

# Community Studies 10

## Introduction to Community Activism

**Monday and Wednesday, 1-4:30pm**  
**Room 161, Social Sciences 1**

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Community Studies is an interdisciplinary major centered on how social justice is sought by communities and, in particular, how activism contributes to social justice-- at the community and wider levels of society. The course surveys different kinds of community activism and examines how they contribute to social justice. We begin with charity and volunteering as forms of community activism that enjoy widespread participation and legitimacy-- asking why that is so. We pay attention to how religious belief can be an organizing principle for different strategies of social activism in different faith traditions. The class explores the workplace as an important site of social justice activism and also examines different community organizing models. Along the way we pause to consider the privatization of public life that is a distinguishing feature of contemporary neoliberalism and discuss why and how "the public" matters. Furthermore, we look at attempts to build a global justice movement as an antidote to neoliberalization. Finally, we consider how technology is powerfully upending community activism and ponder "solutionism"—the rampantly intoxicating notion that there is an app that can solve virtually any social problem.

Disclaimers: the course does not pretend to be exhaustive, i.e., to offer "everything you need to know" about community activism. The pursuit of social justice has a continuing history and thus our modest goal is studying significant contours of that history bearing upon the contemporary moment. Another disclaimer is that the course does not offer an activist toolkit, i.e., lessons/tips about "how to be an activist." Our modest goal is surveying the field, identifying key themes, concepts and recurring processes in order to become informed and active participants in global society: *the aim of higher education writ large*.

Last and certainly not least: this is a fantastic moment to be thinking and reading and talking about community activism in the US context. While we take an academic approach to activism from our comfortable perch in the university, contemporary society is alive with cries for social justice emanating from disenfranchised communities of color across the land (to say nothing of demands for recognition and justice outside the USA). Discussion, debate and disagreement about "appropriate" activist strategies and tactics and whose lives (really) matter have assumed an urgency that was unimaginable just a few years ago. The presidential election promises not to be business as usual but a genuine referendum on the fate of society. There is a lot to learn and think about this summer. Let's go!

## **Course Organization and Requirements**

### **Expectations**

This is an active learning course in a compressed time frame (five weeks). We meet twice weekly for a fairly long stretch of time: three and a half hours to be exact. This is also a small class (+/- a dozen students). Thus, we will have plenty of time to get to know each other, delve deeply into specific topics and engage in mini-investigations and reports back to the class. The course does incorporate some fairly typical learning modalities such as lectures and documentary films. The course absolutely requires active student engagement in order to achieve a vibrant and meaningful learning environment. I don't just encourage students to bring to class relevant experience and/or information—it's a requirement.

### **Beyond the classroom**

Please bring your bus pass with you to class in case we want to go off campus for some course related activity.

### **Technology**

Please bring your laptop or tablet to each class to facilitate in-class projects and research. I assume most students now possess one of these for academic work.

### **Attendance**

Absences will affect your grade. You can't be an active learner if you aren't present. Missing even one class means missing an entire week of the course.

### **Access**

To students with certified disabilities who need accommodations: please see me as soon as possible.

### **Reading assignments**

There are three components to required reading for the course.

1. The news. It is impossible to learn about community activism without knowing what is going on in the world. In order to encourage everyone to develop a regular news habit, all students are required to consult with at least two news sources of their choice (and as many as you wish) during the next five weeks and bring community activism related news to each class meeting. At the risk of sounding hopelessly old fashioned, I personally favor reading a daily newspaper and like it or not, newspapers are still one of the very best sources of information about current events. The good news is that in order to "read the paper" you no longer have to "get the paper." Thanks to digital technologies and tectonic changes in the media landscape, it's possible to keep up with global news through your cell phone-- so go for it!

Thinking long term...whatever news sources you consult, make it a lifelong habit. Of course there is media bias, so learn to recognize and evaluate it. Find out what and who gets covered

and what and who doesn't. The library receives subscribes to daily newspapers; cable and web sources seem to multiply almost daily. Get in touch with the fascinating independent media movement. The main thing is becoming informed as a necessary step in participating in global society.

2. I have assigned only one book for the course, written by veteran labor activist Bill Fletcher, because it seems indispensable: *They're bankrupting us! And 20 other myths about unions*. I will place an order at the Literary Guillotine Bookstore downtown (on Locust Street) when I know how many students will purchase it there.

3. I have also assigned a passel of articles of various sorts and book chapters (also of various sorts) that are accessible for an introductory level course, offer important content knowledge and/or provide points of departure for discussion. These are all required readings and will be uploaded onto the course ecommons website. Note that you are required to complete the readings *before* the class meeting for which they are assigned. I reserve the right to add a few readings to the mix, such as a highly relevant but mercifully brief news article, as the course focuses on a living and breathing topic.

### **Grading**

Course grades will be determined on the basis of the following components.

Four quizzes about readings and other course content = 40%

In-class investigations = 25%

Course projects (to be explained) = 20%

Attendance and participation = 15%

### **Course Schedule**

#### **Monday, July 25: Introductions all around**

Assignment (due Wednesday, July 27): What is "community" "activism" and "community activism"

Using the rubric distributed in class, conduct five interviews with people outside of class, recording the responses. Write a two-three page essay that (1) offers your own responses; (2) summarizes what you heard from others and (3) comment and analyzes the combined findings. Bring to class on Wednesday.

