Union Organizing
37:575:360:01

Course Description
This course is intended to give students an overview of union organizing strategy and tactics. We will be exploring the contemporary challenges that unions face in their efforts to organize workers, as well as some history of how modern union organizers have arrived at current “best practices.” Students will get hands-on practice with some basic organizing tactics – with opportunity for more if desired.

Books and Readings
The only books that are assigned in large part or in entirety are “Restoring the Power of Unions” (2010) by Julius G. Getman and “Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement” (2004) edited by Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss. It is available for purchase at the university bookstore. All other assigned readings will be posted on Sakai.

Grading Policy
Attendance and class participation will count for 30% of your final grade. There will be one mid-term take-home exam, also worth 30% of your grade. There will be a final paper, due May 10, that will be worth 40% of your grade for the semester.

Course Schedule
Week 1 - January 25 Introduction to Union Organizing

Week 2 - February 1 What Do Workers Want?
Assignments due:
Readings:
  EPI Briefing Paper #182
  Frances Swenson, hotel switchboard operator (pgs. 32-36)
  Hobart Foote, utility man (pgs. 168-174)
  Babe Secoli, supermarket checker (pgs. 282-286)
  Betsy DeLacy, patients’ representative (pgs. 497-501)
Week 3 – February 8  
Formation & Implementation of National Labor Relations Act – 1930’s and 40’s

Assignments due:  
Readings:
  

Week 4 – February 15  
The Taft-Hartley Amendments and the Roll Back of NLRB rights.

Assignments due:  
Reading:


Week 5 – February 22  
The Boss Fight

Assignments due:  
Reading:

  - Kate Bronfenbrenner (2009) “No Holds Barred: The Intensification of Employer Opposition to Organizing.” EPI Briefing Paper #182

Exam #1

Week 6 – March 1  
Effective Union Tactics

Assignments due:  
Reading:


Week 7 – March 8  
Working with Organizing Committees

Assignments due:  
Readings:

  - Theresa Sharpe (2004) “Union Democracy and Successful Campaigns; The Dynamics of Staff Authority and Worker Participation in an Organizing Union.” (Found on pages 62-87 in “Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement”)

Mid-term take-home exam.
Week 8 – SPRING BREAK

Week 9 – SPRING BREAK

Week 10 – March 29  A History of Organizing Strategy in the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union
Assignments due: Readings:


Week 11 – April 5  The Organizing Conversation

This week’s class will take the form of a 1-day American Federation of Teachers Organizing Institute training for prospective new organizers. We will be joined by guest lecturers who are seasoned union organizers, as well as workers and job-seekers who wish to explore careers as union organizers. We will engage in a series of role-plays to train, as union organizers train, in “get in the door,” “get the story,” union vision,” “inoculation” and “call the question” techniques that make up “the organizing conversation” that leads to full-scale organizing efforts. While this week’s class will formally last just the regular two hours and 55 minutes, the full training will extend until 5:00 PM. Students are invited – although in no way required – to stick around and gain this first-hand experience in the practice of union organizing.

Week 12 – April 12  How to Survive as an Organizer / Shop Talk
Assignments due: Readings:


Week 13 – April 19  Workers Centers & Alternative Model Unions
Guest Speaker: Carrie Gleason, Retail Action Project
Assignments due: Readings:

Week 14 – April 26  Can The NLRB Be Fixed?

Assignments due:  Readings:


Week 15 – May 3  New Visions for Union Organizing

Assignments due:  Readings:

- Richard D. Kahlenberg and Moshe Z. Marvit (August 31, 2012) “Why the right to form a union should be a civil right.” Washington Post.

Week 16 – May 10  FINAL PAPER (NO CLASS)