GRASSROOTS POLITICS IN PHILADELPHIA

Spring 2014

Political Science 325
Haverford College

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Course Description

This course examines community organizing and grassroots advocacy to empower ordinary people. We will consider how individuals who have all too often been marginalized in urban society come together to identify common problems, set an agenda, and then pursue change through collective action. How do such individuals mobilize resources, establish organizations, and seize opportunities to enhance their power and revitalize their communities?

The spatial context for our analysis of grassroots politics will be the city of Philadelphia. Like so many other American cities, Philadelphia suffered from the ravages of mass suburbanization, deindustrialization, deepening poverty and inequality, and mounting racial and ethnic tensions during the latter half of the twentieth century. We will begin the semester by reviewing the societal forces that contributed to urban decline, as well as the major political decisions at the local, state, and national levels that tended to exacerbate the impact of those forces. We will then take stock of current conditions in Philadelphia, which in some respects have improved in recent years, while highlighting the many social, economic, and political constraints that continue to limit the options of urban policy makers.

Next, we will move into the heart of the course by evaluating various models of community-based organizing, starting with Saul Alinsky’s important contributions to the theory and practice of grassroots activism in cities. We will also consider neo-Alinsky models, as well as alternative approaches derived from Paolo Freire and Ella Baker. From there, we will broaden our inquiry beyond community-based organizing to consider the potential of alliances between neighborhood groups and other entities advocating for change, including labor unions and faith-based organizations. We will explore the tensions between the imperatives of expertise and popular empowerment and the goals of service delivery and political advocacy. Finally, we will study coalition-building strategies that encompass city-wide, regional, and national campaigns for popular empowerment.

A crucial component of this seminar is its blend of classroom-based learning with an experiential component featuring internships and participatory research. Along with weekly class meetings to discuss and analyze assigned readings on the theory and practice of community organizing, each student will be placed in an internship in Philadelphia with a community-based organization, public interest group, or city government entity concerned with popular mobilization around issues related to housing and community development, economic development, education, immigrants’ rights, criminal justice, and poverty. An underlying assumption of the seminar is that what students learn in the classroom will take on a deeper meaning if they are given the opportunity to confront directly serious problems affecting city residents and contribute to ongoing efforts to resolve those problems. The internship experiences will thus inform class discussions throughout the semester, as well as provide the foundation for a research project based on the organizing initiatives of city residents to address a major issue affecting one or more urban neighborhoods. We will conclude by reassessing the condition of Philadelphia and other American cities and the prospects for their revitalization through grassroots activism.
Requirements

Internship in Philadelphia (7 hours/week) 10%
Class participation 10%
Analytical paper (5-7 pages) 20%
Presentation of research 10%
Research paper (12-15 pages) 50%

Texts

Carolyn Adams, et al., Restructuring the Philadelphia Region: Metropolitan Divisions and Inequality (Temple University Press, 2008)
Marion Orr, ed., Transforming the City: Community Organizing and the Challenge of Political Change (University Press of Kansas, 2007)
Celina Su, Streetwise for Book Smarts: Grassroots Organizing and Education Reform in the Bronx (Cornell University Press 2009)

All other assigned readings will be available through Moodle.

Topics and Readings

Week 1

I. Introduction to Course

A. Course overview

B. Starting your internships

Week 2

II. American Cities in the Twentieth Century

Saskia Sassen, “Place and Production in the Global Economy” in Cities in a World Economy
Robert Zecker, “Introduction” in Metropolis: The American City in Popular Culture
Week 3

III. Philadelphia Today

Carolyn Adams, et al., *Restructuring the Philadelphia Region*, Chs. 2-4, 6

Week 4

IV. Urban Politics and Policy Making

Paul E. Peterson, “The Interests of the Limited City,” excerpt from *City Limits*, reprinted in *American Urban Politics: The Reader*, eds. Dennis R. Judd and Paul Kantor

Week 5

V. Saul Alinsky and Community Organizing

A. The Alinsky Model

Randy Stoecker, “Community Organizing and Social Change,” *Contexts*, Winter 2009
Aaron Schutz and Marie G. Sandy, “Saul Alinsky: The ‘Father’ of Community Organizing” in *Collective Action for Social Change: An Introduction to Community Organizing*

B. The Alinsky Model (cont’d)

Mark Santow, “Running in Place: Saul Alinsky, Race, and Community Organizing” in *Transforming the City*
Film in class: “The Democratic Promise: Saul Alinsky and His Legacy”
Week 7

C. Critiques of the Alinsky Model

Joseph Heathcott, “Urban Activism in a Downsizing World: Neighborhood Organizing in Postindustrial Chicago,” City and Community, September 2005
Michael Eichler, “Consensus Organizing: Sharing Power to Gain Power,” National Civic Review (Summer/Fall 1995)
Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker, “Community Organizing or Organizing Community? Gender and the Craft of Empowerment,” Gender and Society, December 1998

D. Evolution of the Alinsky Model

Mark R. Warren, “A Theology of Organizing: From Alinsky to the Modern IAF” in The Community Development Reader, eds. James DeFillippis and Susan Saegert
Edward McClelland, “The Asbestos Piece” in Young Mr. Obama: Chicago and the Making of a Black President

Week 8

SPRING BREAK

Week 9

VI. Alternative Models of Community Organizing

Week 10

A. Paolo Freire and Community Organizing

Celina Su, Streetwise for Book Smarts: Grassroots Organizing and Education Reform in the Bronx, Chs. 1-4

