



PEAC 034
ORGANIZING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE
Swarthmore College
Spring 2026

COURSE AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Time & Place: Mondays and Wednesdays 1:15-2:30 p.m., Keith Room, The Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility

Professor: Lee Smithey; Department of Peace & Conflict Studies; Parrish Hall, 2nd Floor, West Wing, Room 229

Office Hours: Visit <https://bit.ly/smithey-officehours> for information about office hours (which are subject to modifications) and to sign up for a meeting.

Email: LSmithe1@swarthmore.edu

Phone: 610-690-2064

Organizing for Social Change focuses on the strategic work of developing effective nonviolent social change campaigns while keeping our eye on potentials for constructive conflict. Students will learn from activists, organizers, and scholars as they choose, design, and carry out campaigns, addressing social needs and effecting policy changes

TEXTS

Required texts:

Myers-Lipton, Scott J. 2023. *Change!: A Student Guide to Social Action*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Haga, Kazu. 2020. *Healing Resistance: A Radically Different Response to Harm*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

GOALS¹

¹ The preface in this syllabus draws directly on and adapts, with permission, language and work developed by Prof. Scott Myers-Lipton. See also <https://teachingsocialaction.org/>

Students, faculty, staff, and alums of Swarthmore College have a [long and distinguished history of campaigning for social change](#). Moreover, [students around the world have led many nonviolent campaigns](#) for social justice, democracy, and the common good.

Many people in the U.S. think of democratic participation as individuals' participation in elections, political parties, and government sponsored forums (like city council meetings and hearings) and communicating with their representatives. These are no doubt important! However, a healthy democracy also involves an informed and empowered population committed to the art and practice of nonviolent campaigning and "people power." Often injustices, inequalities, or even just inefficiencies are invisible to neighbors, fellow residents, co-workers, and their leaders. Everyday people can organize themselves to draw attention to injustices, collectively problem solve, seek remedies, and demand new policies. They can persuade authorities to enact new rules and initiatives, and they can persuade others to join their campaign, developing influence and power. After all, institutions and organizations operate on the basis of the cooperation and contributions of those who participate in them. As the sociologist Max Weber famously pointed out, authority is based on legitimacy, and legitimacy is bestowed upon leaders and must be replenished. Nonviolent campaigns often generate power through this contingency in the nature of political power.

This course focuses on social action, and social action occurs when everyday people band together to develop power in order to change policies and redress injustices and social problems. It examines the topics of issue development, change theory, building power, group dynamics, strategy and tactics, and campaign planning and implementation. In a traditional course on social action, students read about theories of social change, analyze social problems, read about campaigns, and develop an abstract understanding of concepts, all with the professor being the primary director of the experience. In the experiential social action model of this course, students read about theories of social change and apply knowledge to real world campaigns, as well as define a social problem and develop concrete, quantifiable solutions (i.e., demands). In this experiential social action model, developed by Prof. Scott Myers Lipton, students choose and lead campaigns, all with the professor being a "guide on the side."

Social change work often involves conflict. Policies that perpetuate injustices and inequalities are often difficult to change, buttressed by institutional momentum, bureaucratic rationalities, prejudices, class interests, and other dynamics. Challenging status quos and actively engaging in conflict can trigger insecurities, defensiveness, and other negative emotions among parties to conflict. Learning how to engage in conflict in constructive ways is one of the pillars of peace and conflict studies. Envisioning peaceful and more just futures ultimately involves building relationships and collaboration, but conflict in pursuit of those futures usually polarizes people. This constitutes a paradox at the heart of peace and conflict studies, one that we are not likely to solve, but we can do what we can to honor and maximize the potential for what Dr. Martin Luther King referred to as Beloved Community. In this course, as we pursue social change, we will also pursue Beloved Community, in the hope that constructive conflict can also serve as a forge for future collaborative work. Kazu Haga's book on principles and actions of Kingian Nonviolence will serve as a guide.

