names should be listed on the document itself. **The class presentation will be on April 26th**, during which the entire class will discuss and provide feedback to you on your project.

Your Campaign Outline will be graded on the cogency of the overall project, the effectiveness of your power analysis, the logic and relation between the steps planned, the identification of problems or uncertainties as well as objectives, and the plan for sustaining your win. You will also be graded on your class presentation for clarity, the involvement of the class in experiencing an aspect of the organizing process, involvement of all members of the team, and response to class feedback.

For the in-class presentation, you'll want to quickly orient us to your plan (5m) and then embark on dramatizing a key moment of the organizing process. Past classes have used powerpoints, created brief videos or flyers to help in the dramatization. Your classmates become part of your dramatization. We might be community members at your first meeting or we could be divided into different constituencies that you approach for support or maybe we're the general public that you're surveying. Have fun with this!

All team members are responsible for conducting a peer assessment of each of your teammates' contributions and the quality of those contributions. This assessment is required and graded with a "checkmark" - as turned in or not turned in. **It is due Friday May 15th, at 11:55pm.**

Final Reflection (20%). Your final reflection will look back over the entire course no more than three pages maximum, in 12-point NY Times font, single spaced and refer to at least five of the readings for the course. This is an opportunity to express what you learned, what you wished you would have learned, and what you'll carry forward with you. Concision, synthesis, and insight is more important than length. **This final reflection is due Friday May 15th, at 11:55pm**, and should be submitted via Brightspace. File names should include the student's name as well as the assignment name. *You should be sure to put your name on the document itself.* The two keys for grading in this final reflection are: did you synthesize by making relevant or new connections between and among the themes of the course and did you reference and cite five sources.

Grading Rubric for All Reflection Papers

Area	1 Submitted	2 Passable	3 Good	4 Excellent
Synopsis	No synopsis of argument (s) of argument (s)	Partially accurate or incomplete synopsis of argument (s)	Good synopsis of argument(s)	Concise, clear synopsis of argument(s)
Critical engagement with quote, reading, speaker's arguments: interesting, banal, counterintuitive, confusing? Quality of data?	No real engagement with argument(s)	Partial engagement with argument(s) but reasoning faulty or incomplete	Good engagement with argument(s) with clear and sound reasoning and evidence (highlights strengths, flaws, gaps, limits or weaknesses in	Excellent Clear, systematic, engagement with argument. Provides evidence for claims about argument(s) from readings.

Area	1 Submitted	2 Passable	3 Good	4 Excellent
How would we know if they were wrong? Evidence for claim(s) about arguments?			arguments)	
Discusses application in professional area of your interest	No clear application made	Some effort at application; not clear	Clear application is made	Thoughtful and reflective application
Writing style	Not well written; Clearly not proofread; multiple grammar and spelling errors	Manageably written	Well-written; 1 or 2 minor errors.	Beautifully written; No errors.

Attendance and Lateness

Students should do their best to attend all classes and arrive on time. If you are going to be absent or late, email me as soon as possible (preferably prior to the class) to inform me. On day ONE of the semester, you should select 3 members of your class and exchange email/phone numbers. You must inform your buddies that you will be late/absent prior to class so that they know that they need to provide you notes. These are your absent buddies. When you miss a class, it is YOUR responsibility to get notes and information from one of your absence buddies. All missed assignments must be completed.

Reminder: The department requires that I take attendance. If you are going to be absent, email me as soon as possible but prior to the next class date.

Assignment Due Dates

Assignments will be posted to the “Assignments” tab of Brightspace and completed assignments should be uploaded there. File names should always include the student’s name (or the team number), the numerical date as well as the assignment name. You should also be sure to put your name on the document itself.

All assignments should be submitted via the assignments tab on NYUClasses, with the exception of your Bio which should be submitted via the forums tab and the notecards which you’ll bring with you to each class (in the case of virtual classes, you will upload an image of the notecards). All assignments are due by 11:55pm on the due date.

NYU Brightspace

1. Much of the reading, many announcements, class-related documents, and other useful class information will be posted to the NYU Brightspace site so make sure to check that regularly.
2. Also, check your NYU e-mail 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.

Required Readings

You are expected to complete all readings prior to the class session. Classes will not be repetitive of the readings, rather they will use the readings as a basis for discussion and departure. The first several classes are very heavy with reading in order to give you the broadest possible foundation quickly. We will be returning to earlier readings later in the course to recapitulate themes in a new key. Later sessions are deliberately lighter in reading so as to allow you time for planning your final project and for synthesizing what you are learning.

1. I suggest you purchase [Emergent Strategy, Shaping Change, Changing Worlds](#), by adrienne maree brown (AK Press). Many mandatory readings are from this book and it is a very useful book to have in your library. This book is also available for free in electronic format from the NYU Library using the link above.
2. All other readings will be available on NYU Brightspace 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>.

Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by [Wagner's Academic Code](#). All Wagner students have already read and signed the [Wagner Academic Oath](#). 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 of you and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with me.

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at NYU

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities \(CSD\) website](#) and click on the Reasonable Accommodations and How to Register tab or call or email CSD at (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.

NYU's Calendar 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 exams to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.

Covid-19 Requirements

Every member of our NYU community is [required to wear face coverings](#) when on NYU property or in NYU facilities, including our classroom. You must also follow the [COVID 19 Screener](#) requirements for campus and classroom access. See the [information safety and health protocols](#).

Date	Topic	Reading
January 25th	Overview of the Course, Introduction to Organizing	Class I Notecard, Readings Introduction of Emergent Strategies https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/reader.action?docID=4548573#ppg=6
January 27th (<i>no scheduled class</i>)	Please submit a bio (no more than one page) that is suitable for sharing with the class using the Brightspace Discussion Forum.	Your bio should include your name, your current profession or field of interest and a little bit about yourself. Let us know what stirred you to learn about organizing and what is one social change or policy that has impacted your life and how, as well as what you hope to gain from this class.
February 1st	The Context in Which We Organize Please take a look at your classmates' bios before our second class on Tuesday February 1st.	Reflection Paper on Class I Principles of Emergent Strategy https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/reader.action?docID=4548573#ppg=30
February 8th	Organizing from within. Jemez Principles	Class II Notecard, Readings, Social Identity Wheel Exercise https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/www.sierraclub.org/files/Pivoting-Principled-Practice-Worksheet.pdf Elements of Emergent Strategy https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/

Date	Topic	Reading
		reader.action?docID=4548573#ppg=32
February 15th	Key Concepts in Organizing	<p>Reflection Paper on Class II</p> <p>Schutz, A., and M. Sandy. <i>Collective Action for Social Change : An Introduction to Community Organizing</i>, Palgrave Macmillan US, 2011. <i>ProQuest Ebook Central</i>, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=686654. Chapter 9</p> <p>Fractals https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/reader.action?docID=4548573#ppg=35</p>
February 22nd	Organizing with a historical background	<p>Class III Notecard, Readings</p> <p>New Realities, Integrated Strategies, Stir it up : lessons in community organizing and advocacy, Rinku Sen 2003, Page 1-23</p>
March 1st		Reflection Paper on Class III
March 8th		Case Study Selection
March 22nd		
March 29th		
April 5th		
April 12th		Final project outline and summary description are due
April 19th		
April 26th	Grassroots Advocacy Campaign Presentation	
May 3rd		Three-four page course Reflection Due
May 17th	Celebration	