B. Ella Baker and Community Organizing


Analytical paper due

Week 11

VII. Community Organizing: Ongoing Challenges

A. Coalition Building

Celina Su, Streetwise for Book Smarts: Grassroots Organizing and Education Reform in the Bronx, Ch. 5
Robert Fisher and Eric Shragge, “Contextualizing Community Organizing: Lessons from the Past, Tensions in the Present, Opportunities for the Future” in *Transforming the City*
Film in class: “Brooklyn Matters”

B. Changing Public Policy

Celina Su, *Streetwise for Book Smarts: Grassroots Organizing and Education Reform in the Bronx*, Chs. 6-7

Week 11

C. The Role of Professionals and Experts


D. Activism v. Service Delivery/Development


Week 12

VIII. Beyond Community Organizing

Kathleen Staudt and Clarence N. Stone, “Division and Fragmentation: The El Paso Experience in Global-Local Perspective” in *Transforming the City*
Heidi Swarts, “Political Opportunity, Venue Shopping, and Strategic Innovation: ACORN’s National Organizing” in *Transforming the City*
Richard L. Wood, “Higher Power: Strategic Capacity for State and National Organizing” in *Transforming the City*
Week 13

IX. Research Projects: Community Organizing in Philadelphia

A. Presentation of Research

Week 14

B. Presentation of Research

Week 15

X. Conclusion: The Future of Grassroots Politics


Peter Dreier, “Community Organizing for What? Progressive Politics and Movement Building in America” in Transforming the City

Research paper due at end of semester

Internship Organizations

1. ACTION United
846 N. Broad St., 2nd Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19130
www.actionunited.org

Craig Robbins
Co-Executive Director
Tel: 215-839-3390
215-917-1701
crobbins@actionunited.org

2. Asociacion de Puertoriquenos en la Marcha (APM)
600 W. Diamond Street
Philadelphia, PA 19122
www.apmphila.org

Rose Gray
Senior Vice President, Community and Economic Development
Tel: 215-235-6070
rose.gray@apmphila.org
3. The Bicycle Coalition
1500 Walnut St., Suite 1107
Philadelphia, PA 19102
www.bicyclecoalition.org
Sarah Clark Stuart
Policy Director
Tel: 215-242-9253 (x-306)
sarah@bicyclecoalition.org

4. Education Law Center
1315 Walnut Street, Suite 400
Philadelphia, PA 19107
www.elc-pa.org
Brett Schaeffer
Communications Director
Tel: 215-238-6970 (x-334)
215-519-6522 (mobile)
bschaeff@elc-pa.org

5. JUNTOS
2029 S. 8th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19148
www.vamosjuntos.org
Jasmine Rivera
Lead Organizer
Tel: 215-218-9079
480-628-4032 (cell)
Jasmine@vamosjuntos.org

6. Mayor’s Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity
990 Spring Garden St., 7th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19123
www.phila.gov/ceo
Mary Horstmann
Chief of Staff, Community Empowerment and Opportunity
Tel: 215-685-3600
215-687-4546
Mary.Horstmann@phila.gov

7. Mayor’s Office of Policy Planning and Coordination
Room 225, City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Maia Jachimowicz
Deputy Policy Director
Tel: 215-686-2164
Maia.Jachimowicz@phila.gov

8. Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition
2100 Arch Street, 7th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19103
www.paimmigrant.org

Tasha Kelemen
Executive Director
Tel: 215-832-0636
natashakelemen@paimmigrant.org

9. Philadelphia City Council, Councilman At-Large David Oh
Room 319, City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107
www.davidohphilly.com

Ileana Garcia
Special Assistant
Tel: 215-686-3452
Ileana.Garcia@phila.gov

10. Philadelphia Public School Notebook
699 Ranstead Street, Third Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19106
www.thenotebook.org

Dale Mezzacappa
Contributing Editor
Tel: 215-839-0082 (x-102)
dalem@thenotebook.org

11. Philadelphia Student Union
4205 Chestnut St., 2nd Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19104
www.phillystudentunion.org

Beth Patel
Youth Media Organizer
Tel: 916-806-4004
beth@phillystudentunion.org
12. **POWER**  
*Philadelphians Organized to Witness, Empower & Rebuild*  
1429 N. 11th Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19122  
[www.powerphiladelphia.org](http://www.powerphiladelphia.org)

Wes Lathrop  
Lead Organizer  
Tel: 267-975-9218  
215-232-7697  
wlathrop@powerphiladelphia.org

13. **UNITE HERE, Local 274**  
421 N. 7th Street, Suite 400  
Philadelphia, PA 19123  
[www.uniteherephilly.org](http://www.uniteherephilly.org)

Antony Dugdale  
Deputy Trustee  
Tel: 215-779-4404  
215-232-3145  
adugdale@unitehere.org

14. **Women’s Community Revitalization Project**  
407 Fairmount Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19123  
[www.wcrpphila.com](http://www.wcrpphila.com)

Jill Feldstein  
Organizing and Advocacy Coordinator  
Tel: 215-627-5550 (x-218)  
jfeldstein@wcrpphila.com

15. **Youth Art Self-Empowerment Project**  
2231 N. Broad St., Suite 200  
Philadelphia, PA 19132  
[www.yasproject.com](http://www.yasproject.com)

Sarah Morris  
Interim Director  
Tel: 215-223-8180  
267-571-YASP  
sarah@yasproject.com