



NYU

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

EXEC-GP 2106/PADM-GP 2106

Community Organizing

Fall 2022

Instructor Information

- **Ashley Adams**
- **Email:** apa9916@nyu.edu
- **Office Address:**
- **Office Hours:** Wednesdays 9AM-10AM & by appointment. Email, call, or arrange a time to talk during class.
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Course Information

- **Class Meeting Times:** Saturday 2:30PM-6PM **9/17, 10/1, 10/15, 10/29, 11/12, 12/3, 12/17**
- **Class Location:** 194 Mercer Room 304

Course Objectives

This course will provide necessary tools for someone who wants to become a community organizer. We will focus on an understanding of power – from where it derives and how it is exercised. We will investigate values, self-interest, and how to engage people in action. We will explore different modes of interpersonal communication, and how to use them to build the bonds required in powerful and active organizations. We will do listening exercises, to hone this invaluable skill. We will then look at how to build a powerful, fighting organization, by learning how to create the escalating experiences of successful action necessary for challenging existing problems. We will end by exploring both existing organizations that exercise power, and by looking at the tools of personal organization necessary for an organizer to be successful in a challenging environment.

The course will chiefly rely on lectures, presentations, discussion, group work, and observations of existing organizations and actions. But we will also look at readings and movies to fuel discussion, learning, and thought.

Course Requirements:

1. **Reading and Viewing:** The readings and “viewings” are relative few and essential. Everyone is expected to be prepared by having read and reflected on all of the assignments prior to each class.
2. **Participation:** Classes are designed to be participatory. You are expected to engage in the classes with questions, answers (especially incorrect answers), and meaningful discussion in groups, one on one conversations, and in the class as a whole.

3. **Group Action:** You will need to participate in collective action of some kind – a rally, demonstration, protest, etc. (Explained in more detail below.)
4. **Group Organizing Project:** You are all expected to participate in an group organizing project, keeping track of your experiences and observations, and presenting your insights to the class as a whole, in both written and spoken form. This project can be worked on as a group or alone, as you decide. Group work is encouraged. (See below for an explanation of exactly what this project is, how to create it, and what the expectations are for completing it.)

Specific Assignments:

1. **Biographical Statement:** You are expected to submit a brief biography of yourself, including a statement about one significant exercise of power in your life. Include in this bio any significant educational or work experiences that you think are relevant to the subject of organizing or power. This statement should be no longer than two single spaced pages (one is preferred), and should be suitable for sharing with the rest of the class.
2. **Stick Figure:** Our second class will cover the importance of identifying your own self-interest. The pictorial representation of this is called a “stick figure”. One of your assignments will be drawing one for yourself and presenting it to the class.
3. **Group Organizing Project:** Organizing, as we define it, is the process of bringing people together to increase their power to fight as a group. I want you to have that experience either with an existing organization or with one you create. The appropriate project can be as simple as attaching yourself to an existing group, going to their meetings, participating in strategy discussions and decisions, joining their group actions and activities, and reporting back. Or you might take an idea or interest of your own, develop a campaign furthering that interest, and having your own group action.

You may find these groups on your own. They may be on behalf of any issue or concern, or a multi-issue group. We will spend time in our first class discussing exactly what might be an appropriate group for you to work with. I am also happy to assist you in finding an appropriate group for you. We will have time during our first session to discuss how, exactly, you are to find your appropriate group project.

4. **Group Actions:** You must participate in some group action, at least twice during the term of this course – at least once before and once after midpoint. A group action is a march, a rally, a demonstration, or some other expression of visible group activity. It may be part of your group organizing project, but it need not be. If you need help finding an appropriate group action, I will assist you. You must draft and submit an analysis of the action, including a summary of the preparation for it, the execution of it, and your evaluation of it.
5. **Journal:** You must keep a journal of your organizing project, and your learning as a whole, that both records what it is you did and what you thought about what you did. These should be kept throughout the semester; and submitted twice for evaluation: once at midpoint and once at end of the course.

Grading

Your grade will reflect your fulfillment of the specific assignments above, as well as your level of class participation. Assignments are due on the date and time indicated. Grades will be diminished for lateness. In general, I extend full credit in all areas of grading to those who fully engage in the process of the assignments.

Biographical Statement: 10%

You will be given full credit for an honest and brief biographical statement, presented at the beginning of the semester.

Stick figure: 10%

You will be given full credit for a presentation of your own individual self-interest, called a “stick figure”, presented at the second and third class.

Class participation: 30%

I want you each to ask and answer questions about the material we will cover. You will need to listen to the thoughts of others, and consider them, while also being willing to express yourself. I’m not looking for expertise or correct answers, but a willingness to be vulnerable with opinions, questions, and answers – especially if they may be incorrect. I want you to thoughtfully (and respectfully) challenge what you disagree with, even if you are not sure you are correct. And I want you to be able to consider questions about what you have stated in class. From my experience, learning takes place best when it is interactive.

Group Project and Journal: 30%

You are expected to participate in a group that engages in some organizing activity throughout the semester – something that will show you close up and give you the experience of organizing. I expect, roughly, three to five hours a week of engagement in this project. You will be assessed based on your level of participation. Did you show up for meetings and actions? Did you participate in the organizing activities of the group like petition gathering, phone calling, hand-billing, letter writing, or door-knocking?. Did you have one-on-one discussions with other participants? Did you read any background or research material that was necessary to understand or explain the organizing activity to others?

