

Organizing for Social Change

Fall 2026

Professor Janice Fine (fine@work.rutgers.edu)

37:575:359 (Labor Studies) 01:790:356 (Political Science) 34:970:652:01 (Urban Planning)

Thursdays, 10:10 am-12:10 pm

Room 133, Labor Education Center

Office Hours: By appointment: you can make an appointment by emailing Devarshi Patel, devarshipatel118@rutgers.edu or come see me before or after class

TA's:

Roman Sample, jms1225@scarletmail.rutgers.edu,

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Course Overview

Organizing is when people come together to pursue our collective interests to win improvements in our neighborhoods, schools, communities, workplaces, states, nations and planet. Organizing is moving people into Relationship, Action, Teams and Leadership in order to:

- Build their collective power
- Take greater control over their lives
- Alter the relations of power
- Achieve concrete improvements

Fundamentally, organizing is becoming comfortable with asking others to do things and then asking them to ask others to do things. It is a life skill that all of us need!

We will learn how to bring people together, build a base and take action to win on the issues we care about. We will ask: what is power, how does power operate and how do organizations build it and leverage it to win?

The curriculum and examples are drawn from my many years working as an organizer and trainer before and after entering academia and from classics of organizing, political science, sociology, management, urban studies, economics, public policy and anthropology that shed light on key ideas. I'm always adding to it and welcome your suggestions.

The course will cover the building blocks of organizing including:

- Understanding Power and Strategy
- Designing Campaigns
- Building Organizations
- Self Interest
- Recruiting, Persuading and Retaining Members
- Building Teams and Coaching

- Telling our Stories

We will read both practical and scholarly work on these topics and explore them through class discussions, exercises, roleplays and participation in a campus campaign.

The Learning Objectives of this course are to:

- 1) Examine critically the theory and practice of organizing
- 2) Learn a set of concrete organizing skills
- 3) Analyze the role of direct action organizing as an empowerment strategy in disadvantaged and marginalized communities and think about its relationship to broader movements for social change
- 4) Engage in dialogue and debate around issues of power, inequality, organizing, and politics
- 5) Understand theoretical perspectives on concepts related to organizing drawn from political science, sociology, history, anthropology, urban planning, and political theory
- 6) Write an essay that puts forward an argument

Course Requirements:

Weekly Reading Questions:

Each week, there will be readings that cover the topic we will be learning about in class.

- These questions must be submitted before class
- You have the option to skip THREE weeks of your choice.

Organizing Practicum:

In order to receive the full possible credit for this course (3+1=4 credits), you can choose an *organizing organization* and actively participate in it over the course of the semester including planning, organizing and participating in at least one action or conducting ten one-on-one meetings or helping to build and coordinate a turf-based or functional team in an organization. You can work with a campus organization or choose among the organizations that will be presenting their work in the class. Some specific community organizations and unions that have been partnering with the class: AAUP/AFT, New Labor, Make the Road NJ, 1199 New Jersey, Brandworkers, Indivisible, NJ PIRG, NJ CRAN, Emergency Worker Organizing Committee (EWOC), Middlesex Central Labor Council AFL-CIO, Climate Action Campaign, Food and Water Watch, Garden State Equality, among others. Students often tell me that getting their feet wet working with an organization is one of the most powerful experiences they have ever had. Many of my students have gone on to full-time jobs in social justice.

Students need to register for the 4th credit within the first few weeks. If you plan to sign up for the 4th credit, you must get approval from me and then e-mail Bill Bailey at the LSER Credit Office (William.bailey@rutgers.edu) to register for 470 Community Engaged Activity in Labor Studies **You must choose an organization and notify me and the TA's of your choice by** and begin working with the group from that week on. Every two weeks, you are required to submit one or two paragraphs on what you have been doing and your observations and experiences. You can include this along with your homework. If there is a problem with your internship, please let us know immediately so that we can resolve it or place you with another organization.

Essays: In lieu of a mid-term and a final, students will write two essays based upon their reflections on the main issues and themes that emerged in the readings, lectures, role plays, exercises, class campaign and class discussions. If you keep up on the weekly reading questions, come to class and leave yourself adequate time, you should do well on the essays.