A key part of the social action model is that students have the opportunity to shape or initiate the adoption of a new policy (i.e., a rule, regulation, norm, or practice of an institution) on or

off campus, with the students choosing or developing campaigns on their own rather than assigned by the instructor.

Another key feature of the social action model is the topic and flow of the course. In order to launch campaigns by mid-semester, students go through the issue development process (identifying demands and targets) in the opening days of the class. By choosing the campaigns by the 4th or 5th class, students have enough time to learn about all of the necessary aspects of social change, and then launch a campaign by the ninth week, and still have almost half a semester to undertake several actions. All actions must comply with the Student Code of Conduct.

Class will involve activities such as: (a) students practicing framing their campaigns (i.e., who, what, why, where, and when of a campaign), (b) a discussion and/or mini-lecture about the reading, (c) a Zoom call with an alumni, local activist, or other resource person, and (d) group work on campaigns.

All students will be involved in social action. The College advises that students spend [2-3 hours of work for every one hour of class time](#). That amounts to 5-7.5 hours per week, and in this course, the reading load will be lighter to make time for group campaign planning and social action. Approximately one half of that time will be spent on campaign activities (e.g., tabling, flyering, giving organization raps) or campaign actions (marches, rallies, street theater, etc.). Without such an investment of time and effort it will be difficult to do the portfolio work, which will impact your grade. It will be possible to do your social action on campus, so all students should be able to work it into your schedule. In addition, class time will be dedicated to your social action campaign, so you will be able to do some of your organizing in class.

The requirements for the campaign are: (i) that you have a minimum of 3 students on your team, (ii) you have passion for the issue, and (iii) your campaign tries to change some type of policy. Whatever campaign you choose, you will learn about democracy, power, and how to bring about change nonviolently. Importantly, there is no political indoctrination in this course, as students develop and choose what campaigns to work on, and they can change campaigns at any point in the semester. The instructor's role is to offer guidance about planning, strategy, and tactics, and to help students consider the variety of options available, with the students deciding on how best to move forward.

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. conduct issue development
2. map and build power
3. implement strategies and tactics
4. conduct research (historical analysis, power map, target analysis)
5. work with the media
6. perform campaign implementation and evaluation plans
7. develop groupwork, research, communication, and writing skills

ASSESSMENT

Your grade for this course will be based on the following:

Short Quizzes (20% of total grade)

The purpose of these eight short in-class quizzes is to encourage reading. If you do the reading for each class, these short quizzes will not be onerous. I will count your six highest quiz grades toward your final grade. Makeup quizzes will not be arranged.

Portfolio and Log (40% of total grade)

The portfolio is where you *demonstrate your knowledge of the text in light of your social action experiences*. Ten sets of prompts will be provided to which you will respond. Some call you to take action, such as interviewing someone, doing a bit of research related to your campaign, etc. Your portfolio will be collected three times over the course of the semester for the professor to evaluate, grade, and provide feedback.

Participation (20% of total grade)

Social action work, like collective learning, is group work, and as a matter of equity and effectiveness, full participation is very important. Attending class and your group's meetings and actions are mandatory. Notify the professor in advance if you need to arrive late or leave early. Similarly, communicate well with your teammates about agreed meetings.

Your classroom participation grade will be based on the following criteria:

- Excellence (A) requires that you play a leadership role in the large class discussion and your team, apply the text, discuss points articulately and respond intelligently to other's views; ask insightful questions, and take responsibility for the direction of the class discussion and your team.
- Above average (B) requires that you participate regularly in the large class discussion and your team, demonstrate good knowledge of the text, discuss points articulately and respond intelligently to other's views; ask insightful questions, but you do not take a strong leadership role in the overall class discussion and the direction of your team.
- Average (C) requires that you follow the discussion in the large class and your team, make occasional comments, have a basic knowledge of the text, and sometimes ask questions in the large group and team.
- Below average (D) indicates that, for the most part, you are merely showing up.
- Failure (F) indicates especially poor attendance and little participation.

