

COMJ 460: COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND CIVIC PROFESSIONALISM¹

INSTRUCTOR

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Office Hours: MWF 9:00-10:00, 12:15-1:15 or by Appointment

ALLEGHENY'S COURSE DESCRIPTION

A study of the history and practices of community organizing as a methodology of social change and civic engagement. Through a seminar format, we trace key moments in a select group of movements for change and, through those cases, identify skills, values, and methods that are central to community organizing as a social and community practice. Students develop skills that are grounded in theory and history and that can be deployed in concrete social situations.

Distribution Requirements: CL

MY COURSE PHILOSOPHY & OBJECTIVES

This course allows us to think through and enact social change. In particular, we are interested in understanding various motivating pressures for social movements, philosophies and tactics that organizers have pursued, and challenges to collective power. As your instructor, my goals for the course are that each of you leaves with an understanding of the broad legacy of participatory democracy and community organizing in the US, that you collectively develop a strong sense for constraints on popular power under actually-existing democracy, and that you gain valuable experience running your own social action campaign.

WHAT I EXPECT OF YOU

You will attend every class meeting, arriving on time and participating in discussions and activities when prompted to do so. You will read assigned texts before the class meeting at which they are to be discussed and come prepared with questions or comments inspired by meaningful engagement with the content of said texts. You will be respectful of your fellow students—even in disagreement—and support their learning and your own by staying focused during meeting times on the content of the class. You will, at all times, be respectful of your instructor and any guest lecturers. You will be flexible and accommodating to changes in this syllabus due to factors endogenous or exogenous to the particulars of our class. You will deal maturely and gracefully with ideas that might challenge or unsettle your own beliefs. You will be unafraid to ask questions when ideas are unclear or complex, and you will support others in doing the same. You will act in good faith as part of a diverse scholarly community. You will

¹ This syllabus and all contents thereof subject to change without advance notice.

be an active participant in your own education and a generous, helpful colleague to the other students learning alongside you.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT OF ME

I will communicate my expectations for your work clearly. I will grade assignments in a timely manner and return them to you with appropriate feedback. I will, within reason, be available to you for any question or discussion you wish to pursue with respect to the course material. I will be considerate of your position as an undergraduate student with many commitments outside of my course and will make demands on your time and attention accordingly. I will be considerate of your various roles outside of school as well and work to accommodate, within reason, existing commitments you may have as parents, caregivers, workers, etc. I will trust you to do your own work and to be transparent in your communications with me—until I am given sufficient reason not to. I will at times encourage lively debate, but will never tolerate comments that are disparaging, discriminatory, or otherwise offensive to other students or broader populations. I will, throughout the course, ask you to think carefully and reflexively about how you formulate opinions, how you gather and evaluate evidence, and how you encounter and negotiate differences in the world. I will, above all, do everything I can to help you develop the skills necessary for critical thought and analysis.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is crucial to your success in this class. My expectations for you are very high, but I am more than willing to make appropriate accommodations. If you are ill, for instance, I would much prefer that you communicate that to me rather than showing up to class and potentially infecting others or simply not being at your best. Reach out to me, and we will make a plan that works for both of us. Similarly, if there are other complications in your life that are impacting your ability to succeed, tell me. **My least favorite thing as a teacher is to be surprised**—if you wait until the last minute to share important information or, worse, fail to share information with me that will later become relevant, we will likely have issues. I see this as, fundamentally, a question of respect and I hope you can as well.

I'll ask that, with few exceptions, your communication with me proceed via email at my Allegheny address. You will see that I have listed my office and Google Voice numbers above—If you need to reach me urgently (hopefully this will never be the case) and I am slow responding to email (also unlikely), then you have those at your disposal.

COURSE MECHANICS & EXPECTATIONS

In terms of class rhythms, I anticipate that you will be in attendance at all of our class meetings. The importance of this should be evident from the brief points above. Qualitatively, I would suggest that you use the "What I Expect of You" section of this syllabus as a guide for *how* to show up for class. We will likely spend the first few minutes of every class just chatting, listening to music, discussing interesting current events—I think these moments are equally as important as the "content" portions of our course, as they set the groundwork for the

engaged learning community that we are collectively producing, and sometimes bleed directly in to the readings, etc. for that day or other days. I encourage you to bring your whole self to class! Along those lines, I should note that **the recording of class meetings is strictly forbidden** (with the obvious exception of students with documented disabilities whose accommodations allow it).

Our reading schedule is posted on the class's Google Classroom page. Assignments will also be posted there alongside detailed instructions. You will submit these assignments, likewise, on Google Classroom.

This class will be centered around a term-long social action project—alongside traditional discussion sessions, your work on the project will occupy a large proportion of our course meetings. Details TBD in consultation with students.