Please remember that you **MUST** substantively refer to **at least 4** different articles or book chapters from the reading assignments, and you cannot just mention the article, you must engage with it. Although you are more than welcome to use and cite my power points, they do **NOT** count toward this requirement of 4 articles. Going from good to great on this assignment is when you bring in examples either that we studied in class or from your own experience. **Remember, I am looking for examples of building collective power, not individual.**

Sometimes students don't take the time to find the readings that are germane to the essay question and just take random readings from the syllabus. Don't do that! Also don't bring in outside sources, I am asking you to engage with the readings from this class! Spend some time going through the reading list and choosing the readings you will discuss carefully.

Finally, remember this assignment requires the production of a polished essay that integrates the answers to the questions I have posed. I advise making an outline, writing a first draft and then revising to a polished second draft. Although you are welcome to utilize AI to help you with an outline, you may not use it to draft your paper—I want you to grapple with the course material through writing your own original thoughts about it. **The essay should be approximately 6-8 pages double-spaced.**

NOTE: Students needing accommodation should talk to me about doing an oral exam if they feel this is needed. Please be advised that this does not mean that students can speak off the top of their heads, it would require creating an outline of the material they are going to cover (readings, class presentations and power points, role plays and exercises, group discussions, etc.) and points they are going to make.

Essay #1: What is power in an organizing for social change context and what are the fundamental sources of power in organizing? How does the analysis of forms of power inform campaign strategy and tactics?

Your essay should be sure to discuss the following questions: What is the difference between “power with” and “power over”? What are the “faces of power” and what are the forms of power that people can draw upon as they plan and carry out their strategies? What is the difference between strategy and tactics and what does it mean to “always be able to locate the power behind a tactic?”

DUE: November 2nd, Midnight

Essay #2: What is organizing?

Your essay should cover and provide examples for these questions: What is the difference between organizing and mobilizing? What is the difference between constituents and allies? How do organizations recruit and then retain members? What have you learned from readings, class presentations, exercises and our class campaign about why people join organizations and what it takes to effectively keep them involved? What are circles of commitment and pathways of participation? Why and in what ways are teams important in organizing?

DUE: December 17th, 5 pm

Class Campaign and Attendance

You will be working with peers from this class and previous classes on a campaign to improve university bus service. Over the course of the semester, to gain practical experience in recruitment, campaign strategy and tactics, students will be participating in the OverRide campaign to improve bus service at RU. What does this require? Conducting research and helping to design overall campaign strategy and tactics, participating in planning sessions in class, identifying opportunities to call attention to the campaign, helping to recruit students to join the campaign, taking an active role in campaign activities including: participating in meetings, actions and designing and carrying out strategies to recruit students to do so.

Class meets only once a week, and we cover a lot. When you miss class, you miss out on the Over Ride campaign, presentations, role plays, exercises and group discussions that are essential to learning how to organize—it's not something you can make up and I can't re-run everything I covered in class just for you, that's why **attendance is mandatory**. You should have no unexcused absences; after three, you will receive a zero for the class campaign/attendance portion of your grade. Of course, I will understand if you are sick, have an emergency or family crisis if you communicate with me about it in a timely manner. Do not schedule meetings or appointments during class time. If you don't explain your absence, understand that I will count it as unexcused. Believe it or not, I've had students miss almost the entire semester's worth of classes and then show up and ask if they can hand in the homework and pass the class!

You must also arrive at class on time. I know the buses make it hard, I know parking is difficult and mass transit can be delayed, please build that in so you can make it on time. I have some students who are habitually late, sometimes 30-45 minutes late and it is not fair to me or to your classmates who have figured out how to get here on time. The TA's will be taking attendance, and they will mark down any student who is 15 minutes late or longer. After 3 times, I will deduct points from your attendance grade.

- The richness of our larger conversations will be dependent upon you bringing thoughts and ideas to the larger discussion and taking part in the OverRide campaign. Please don't be a "free rider", take part in our conversations and in your small groups.
- Each week at the start of class, students will engage in a one-on-one conversation with each other. I'll put a question up on the screen for you to discuss.