At the end of the course, you will be asked to evaluate your level of participation, as well as your teammates. This evaluation will be taken seriously when participation grades are determined.

Campaign Presentation and Binder (20% of total grade)

At the end of the semester, your team will give a group presentation on your social action campaign. In addition, your group will turn in a campaign binder (compiled over the course of the semester), which will be evaluated. The binder will also be used by future students when they choose their campaigns.

GUIDELINES AND PRACTICE

Please visit [the relevant page linked in Moodle](#) for more detailed information about practices, guidelines, and expectations.

COURSE OUTLINE

FIRST CLASS - JANUARY 21

Wednesday

We will begin to introduce ourselves to one another and to the goals of the course.

[Historical list of Swarthmore College campaigns](#)

WEEK 2 - JANUARY 26, 28

Monday

Issue Development

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Student Victories (XI-XII), Preface (XIII-XVII), & pp. 1-6 (of Ch. 1)

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, pp. 7-19 (of Ch. 1)

Video: "[Walk the Walk](#)" (first 15 minutes)

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE! A Guide to Teaching Social Action, Ch. 1, Section A & B (in Moodle)

Wednesday

Haga - Intro and Ch. 7 "The Colonization of Our Minds"

[Student Reflection: Josh Barousse, SJSU Class of '08](#)

[Professor Smithey's letter and policy regarding artificial intelligence](#)

WEEK 3 - FEBRUARY 2, 4

Monday

Issue Development

Lakey ch 5 - "Choosing the Campaign's Focus"

Lakey ch 6 - "Inventing a new campaign"

Portfolio 1: Assigned

Wednesday

Setting the Tone

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Ch. 2, pp. 20-25

Haga Ch 4 on Violence and Ch. 5 on Nonviolence

Video: "[Walk the Walk](#)" (2nd 15 minutes)

Portfolio 2: Assigned

WEEK 4 - FEBRUARY 9, 11

Monday

Change Theory

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Ch. 3, pp. 28-40

Haga Ch. 8 “The Six Principles of Nonviolence”

Haga Ch. 9 “Principle One: Nonviolence is a way of Life for Courageous People”

[Student Reflection: Rochelle Jackson-Smarr, Class of ‘08](#)

[Video: Jo Ann Robinson](#)

Wednesday

Building Power

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Ch. 3, pp. 43-50

[Myers-Lipton, “Students for DMH and the Fight for Air Conditioning”](#)

[Lowman, “Students Get Heated Over Building Conditions”](#)

[Video: Saul Alinsky](#)

~~Faint-In from the Students for DMH~~

Selection from James Lawson film [“Love and Solidarity”](#)

Portfolio 3: Assigned

WEEK 5 - FEBRUARY 16, 18

Monday

Building Power

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Ch. 4, pp. 51-58

Myers-Lipton, [“Chicano Commencement”](#)

Lakey Ch. 7 “Analyzing the Target and Power Dynamics”

Lakey Ch. 9 “Cultivating Allies and Winning over Neutral”

Wednesday

Building Power

Walking Tour – Swarthmore Social Action History and Visit to the College Archive

Haga Ch. 10 “Principle Two: The Beloved Community is the Framework for the Future” (16)

Haga Ch. 11 “Principle Three: Attack forces of Evil, Not Persons Doing Evil (15)

Student [Reflection: David Salinas, Class of ‘19](#)

Portfolio 4: Assigned

WEEK 6 - FEBRUARY 23, 25

Monday

Research

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Ch. 5, pp. 60-68
Haga Ch 15 “The Six Steps of Nonviolence”
[GNAD Swat case\(s\)](#) TBA

DUE: Portfolio 1-3 and Social Action Log

Wednesday

Group Dynamics

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Ch. 6, pp. 72-79
Haga Ch. 16 “Step One: Information Gathering”
Haga Ch. 17 “Step Two: Education”
[Student Reflection: Leila McCabe, Class of ‘12](#)