Your journal is your self-reflection on what you are observing and learning. You will receive full credit for keeping the journal, and applying the material we have discussed in class to the experiences you are having, and the self-discoveries you are making. You will not be assessed on your specific insights, or the rightness or wrongness of the lessons you drew from the experiences you had.

Action participation and analysis: 20%

I want you to get your hands dirty in at least two different actions throughout the semester. An action is some form of group engagement and event like a rally, a march, a demonstration, or a confrontational meeting involving the mobilization of group members. Ideally, these would be actions stemming from your group project, but they need not be. Just showing up is necessary and insufficient. In addition to attending these two actions, you will need to write a single page, single spaced analysis of each of the two actions, and how they furthered (or didn’t further) the interest of the group. You will be assessed based on your participation in these actions, and in the application of the work we have covered in writing your analysis.

Course Outline

Class Subject:

Class 1: Introductions, Self-Interest, and One-on-Ones

Saturday, September 17th, 2:30 PM – 6:00 PM

In this session we will meet each other, introduce each other, and learn our individual values and interests. We will learn and model effective one-on-ones, the building block of successful power organizations. We will learn to do a “stick figure” of ourselves; and explore the power of self-interest.

Class 2: Sources of Power

Saturday, October 1, 2:30 PM -6:00 PM

We will look at power – what it is, how it functions, and how it can be increased with organization. We will look at experiences you have had in your life that have affirmed or diminished your own power. We will look at the sources of power, and the attributes of powerful groups and individuals. We will participate in an exercise of bias and power; and discuss the implications of such in our organizing work.

Class 3: Increasing Power by Organizing

Saturday, October 15, 2:30 PM – 6:00 PM

This class will explore the exercise of power, and how effective organizing can help increase a group’s power. We will learn how to “Fight Like A Boxer”, and how to turn major problems into power-building fights. We will look at the methodology of experienced organizers, and study that method.

Class 4: Leadership Recruitment and Alliances

Saturday, October 29, 2:30 PM – 6:00 PM

We will look at the importance of identifying, recruiting, and training organizational leaders, and how to prepare them for action. We will learn to understand the qualities of an effective leader; and practice the skills of recruiting leaders.

Class 5: Playing Well With Others

Saturday, November 12, 2:30 PM – 6:00 PM

Does compromise and negotiation mean you are weak or strong? We will conduct roleplaying exercises to experience the use of power in our own group. We will hear of your experiences observing the exercise of power in the organizations you have been observing. We will look at positional and interest-based models for exercising power in negotiation.

Class 6: Staging Meetings and Actions

Saturday, December 3, 2:30 PM – 6:00 PM

A central part of building power is the ability to organize and stage effective meetings and actions. We will look at the ingredients of these activities as well as the method for evaluating and improving them. We will look how to stage these events for maximum public drama and impact.

Class 7: Project Review, Organizing Plans, and Self-Organization

Saturday, December 17, 2:30 PM – 6:00 PM

Effective organizing requires top-flight personal organization. Too often, organizers waste enormous amounts of time and energy because they are lacking in discipline, self-control, and self-organization.

They lead unbalanced lives. In this class you will learn how to be most effective with a good work-life balance and good self-organizational skills. We will also review your project work, and discuss specific follow up to the course work that you may wish to pursue.

Letter Grades

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

Letter Grade Points

A 4.0 points

A- 3.7 points

B+ 3.3 points

B 3.0 points

B- 2.7 points

C+ 2.3 points

C 2.0 points

C- 1.7 points

F 0.0 points

Student grades will be assigned according to the following criteria:

- (A) Excellent: Exceptional work for a graduate student. Work at this level is unusually thorough, well-reasoned, creative, methodologically sophisticated, and well written. Work is of exceptional, professional quality.
- (A-) Very good: Very strong work for a graduate student. Work at this level shows signs of creativity, is thorough and well-reasoned, indicates strong understanding of appropriate methodological or analytical approaches, and meets professional standards.
- (B+) Good: Sound work for a graduate student; well-reasoned and thorough, methodologically sound. This is the graduate student grade that indicates the student has fully accomplished the basic objectives of the course.
- (B) Adequate: Competent work for a graduate student even though some weaknesses are evident. Demonstrates competency in the key course objectives but shows some indication that understanding of some important issues is less than complete. Methodological or analytical approaches used are adequate but student has not been thorough or has shown other weaknesses or limitations.
- (B-) Borderline: Weak work for a graduate student; meets the minimal expectations for a graduate student in the course. Understanding of salient issues is somewhat incomplete. Methodological or analytical work performed in the course is minimally adequate. Overall performance, if consistent in graduate courses, would not suffice to sustain graduate status in “good standing.”
- (C/-/+) Deficient: Inadequate work for a graduate student; does not meet the minimal expectations for a graduate student in the course. Work is inadequately developed or flawed by numerous errors and misunderstanding of important issues. Methodological or analytical work performed is weak and fails to demonstrate knowledge or technical competence expected of graduate students.

- (F) Fail: Work fails to meet even minimal expectations for course credit for a graduate student. Performance has been consistently weak in methodology and understanding, with serious limits in many areas. Weaknesses or limits are pervasive.

Brightspace

All announcements, resources, and assignments will be delivered through the Brightspace site. I may modify assignments, due dates, and other aspects of the course as we go through the term with advance notice provided as soon as possible through the course website.

Academic Integrity

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 Student Accessibility

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.

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.

NYU's Wellness Exchange

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.