Readings

1. All of the required articles are available on the web through Canvas. Go to <https://canvas.rutgers.edu/>
2. Enter your Rutgers ID and password in the upper right corner
3. Click on the tab that says Courses, then 2021SP- ORGANZ FOR SOC CHNG 37:575:359:01
4. Click on "modules" at the left
5. Scroll down to this week's module and click "Week X: To Do" for links to that modules readings

- Keanga Yahmatta-Taylor, *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*, pp. 9-14, 61-64
- Strike Debt “Student Debt: Foreclosing on the Future” pp. 65-78
- What a Story of 1970s Abortion Activism Can Teach Us Today
<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2022/06/the-janes-hbo-max-review-abortion-roe/661446/>
- “Reclaiming Our Financial Power”, Maurice BP Weeks, Racism is Profitable Podcast
<https://www.liberationinagenerationaction.org/podcasts/reclaiming-our-financial-power/>.

Optional:

- Yvonne Bynoe, Still We Rise: Student Activism on a Global Scale, in *Stand and Deliver: Political Activism, Leadership, and Hip Hop Culture*, 133-144
- Jelani Cobb, The Matter of Black Lives: A New Kind of Movement Found Its Moment, What Will It’s Future Be? March 14, 2016 *New Yorker*
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/14/where-is-black-lives-matter-headed>
- Gary Delgado, *Organizing the Movement* Chapter Two: The Sixties Movements: Roots of Community Organization 13-38

Week 3: September 17, 2026

Choose an organization to work with for the organizational practicum: Organizations come and present this week or next week

Relations of Power, continued and beginning of building teams

Readings for Week 3:

Read all three:

- John Gaventa: *Power and Powerlessness*, Power and Participation 1-32
- Stephen Dumcomb: Cultural Hegemony, *Beautiful Trouble*, 222-223
- Jennifer Jihye Chun, *Organizing at the Margins: the Symbolic Politics of Labor in South Korea and the United States*, pp. 13-19

In addition, choose one:

- Hahrie Han, Elizabeth McKenna, Michelle Oyakawa, *Prisms of the People*, pp. 69-83
- Deepak Pateriya, “What’s Your Power Analysis? An Interview with Doran Schrantz,”
https://forgeorganizing.org/article/interview-doran-schrantz?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email
- The Forge, “The Rise and Fall of Racial Capitalism”
<https://forgeorganizing.org/issues/rise-and-fall-racial-capitalism>
- Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, Signaling Power and Signaling to Power, 189-222
- The Star Making Machine that Created Donald Trump, Russ Buettner and Susanne Craig
<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/14/business/donald-trump-apprentice.html>

Optional:

- Lawrence Goodwyn *The Populist Moment*, Introduction
<https://ratical.org/corporations/PMSHAGIntro.html>
- E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People*, Chapter One.
- Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens” *Perspectives on Politics*, September, 2014, Vol 12/No. 3.

- Peter Dreier (2003) The Future of Community Reinvestment: Challenges and Opportunities in a Changing Environment, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 69:4, 341-353, DOI: 10.1080/01944360308976323
- Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, “Rulemaking, Rulebreaking and Power” 1-44.

Week 4: September 24, 2026

Deadline for choosing an organization to do your one credit internship with and notify me and the TA’s

How to Run A Meeting

Building Teams

Readings for Week 4:

- McKenna and Han, *Groundbreakers*, Creating a Structure to Share Responsibility: Neighborhood Teams, 130-152
- Wageman, et al, Give Your Leadership Team the Structure it Needs to Work, in *Senior Leadership Teams: What it takes to make them great* Chapter 1 pp.1-23 and When to Coach the Team pp. 165-177
- Hackman Interview, Why Teams Don’t Work, *Harvard Business Review*, pp 2-10
- Steve Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose*, The Saddleback Difference, 22-36
- Chris Surratt, “A Clean Slate” in *Small Groups for the Rest of Us*, 57-75

Week 5: October 1, 2026

Readings for week 5:

- Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years: 1954-1963*, Chapter Five: The Montgomery Bus Boycott 120-196
- Barbara Ramsby *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, Chapter 10: Mississippi Goddamn: Fighting for Freedom in the Belly of the Beast of Southern Racism, 299-329

