

KROC-593-04
Social Action: Tijuana Watershed Pollution Crisis
9:15 AM - 12:05 PM

(Plus Additional Trips)

KIPJ 249

Instructor:

[Dr. Sarah Federman](#)

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Zoom by appointment (starting January 26): [Schedule here](#)

In person and Zoom available depending on availability. Office 124

Zoom link [here](#)

Description

In Kroc classes students learn the theories of peace, conflict, human rights norms, and justice as well as learn some methods of intervention. Most skills and intervention tools taught at Kroc, such as negotiation and mediation, remain individual efforts. This course gives students the experience of working together on an issue, employing what they've learned at Kroc as well as the new material shared in this course.

There are other advantages to this course: Most therapeutic models focus on individual transformation, yet tremendous healing and growth also happen through collective action. Studies on climate-related anxiety, for example, show that collective action (rather than

individual action) more effectively reduces depressive symptoms.¹ No matter how good the therapeutic model is, personal work alone cannot address the anxieties related to the problems of our times; war, increasing authoritarianism, climate catastrophes, changing technologies, social isolation, along with a widening gap between the super powerful and those they'll dominate.

Cultural trends and political systems contribute to personal suffering, so it follows that formulating responses to those larger dynamics offers a crucial aspect of self-actualization and even power.² Political philosopher Hannah Arendt pointed to this when discussing the difference between developing a private self and a public self. A maximized private self, she said, led only to independence whereas the development of a public self gave one power and voice.³ This course offers participants an opportunity to develop power and voice in a collaborative setting.

The class will focus its social action on the Tijuana/San Diego Watershed Crisis. The NGO surfrider describes the issue:

“The Tijuana River Watershed is a strikingly beautiful and deeply meaningful place for communities on both sides of the Mexico/U.S. border, including members of the Kumeyaay nation. It provides critical habitat to countless species and is home to the largest remaining coastal wetland in Southern California. Yet each year, billions of gallons of untreated sewage, industrial chemicals, and trash flow across the border through the river and enter the Pacific Ocean, causing beach closures throughout South San Diego County and widespread human health issues and illnesses throughout the region. In 2024, over 36 billion gallons of polluted flows contaminated the Tijuana River

¹ [Schwartz, S.E.O., Benoit, L., Clayton, S. et al. Climate change anxiety and mental health: Environmental activism as buffer. *Curr Psychol* 42, 16708–16721 \(2023\).](#)

² See Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Jurgen Habermas, Nancy Schepper-Hughes, Arthur Kleinman, Didier Fassin, and most closely connected to humanitarian work, Paul Farmer.

³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Valley, closing beaches, fouling the air, harming the region's economy, and sickening people on both sides of the border.”⁴

Course Goals & Learning Objectives:

- Study a complex bi-national conflict with multiple stakeholders
- Work collaboratively on an intervention
- Grapple with group dynamics
- Experience speaking to a variety of stakeholders
- Build power, engage with affected parties
- Develop a plan for social action (based on research)
- Enact the plan
- Reflect on the results, impact, and
- Plan next steps for future students.

Required Books

Marshall Ganz. *People, Power, Change: Organizing for Democratic Renewal* (Oxford University Press, 2024)

Scott Myers-Lipton, *CHANGE! A Student Guide to Social Action*, 2nd edition, Routledge.

Recommended:

Rutger Bregman, *Moral Ambition: Stop Wasting Your Talent and Start Making a Difference*

⁴ Dias, Mara. “US & Mexico Commit to Expediting Solutions to Tijuana River Sewage Crisis,” Surfrider, July 2025
https://www.surfrider.org/news/us-mexico-commit-to-expediting-solutions-to-tijuana-river-sewage-crisis?utm_campaign=Making%20Waves&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=374775187&utm_content=374775187&utm_source=hs_email

(Little, Brown and Company, 2025)

Tentative Schedule

Potential Trips Include:

[Tijuana Estuary](#) (watch video [here](#)) & Imperial Beach. Open Wed-Sat, 10am-5pm

Tijuana, Mexico: impacts of pollution

Session 1: Introduction to Social Action & Self-Care January 27th

Readings

Halifax, *Altruism* ([click here](#))

Shirch, [10 Ethics of Peacebuilding](#)

Surfer turned Politician: Paloma Aguirre ([click here](#))

In Class

Introduction to Course

Introduction to TJ Watershed Crisis

Watch intro to TJ River Crisis ([click here](#))

Discussion Day Trips

Safety/Self-Care

Mental health resources are available for anyone feeling emotionally affected by the Tijuana River Valley sewage crisis through the San Diego Access Crisis Line by calling [1-888-724-7240](tel:1-888-724-7240) or 988.