Portfolio 5: Assigned

WEEK 7 - MARCH 2, 4

Monday

Strategy and Tactics

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Ch. 7, pp. 81-88
Haga Ch 18 “Step Three: Personal Commitment” (7)
Rodriguez, [“A More Balanced Playing Field...”](#)
[AS, SJSU, Board of Directors’ Resolution](#)
[Student Reflection: Lucila Ortiz, Class of ‘10](#)

Portfolio 6: Assigned

Wednesday

Zoom Speaker or visit

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Ch. 7, pp. 89-97
[GNAD case on O4S](#) Campaign
Lakey Ch. 8 “Strategy Tools for Getting from Here to There.” (10)
Lakey Ch 14 “Growing Leadership for a Growing Campaign” (7)

WEEK 8 - MARCH 16, 18

Monday

Campaign Kickoff

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Ch. 8, pp. 99-106

Video: [Student Homeless Alliance](#)

Lakey Ch 15 “Direct Education for Direct Action”

Haga Ch “Step Four: Negotiation” (10)

Haga Ch 20 “Step Five: Direct Action” (12)

Wednesday

Campaign Kickoff

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Ch. 8, pp. 107-112

Franco, [“Students Declare Housing Crisis”](#)

Mehta, [“No Deal”](#)

DeRuy, [“SJSU Students Blast University Leaders for Handling of Housing Crisis”](#)

Trujano, [“SJSU’s New Housing Solutions”](#)

Student Reflection: [Mayra Bernabe, Class of ’19](#)

U.S. CASE STUDY: MOUNTAIN JUSTICE, SWATDIVEST, AND THE SUNRISE MOVEMENT (2018 - present)

Witt, [“The Optimistic Activists for a Green New Deal”](#)

Video: [“Inside the Sunrise Movement”](#)

Selected readings from [SwatDivest News Archive](#) TBD

Zoom Speaker or visit:

***** SPRING BREAK *****

WEEK 9 - MARCH 23, 25

Monday

Campaign Plan

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Ch. 9, pp. 114-120

Rey, [“Campus Safety: A Reason to be Worried?”](#)

Bradley, [“Campus Safety and Statues Garden”](#)

Clark, [“Escort Program to Expand Its Boundaries of Transportation”](#)

CMS Info, [“Students Auto-Enrolled in Alert-SJSU”](#)

Student Reflection, [Natasha Bradley, Class of ‘11](#)

[GNAD Swat case\(s\)](#) TBA

Wednesday

Myers-Lipton, [“Donald Williams Jr. and Students 4 Racial Equality”](#)

Murphy, [“San Jose State Donor’s Alleged Remarks about Latinos Investigated”](#)
O’Connor, [“University’s Officials Step Down After Anti-Latina Comments”](#)
Hernandez, [“Sit-in for Racial Justice: Students Ask for Apology from President”](#)
Murphy, [“SJSU Donor Did Makes Offensive Remarks about Latinos, Investigation Confirms”](#)
Student Reflection: [Estelia Velasquez, Class of ‘16](#)
Video: [SJSU Students Denounce Board Member's Alleged Racist Statement](#)

Portfolio 7: Assigned

WEEK 10 - MARCH 30, APRIL 1

Monday

Campaign Evaluation

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Ch. 10, pp. 122-124

Portfolio 8: Assigned

Wednesday

[GNAD Swat case\(s\)](#) TBA

[How to Get Press to your Event](#)

Ewing, [“Anti-Sweatshop Groups Gain Steam”](#)

Morgan, [“Groups Rally for WRC Support”](#)

[AS University Affairs Meeting](#)

Parker, [“SJSU Signs with Labor Rights Group”](#)

Student Reflection: [Austin Gieger, Class of ‘08](#)

Yap, [“Labor Rights Violations Suspected”](#)

Video: [United Students Against Sweatshops](#)