Optional:

- Dara T. Mathis, “King’s Message of Nonviolence has been Distorted
- Doug McAdam *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, pp. 125-142.
- Rachel Meyer and Janice Fine “Grassroots Citizenship at Multiple Scales: Rethinking Immigrant Civic Participation” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, December 2017, Volume 30, Issue 4, pp 323–348.
- Nell Irvin Painter, “Mother of the Movement” *NYT Book Review*, March 31, 2013.
- November 30, 2012 “Young Immigrants Say It’s Obama’s Time to Act”
Julia Preston, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/01/us/dream-act-gives-young-immigrants-a-political-voice.html>
- Michael Specter “How Act Up Changed America” a book review of *Let the Record Show...* by Sarah Schulman
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/06/14/how-act-up-changed-america>

Week 6: October 8, 2026

Strategy and Designing Campaigns: The essence of effective organizing is strategy and planning campaigns that accurately identify and concentrate power on specific targets for the achievement of specific goals. This class will lay out a key tool from the Midwest Academy called the Strategy Chart which will form the basis for the semester-long group assignment.

Handouts:

- Bobo, Kendall and Max, *Organizing for Social Change* “Developing a Strategy” 20-34, Fine Revised Strategy Chart and Blank strategy charts
- Bobo, Kendall and Max, “Planning and Running Meetings” 95-102

Reading for week 6

Read all 4:

- Michal Gecan, *Going Public*, The Habit of Action, 49-99
- Jane McAlevey, *No Shortcuts*, Introduction, 1-22
- Alicia Garza, *The Purpose of Power* No Base, No Movement, 212-218

In addition, choose one:

- Bobo, Kendall and Max: Designing Actions, 34-40, 48-54, 56-69
- Show, Don’t Tell, *Beautiful Trouble*, 174-175
- Put Your Target in a Decision Dilemma, *Beautiful Trouble*, 166-167
- Time is Running Out to Cancel Student Debt for Aging Borrowers
inthesetimes.com/article/debt-collective-cancel-student-loans?link_id=8&can_id=694e67f982fd247075a896edb64a1ab4&source=email-the-ballot-box-belongs-to-working-people-

Week 7: October 15, 2026

More on Campaign Strategy Development: In this class we will further explore strategy.

Handouts: Campaign Strategy Exercise: Sludge Incinerators in Providence, Rhode Island

Readings for week 7:

- Alicia Garza Chapters 6&7 “Trayvon, Obama and the Birth of Black Lives Matter” and “Rebellion and Resistance” in *The Purpose of Power* 95-137
- Cristina Jimenez and Peter Dreier, “How Undocumented Youth Moved the Immigrant Rights Movement” Gettysburg Case Study, Spring 2015
- Josh Bolotsky, “Use your radical fringe to shift the Overton Window” in *Beautiful Trouble*, pp. 200-201.

Optional:

- Janice Fine, *Community Unions: Beyond the Politics of Particularism*, “Climbing Jacob’s Ladder: Solidarity and Baltimore” pp. 201-247
- David Karpf, *Analytic Activism: Digital Listening and the New Political Strategy*, “The Organizational Logic of Petition Platforms” 59-92

Week 8: October 22, 2026

Actions This session will instruct students in the basics of preparing for (including doing systematic turnout), executing and evaluating actions.

Readings for week 8:

- Rinku Sen, Picking the Good Fight, in *Stirring It Up*, 48-78
- Alicia Garza “The Meaning of Movement” in *The Purpose of Power: How We Come Together When We Fall Apart* pp. 141-148
- Engler and Engler, Structure and Movement in *This is an Uprising*, 31-56
- Marshall Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins*, Chapter One, Introduction: How David Beat Goliath 3-21

Optional:

- Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, chapters 3, 6 and 7
- Andrew Boyd and Joshua Kahn Russell, “Action Logic” pp 208-209 *Beautiful Trouble*
- Rinku Sen “Movement Moments” <http://www.colorlines.com/articles/occupying-organizing-and-movements-demand-both>
- John Harwood, “A Sea Change in Less Than 50 Years as Gay Rights Gained Momentum” *NYT* March 26, 2013, A16.