#### **Wednesday, July 27: Charity and its interlocutors**

Reading:

David Wagner, *What's Love Got to Do with It?* (selection)

Janet Poppendieck, *Sweet Charity?* (selection)

Michael Katz, "The History of an Impudent Poor Woman in New York City"

Mara Einstein, *Compassion, Inc.: How Corporate America Blurs the Line between What We Buy, Who We Are and Those We Help* (selection)

### **Monday, August 1: Religious faith and community activism**

Class will meet downtown at Santa Cruz public library, 224 Church Street (see ecommons announcement for google map link if you are unfamiliar with location). PLEASE be on time! After/in conjunction with our discussion of religious faith, we will be going to the Nickleodeon Theatre downtown to see a feature length documentary film: "The Music of Strangers: Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble" for the 2:30 show. The film is long...so the class will go past our 4:30 ending time...hope that's okay!

Reading:

Staunton Lynd, "Oscar Romero, An Unlikely Saint" (from *Accompanying*)

Martin Luther King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

Lisa Rab, "Meet the Preacher behind Moral Mondays"

Alan Blinder, "Federal Appeals Court Strikes Down North Carolina Voter ID Provision" (weblink to NYTimes on ecommons)

### **Wednesday, August 3: Producing volunteer nation**

Bring to class a "news" item from current media that sparked your interest (and relates to class)

QUIZ #1

Reading:

Sara Mosle, "The Vanity of Volunteering"

Susan Brinn-Hyatt, "From Citizen to Volunteer"

Mary Beth Pudup, "Civic Engagement: the (political) career of a concept"

Robert Putnam, "Bowling Alone"

### **Monday, August 8: Privatization of public life**

Make sure to bring your bus pass, we may be going off campus!

Reading:

VIDEO: "Scout's Honor"

Andrew Koppelman, *A Right to Discriminate?* (selection)

Julie Bosnan, "The Right's Wording for Public Education in Kansas: 'Government Schools'"

### **Wednesday, August 10: Community organizing traditions**

QUIZ #2

Bring to class a "news" item from current media related to community organizing

Reading:

Marty Martinson and Celina Su, "Contrasting Organizing Approaches: The 'Alinsky Tradition' and Freirian Organizing Approaches"

M., "A Critique of Ally Politics"

Indigenous Action Media, "Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex"

Watch:

The Freire Project, "Seeing through Paolo's Glasses: Political Clarity, Courage and Humility" (You Tube video link on ecommons)

Bill Moyers, "The Real Saul Alinsky" (Vimeo weblink on ecommons) (also check out collateral material related to Moyers' segment)

**Monday, August 15: Labor organizing: back to the future**

Bring to class labor related “news” from current media

Reading:

Bill Fletcher, *They’re Bankrupting Us! And 20 other Myths about Unions*

**Wednesday, August 17: Global organizing for economic justice**

Bring to “news” from current media that relates to some aspect of globalization

QUIZ #3

Video: “The Take”

Reading:

Cynthia Kaufman, *Ideas for Action: Relevant Theory for Radical Change* (selection)

Michael Levitin, “The Triumph of Occupy Wall Street”

Check out:

<http://occupywallst.org/>

Watch:

Todd Gitlin, *Occupy Nation; the Roots, the Spirit and the Promise of Occupy Wall Street* (CSPAN Book Talk, weblink on ecommons)

**Monday, August 22: Technology and community activism**

Make sure to bring your bus pass, we may be going off campus!

Reading:

Allison Arieff, “Solving All the Wrong Problems”

C.Z. Nnaemeka, “The Unexotic Underclass”

Jacob Silverman, “All Knowing”

Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa, “#Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography and the racial politics of social media in the United States”

Kentaro Toyama, *Geek Heresy: Rescuing Social Change from the Cult of Technology* (selection)

Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here* (selection)

**Wednesday, August 24: Course wrap and feast; student presentations!**

Quiz #4

## Course project guidelines

The project seeks to provide each student with the opportunity to “go deep” on a social justice topic/issue they care about and/or wish to know more about. In the process, the project also affords the opportunity learn how to learn more about social justice work.

The projects will be presented to the entire during our final meeting on August 24.

Listed here are steps to follow in completing your project. These are meant to be indicative of the work you should undertake, but I encourage creativity in coming up with your own ideas and strategies for approaching/completing your project.

1. Decide on an issue. During our very first class meeting, each student articulated issues they care about, so I know you all have somewhere to begin. Feel free to consult with me to help clarify your ideas. Think about what you know about the issue, why you care about it, and what you think is and/or should be done “about it.”
2. How and why is this issue “in the news.” Consult with a range of news sources to get better acquainted with the most currently relevant information regarding the issue.
3. Who is working on this issue? Using your news search in conjunction with further online research, identify the organizations and/or individuals who seem to be centrally involved in framing the social justice issue, developing policy and/or programs addressing it. etc. If you are working on an issue with local relevance and associated activism, see if you can meet and speak with key individuals associated with local organizations.
4. What kind of work is “being done” about the issue? Once you know the issues, the news about it, who is working on it...describe and analyze the activism associated with committed organizations/people to address the issue. What kind of strategies are being pursued? Are organizations working individually...or in coalition with other organizations/sectors (e.g., government)? How is the work being undertaken? Are their specific campaigns? What are the goals? What is the level of community engagement outside of organizations/leaders? Is the goal to pass a law? Reverse a law? Obtain resources for a community? Gain recognition? Etc.

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You will present your work verbally to the class with a brief powerpoint presentation or poster (your choice). You should include key information in your presentation (related to the guidelines above). You should include graphical information as appropriate (photos, charts, tables, maps, etc.)

Your work should be written up in an essay of five pages (maximum), including a list of sources, that will be turned into me.

I will be sure to meet with everything individually to review your work.