Session 2: Change IS Possible

February 3

Readings

Bregman, *Moral Ambition*, Chapters 1 & 2 ([Link here](#))

TJ-Related Readings

- Latest Tijuana sewage spill highlights ‘urgent need’ to end crisis - January 26 ([link here](#))
- Water Air Quality Study ([click here](#)) - Read & watch the 2 min video
- July 2025 US/Mexico Agreement TJ Sewage Crisis (short vide [click here](#))
- More on the July 2025 agreement ([click here](#))

Recommended:

- Tijuana River Valley Sewage Community Survey Results Complete ([click here](#))
- US Mexico Agreement Summary ([here](#))

Assignment:

1. Sign Up for Co-Leading the Discussion [here](#)
2. While watching the videos and reading the articles, make a list of
 - those affected by the crisis
 - those who have been working to change it and
 - what they're trying

In Class

Intro to TJ River Issues, list who is affected.

Who do we need to talk to?

1 Speaker Scripps Meeting 12/11: [Here](#) (Blakespear & Aguirre)

Discuss Visits to the TJ Estuary & Imperial Beach

Session 3: Social Action!

February 10

Readings

Myers-Lipton, Social Action - [An Overview](#)

Ganz, *People Power Change*: [Chapter 1](#)

Transboundary Water and Paradiplomacy in the San Diego-Tijuana ([Click here](#))

The TJ River Crisis ([here](#))

Assignment

Come to class with what aspects of this conflict concern you the most.

In Class:

Opening: Visualizing the River well ([click here](#))

1 Speaker Scripps Meeting 12/11: [Here](#) (Scientists reports)

Review past student campaigns [here](#). (Click the tab to see Victories!)

Visit by USD's [Susanne Walther](#)

Session 4: Issue Selection & Group Dynamics

February 17th

Readings

Our group ecosystem:

Myers-Lipton: Chapter 1 "Issue Development"

Myers-Lipton, Chapter 2 "Setting the Tone"

Myers-Lipton, Chapter 6 "Group Dynamics"

In Class

- Discuss Readings
- Pick a group name/Divide into two groups?
- Conflict Template

Visit by Stefanie Sekich Quinn

Create a Template of the Conflict

List actors in your conflict (individuals, groups, organizations, broader dynamics)

- **Their interests**
 - **Positions**
 - **Needs**
 - **source of power/or lack of power**
 - **Current State of the Conflict**
 - **Relevant historical moments**
-
- Decide where to focus - water pollution, air, Navy seals, different interventions?
Multiple groups?

Session 5: Understanding Your Conflict

February 24

Readings

(Skim this) Gathering Information ([Click here](#)) [where to get info & interviewing]

Conflict Maps ([video explanation here](#))

TJ & Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Minute 333

- Minute 333 News Item [here](#)
- EPA Minute 333 Update ([click here](#))

A Boom Holding Off Trash Debris ([link here](#))

Assignment

Come to class with a revised list of:

1. The major players (who is harmed, causing the harm, complicit, helping, etc)
2. What do they want?
3. What factors contribute to the conflict? (war, climate, etc)
4. Who profits from the conflict? (Can you think of anyone benefitting?)
5. What do you not know that you might need to know?

In Class

1 Speaker Scripps Meeting 12/11: [Here](#)

Create a conflict map, identify missing data and here to find it

Session 6: Change Theory & Research

March 3

Readings

Myers-Lipton, Chapter 3 “Change Theory”

Myers-Lipton, Chapter 5 “Research”

Tire Pollution - ([short video here](#))

More on Tires ([here](#))

In Class

1 Speaker Scripps Meeting 12/11: [Here](#)

Theory of Change presentation

Take on the tire issue?

Session 7: Strategy & Planning Your Actions

March 10

Readings

Ganz: Chapter 4 “Strategy”

Ganz: Chapter 5 “Action”

TJ: Recycle the water? ([link here](#))

Some Water Treatment Progress ([Link here](#))

In Class

Where do you want to focus?

Session 8: Accessing Power & Building Relationships

March 17

Readings

Myers-Lipton, Chapter 4, Building Power

Federman, Chapter 6, Power ([click here](#))

Ganz, Chapter 2, Relationships

Assignment: Make a Request to Someone in Political Power

Pick an issue of importance to you and identify a person who has the power to respond to your request. This can be a city council member, a congress person, or someone else holding public office.

Then prepare a powerful communication that you will deliver over the phone, in person, via snail mail or email.

A powerful letter has several components:

1. Introduction—Include any relevant professional titles or experience that add authority to the request you will make.
2. Compliment—Acknowledge something that the organization or person has done right.
3. Clear statement of the issue—What do you want?
4. Explanation of why this matters to you personally—Tell a story.
5. Appreciation and support—Close the letter by thanking the person for their time.
6. Provide your personal contact information, offering your assistance on this matter.

In Class

Share what happened with your call.

Identify who we want to reach out to.