ASSESSMENTS

Your grade in this course will be a reflection of the totality of your effort throughout the semester. Assessments for this course fall in one of four categories:

Engagement & Social Action Project (70 points)

Attendance, participation, in-class assignments, quality of engagement, demonstration of critical thought, and support for your fellow students within and outside class meetings. Consistent attendance at class meetings is necessary but insufficient to achieve maximum points in Engagement. I cannot stress this enough: **this is the most substantial single element of your final grade—treat it as such!**

Writing Assignments (30 points)

Writing assignments to test conceptual understanding and critical thinking. You may revise written submissions based on feedback if you so choose. Further details TBD in consultation with students.

Makeup or late assignments **will not be accepted** except in cases of a documented medical or family emergency or explicit prior arrangement. Again, communicate!

The grading scale is as follows:

A...90-100

B...80-89

C...70-79

D...60-69

I/F...59 or lower

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The use of artificial intelligence (and by this, I specifically mean generative AI and/or Large Language Models such as ChatGPT) is expressly forbidden. I am happy to provide a lengthy discussion and bibliography in defense of this policy, if such is of interest to the course. But for the purposes of this syllabus, I will say simply that using “AI” for things like writing and thinking is antithetical to the very idea of education *per se* and incongruent with the possibility of new, creative, and critical thought.² It is inherently retrograde, reductive, and unreliable and can only exist at all by the ongoing theft of intellectual property. Its use produces massive environmental and social injustices and uneven externalities in the real world. Perhaps most importantly, its use is a betrayal of the community of learning we are attempting to build throughout this term. Learning is, by necessity, a struggle—the use of AI attempts to flatten this process into a soulless product. Whether or not you personally agree with this diagnosis is of no consequence here—the use of AI, in any capacity whatsoever, in association with this course is forbidden in the strongest possible terms. **This is a bright line you would be exceedingly unwise to cross.**

WRITTEN WORK

Formal, written work for this course may be submitted in the citation style of your choice (e.g. APA, MLA, Chicago)—unless otherwise specified in assignment instructions—but must be consistent throughout the assignment. I am happy to meet with students to discuss the finer points of citation, attribution, and formatting if desired—I will not ask you to meet standards in which I am unprepared to instruct you.

Formal, written work will be submitted in two ways. First, you will share with me (callums@allegheny.edu) and give me edit access to a Google Doc in which you draft your work. You may do this when you start working on the assignment or at the deadline for the assignment, I don't care. It is mandatory to do your drafting in this Google Doc. You will also submit to me, via Google Classroom dropbox, a formatted, final PDF version of your work. **The assignment is not submitted until I have both documents in hand!**

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Accommodations

We all learn in different ways, each of us with skills and challenges specific to our particular situation. If you know of any factors in your life that may hinder your ability to best demonstrate your learning, please notify me. If these factors are recognized, documented disabilities under the ADA and have been communicated to the College, please contact me during the **first week of class** so that we can arrange to accommodate any needs. Please note that accommodations cannot be made retroactively.

² There are, of course, complex research applications where targeted use of AI can be incredibly productive. None of those circumstances apply in the context of this course, and, even in such limited cases, environmental and social externalities remain significant.

Academic Integrity

I encourage you to discuss readings, lectures, and assignments with other students. Plagiarism, however, is strictly prohibited—it is further a violation of the spirit of mutual trust I seek to develop in the classroom. As an Allegheny College student, you have agreed to abide by the Honor Code—I will hold you to that agreement. Lack of knowledge of the Honor Code is not a reasonable explanation for a violation. Questions related to course assignments and the academic honesty policy should be directed to the instructor.

Help!

If you begin to struggle in keeping up with the material or are having any other issue in the course, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. You may reach me via email at the address listed above or, under pressing circumstances, at the numbers listed. I will, in either case, get back to you as soon as I can. My job is to support your learning, not make your life difficult. The only way I can help students is if their needs and challenges with respect to the course are made known to me as its instructor.

Finally...

Thank you for your willingness to respect the expectations laid out above. They are important for the development of a conducive and encouraging learning environment for all of us, and I take them quite seriously. Please make the effort to do the same.

KEY DATES**No Class**

Friday, October 2

Friday, October 23

Friday, November 20

Monday, November 23

Last Day of Class

Friday, December 4

TEACHING SOCIAL ACTION CAMPAIGN | TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Deliberation *Do we want to do this?*

Week 2: Issue Development & Tone Setting *What are we doing? Who are we?*

Week 3: Change Theory *How will we effect change?*

Week 4: Building Power *What is our base of power? Who are our co-conspirators?*

Week 5: Research *What do we know? What must we know?*

Week 6: Strategy & Tactics *What sorts of approaches might serve us?*

Week 7: Campaign Plan & Kickoff *How will our campaign run? How do we start with a bang?*

Weeks 8-13: Run Campaign *Run it!*

Week 14: Evaluation *How did we do?*

Week 15: Presentation *What is our story?*