Video: [Gulf Coast Civic Works Project](#)

WEEK 11 - APRIL 6, 8

Monday

Portfolio 9: Assigned

Wednesday

Campaign frame

TBA

DUE: Portfolio 4-7 and Social Action Log

WEEK 12 - APRIL 13, 15

[GNAD Swat case\(s\)](#) TBA

Monday

Haga Ch 21 “Step Six: Reconciliation” (8)

RIGHT TO A JOB / GULF COAST CIVIC WORKS PROJECT (2006-2010)

Myers-Lipton, [“The Right to a Job”](#)

Diroy, [“Louisiana Winter Project Seeks National Awareness for Gulf Coast”](#)

Goldston, [“Forgotten in Louisiana”](#)

[GCCWP Website](#) (click around, make sure to view Summit Agenda)

Lieurance, [“Students to March for Katrina Anniversary”](#)

[ACT letter to President-elect Obama](#)

Tilove, [“Unlikely Allies Back House bill for Gulf Coast Jobs”](#)

Video: [Fox News Coverage of Louisiana Winter 2007](#)

Wednesday

RIGHT TO A LIVING WAGE / RAISE THE WAGE, SAN JOSE (2010-2012)

Reader: Myers-Lipton, [“The Right to a Living Wage”](#)

Myers-Lipton, [“Raise the Wage in San Jose”](#)

Noguchi, [“Measure Sets Sights on Wage Increase”](#)

SJ Mercury News, [Readers’ Letters](#)

SJ Mercury News, [Internal Affairs](#)

Seipel, [“Minimum-wage Hike Measure Heads to Ballot”](#)

Guevera & Krenak, [“Higher Min Wage in SJ Will Help”](#)

Mendoza, [“Student Class Project Leads to Minimum Wage Jump”](#)

Mungia, [“Students Push for Faster Wager Increases”](#)

Student Reflection: [Elisha St. Laurent, Class of ‘12](#)

WEEK 13 - APRIL 20, 22

[GNAD Swat case\(s\)](#) TBA

Monday

Group Work

Wednesday

RIGHT TO A GOOD EDUCATION / RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EOP (2011)

Myers-Lipton, [“The Right to A Good Education”](#)

Myers-Lipton, [“Re-Establishment of Equal Opportunity Program \(EOP\)”](#)

Student Reflection: Chis Temblador, Class of ‘11, [“Students for EOP”](#)

Patterson, [“Many March to Celebrate Black History Month...”](#)

Lanham, [“Protest Yields Support for Student Equality”](#) (bottom of Spartan Daily, page 1)

WEEK 14 - APRIL 27, 29

[GNAD Swat case\(s\)](#) TBA

Monday

RIGHT TO DECENT HOUSING / STUDENT HOMELESS ALLIANCE (1992-present)

Reader: Myers-Lipton, "[The Right to a Decent Home](#)"

Myers-Lipton, "[National Hunger and Homeless Awareness Month](#)"

Myers-Lipton, "[Student Homeless Alliance and the Push for Emergency Beds on Campus](#)"

Jimenez, "[Students Demand that SJSU Fix Homeless Response...](#)"

Wednesday

U.S. CASE STUDY: ACT-UP (1990)

Reader: DeParle, "Rage, Rash, Effective, Act-Up Shifts Aids Policy" Myers-Lipton, "Graduate Schools for Social Action"

Video: United in Anger (from 0-4:22 minutes, and 21-34 minutes)

Participate in the Social Action Summit Thursday, May 1, 8-9:30 pm EST

FINAL CLASS - MAY 4

Monday

Debrief & Campaign Presentation

Myers-Lipton, CHANGE!, Ch. 11, p. 157-163

Myers-Lipton, "Dr. King's Legacy for Today"

Portfolio 10: Assigned

DUE: Portfolio 8-10 and Social Action Log TBA

CAMPAIGN PRESENTATION & BINDER DUE - TBA