Divide who will access powerful Actors: USG, Mexican government, Corporations

Session 9: Digital Investigation- Who is Dumping?

March 24

Bring your journal to class to submit & make sure that your social action log is up to date.

Readings

Ganz, Chapter 6 “Structure”

Ganz, Chapter 7 “Developmental Leadership”

In Class

Who is dumping?

Explore Bellingcat Investigation Toolkit ([click here](#))

Session 10: Strategies & Tactics

April 7th

Readings

Myers-Lipton, Chapter 7, Strategy & Tactics

Myers - Lipton: Chapters, 8, 9 - Campaign Building

Session 11: Bridging Conversations

April 14

Readings

Guzman, [Chapter 6](#) and [Chapter 8](#)

In Class

List and discuss unlikely allies

Bridging conversations we could have

Visit with Ramon Chariez - endurance, mobilization, storytelling

Session 12: Reflection

April 21

Reading:

Myers-Lipton, **Changer 10: Campaign Evaluation & Passing it On**

Session 13: Presenting Outcomes

April 28

We may move this class to the evening to allow more people to attend.

Session 14 : Personal & Campaign Evaluation

May 5

Wrap up the term!

Bring Journal to Submit

Assignments for Social Action Students

Participation

(30%)

Attendance: You can miss two sessions per term without it affecting your grade, but you'll need to keep up with the group work. Please let me know in advance if you will miss class.

Readings: We're a small seminar so it's important that you keep up with the readings. It will be evident that you haven't during discussions.

1. Leading Class Discussion

As part of a masters practicum seminar you're moving into the role of guide therefore, each week we will have readings about Social Action as well as readings about the conflict.

You'll lead (or co-lead) a class discussion on that week's social action readings to help the class discuss the major ideas in the readings and how they can relate to the conflict we're studying.

Sign up for your co-lead session [here](#).

2. **Social Action Log:** You will be evaluated on the extent and quality of your participation in class as well as in the project. There might be tasks you take on during the term in addition to the class assignments to move the campaign forward. So you will keep a social action log throughout the semester. Add what you do to your tab here using [this link](#) to keep track of your activities. I made a different tab for each person and put it in a shared Google Drive.

Journal (10%)

You'll keep a handwritten journal about what you're learning about the TJ river crisis and about social action from the readings and discussions. At least 2 pages per week, reference at least one of the SA readings and one of the readings/videos about the TJ Water Shed.

Submit **March 24th** and **May 5th**

Final Reflection Essay (10%)

Submit **May 12**

3-5 page paper that summarizes:

- your contributions to the campaign and final binder
- what you think went well,
- what you might do differently next time, and
- what you learned about social action.

Group Presentation Video (20%) **April 28th**

You will create a short video / presentation for others to learn about your experience and project. This could be a presentation or a video.

Of course, your group presentation should be highly informative, engaging, and filled with excitement on how your group, and its members, got out of your comfort zone. and moved your campaign forward. The night before the final, please email me the PowerPoint presentation.

Your evaluation will be based on how well your team demonstrates the knowledge gained about the conflict and social action.

Final Campaign Binder (30%)

Submit May 19

As part of this evaluation, your group will produce a campaign binder that is a summation of your group's experience, and will provide an historical record of your campaign that can be used by future social action students.

This will be in a Google Folder.

The size of the final product will depend on you and you can divide the work among you as you wish.

There are 9 sections to the campaign evaluation, and they include:

1. Issue identification. State your demands and target. What suggestions do you have for the next group regarding issue identification? Was it clear what to ask for?
2. Research. Include your historical analysis, target analysis, and power map. What questions did you answer? What questions do you still have? Any suggestions for the next group regarding research? Use MLA citations.
3. Change theory. What theory of change did your group adopt?
4. Leadership. State if your group used a traditional definition of leadership or the newer definition offered. What suggestions do you have for the next group regarding leadership?
5. Building power. Name the allies you built. How successful was your group in recruiting new members and building allies? What suggestions do you have for the next group regarding building power?
6. Group dynamics. How was your team's group dynamics? What suggestions do you have for the next group regarding group dynamics?

7. Activities: What campaign activities did your group conduct (e.g., letters, meetings, etc.) What suggestions do you have for the next group regarding campaign activities?
8. Lessons learned. If your group won or lost the campaign, what are the major lessons you learned? If the campaign is not complete, what are three recommendations you can provide to the next group?

Appendix of Contacts: Include a list of contacts and folder with your correspondence with different parties, articles or other materials that could be useful for the next group.

Appendix of Sources: Where you got your information.

AI Policy

In this class Generative AI Tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc) may be used in the following ways

- Clarify scientific terminology and impacts
- Clarify government agency roles
- Brainstorm interventions (after you've brainstormed together)
- Identify other aspects of the conflict we're missing
- Locate key contacts
- Copy edit the binder, but you must use your own sources.