

rev. 1/18/05

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office hours: Wednesday 12-2 + by appointment

WMST 3590

“Theorizing Civic Engagement”

4 credit seminar. Tuesday 2:10-4pm. Call #04007

809 Altschul

In New York City, poverty, racism, inadequate education, lack of access to health care, unemployment, and a host of other problems are daily realities for many. These issues are magnified for the City's homeless, who confront a constellation of problems on a daily basis, often without access to any support networks.

At the national level, the federal government has increasingly distanced itself from the struggles facing the homeless in our city. At the community level—in neighborhoods, workplaces, non-profit organizations, and activist community groups—people continue to organize to solve the daunting problems confronting the homeless and other marginalized populations.

In this class we will explore how communities and individuals make change, whether through traditional channels such as voting and supporting political parties and candidates, or through direct action, grassroots innovations, and/or socially aware business models.

Through a combination of community-based learning, directed reflection, and theoretical readings, we will explore the different meanings of civic engagement by focusing on the multiple creative solutions homelessness advocates have developed in community organizing and conceptualizing social change.

Internships in New York City or participation in campus activism (min. 4-5 hours/week), dialogue with local leaders, and case studies will enrich our reflection upon and analysis of homelessness and related issues including: individual and community empowerment; public policy at the grassroots; the relationship between government funding and social change; communication and coalition-building across differences of race, ethnicity, gender, and class; and leadership development.

The classroom component for this course will consist of readings and multiple guest lecturers who are experts in various aspects of civic engagement and homeless advocacy and related issues in New York City.

Students enrolled in this course will also be required to participate in both the classroom component AND a civic engagement component. You will be required to participate with a related social service organization on a volunteer basis for approximately 3-4 hours per week. You will be provided with multiple possibilities that have been arranged through Barnard, and, based on your interests and the organizations' needs, we will match you up in teams for this aspect of the course.

As a term project you will create an organizational “ethnography” that analyzes the organization, its goals, structures, political organization, forms of hierarchy, and its relationship to the community it serves. This ethnography will be prepared in three parts:

- Class presentation by the team working at the organization on its own discourse: how does the organization “talk” about itself? Research for this phase will be based on content analysis of its web site, brochures, annual reports, press releases, etc. (presentations in class March 8)
- Final presentation on the organization: an analysis of the goals and self-representation of the organization, and how it actually operates. Included in this final presentation of the “ethnography” will be a discussion of the political hierarchies within the organization and in its relationships to its community, as well as the result of interviews with participants.

Our goal in this non-traditional format is to allow students to engage directly in the theories and strategies of education in multiple settings, including “hands on” experience with educational policy and strategy organizations.

Requirements for completion of the course will be as follows:

- complete the civic engagement component of the course
- 2 review papers (max. 5 pages) on your choice of class readings.
- maintain a journal of your observations about the organization within which you are working. These will be submitted for evaluation.
- 2 in-class team presentations (mid-term and final) on your civic engagement organization, its goals, strategies, and theoretical underpinnings.
- final paper approx. 10-15 pages. This will be written and referenced discussion relating to course readings and other relevant literature that describes and analyzes the organization you worked in, and that brings together aspects of the readings with your organizational experience.

PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT IF YOU DECIDE TO STAY IN THIS COURSE ALL OF THE ABOVE REQUIREMENTS MUST BE COMPLETED. The success of this non-traditional format depends upon all students’ participation.

Required books: Available at Labyrinth and on reserve in Barnard library:

Alinsky, Saul. Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals.

Bellah, Robert et al. Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life.

Skocpol, T. and Morris P. Fiorina, eds. Civic Engagement in American Democracy

Lyon-Callo, V. 2004. Inequality, Poverty, and Neoliberal Governance: Activist Ethnography in the Homeless Sheltering Industry. Toronto: Broadview Press.

Checker, Melissa and Maggie Fishman, eds. 2004. Local Actions: Cultural Activism, Power, and Public Life in America. NY: Columbia U. Press.

E-book on CLIO:

Waterston, Alisse. Love Sorrow and Rage: Destitute Women in a Manhattan Residence. 1999. Philadelphia: Temple University.

Recommended not required:

Baumgardner, J. and Amy Richards. 2005. Grassroots: A Field Guide for Feminist Activism. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

In addition, a packet of readings will be available at: COPY EXPERTS 2440 Broadway (90th Street. Telephone 212-875-0948.

Weekly sessions. Please complete readings in advance of class session.

PART 1—THEORIZING AMERICAN CULTURE/CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

January 18:

Course introduction, procedures, etc.

January 25: Introduction/discussion

Internship orientation: Cara Smith, Office of Career Development

Leadership strategies: Will Simpkins, OCD, NYCCEP

Read: Rules for Radicals

February 1: **American traditions/public service**

Bellah : Introduction to the Updated Edition, Preface, and Part Two: Public Life
in packet: “Considering the 60s” and “Port Huron Statement”

February 8: **American traditions/public service-2**

Skocpol and Fiorina: Chapters 1 and 3, and Part 3
Checker and Fishman: Foreword and Introduction

February 15, 22: **American diversity, challenges of engagement**

Checker and Fishman: chapters 3,4,5,8,10

In packet: chapters from Crazy for Democracy: Women in Grassroots Movements

March 1: **Summing Up/Catching Up**

In packet: excerpts from *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam

First reading paper due March 1

March 8: Organizational presentations

Spring break

**PART 2: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN NEW YORK CITY/THEORIZING HOMELESSNESS
ADVOCACY**

March 22: Homelessness and Poverty in America

Read: Lyon-Callo Chapters 1,2,3

March 29: Advocacy and Homelessness

Lyon-Callo Chapters 4-8

April 5: Gender/Sexuality/Homelessness:

Read Waterston

Guest speaker: Will Simpkins, Associate Director, NYCCEP

April 12: Philanthropy: Paying for Advocacy

Readings TBD

Guest lecturer: Prof. Ellen Marakowitz

April 19: Front lines of advocacy:

Guest speakers from Common Grounds

Readings TBD

Second reading paper due April 19.

April 26, May 3: Final presentations/internship ethnographies