Week 9 October 29, 2026

FIRST ESSAY ON POWER DUE November 2nd SEE PAGE THREE FOR ESSAY QUESTION AND INSTRUCTIONS

Understanding People is Key to Organizing People

Emotional Intelligence

Hand Model of the Brain

Triggers

Reappraisal

Coaching

How to be an anti-racist

Problematic Organizing and social movement cultures and how to create healthy ones

Choose 2:

- Alicia Garza, “Imposter Syndrome and the Patriarchy” in *The Purpose of Power* 196-211
- Ibram X. Kendi *How to Be an Antiracist* pp. 3-23
- JM Smucker, “Life of the Oppositional Group”, *Hegemony How-To*, 46-62
- Yotam Marom, *For Louder Days*, Chapter Five
- Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, Movement Cultures. 83-112

Choose 2:

- Sanford F. Schram, “Middle-Class Melancholia” *The Return of Ordinary Capitalism: Neoliberalism, Precarity, Occupy*, 32-44
- Hochschild AR. *Stolen Pride : Loss, Shame, and the Rise of the Right*. 1st ed. The New Press; 2024, “The Pride Paradox” Chapter Three. Pp. 23-42 (find it here: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.26193155>)

- Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper “Collective Identity and Social Movements” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 27 (2001), pp. 283-305.

Week 10: November 5, 2026

Building the Organization: The essence of all effective organizing is recruitment, leadership development, having clear roles on teams and coaching. Drawing upon ideas and exercises from the Workplace Justice Lab Build the Base Grow the Movement curriculum, the next four classes will focus on the analyses, strategic approaches and concrete skills necessary to recruiting participants to an organization and involving them in building and leading it.
Group Work on: Constituents, Allies and Opponents and Actual Research

Readings for Week 10

- George Goehl, Often Overlooked, The Power of Ritual in Organizing
- Michael Gecan, *Going Public*: Part I. The Habit of Relating: 19-32, 33-46
- Hahrie Han, Chapter 3: “Choosing Strategies for Building Power” *How Organizations Develop Activists*, 62-88
- Robert Cialdini, Harnessing the Science of Persuasion, 2-9
- Ziad Munson, "How People Become Pro-Life Activists"
<https://scholars.org/contribution/how-people-become-pro-life-activists>
- Climate Advocacy Lab: 9 Evidence-Based Insights for Action-taking

Week 11: November 12, 2026

Building the Organization continued

Readings for Week 11:

Read all 3:

- Mike Gecan, *Going Public* Part III. The Habit of Organization 129-166
- Jane McAlevey, No Shortcuts, Chapter Two, 27-70

In addition, choose one:

- Janice Fine, Jill Hurst and Allison Porter “Solving for Growth” 1-15
- Janice Fine, “Is it Important for Members to Pay Membership Dues?”
- Han, Chapter Five: Mobilizing, 123-151

Optional:

- Debra C. Minkoff, “Bending with the Wind: Strategic Change and Adaptation by Women’s and Racial Minority Organizations, *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 104, No. 6 (May 1999) pp. 1666-1703.
- Mark Leach and Laurie Mazur, “Creating Culture: The Promising Practices of Successful Movement Networks” *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, Fall/Winter 2013.

Week 12: November 19, 2026

Building the Organization continued
Relational Organizing

Readings for Week 12:

- Malcolm Gladwell “Six Degrees of Lois Weisberg” *the New Yorker* Jan. 11, 1999, 52-63
- Mark Engler and Paul Engler, *The Strategic Turn*, pp 1-27
- Janice Fine and Benjamin Schlesinger, Where Did the Labor Vote Go?
<https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/where-did-the-labor-vote-go/>

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 13: December 3, 2026

Circles of Commitment, Leadership Pathways, Systems and Structures

Readings for Week 13

- Bobo, Kendall and Max: *Organizing for Social Change*, Chapter 20 “Tactical Investigations” 232-274 (read the first ten pages and skim the rest)
- Peter Dreier, unpublished article, “When Is Business Bluffing? Progressives’ Dilemma Over Capital Mobility”
- Arnie Graf, "Cops vs. EDF" Lessons Learned: Stories from a Lifetime of Organizing, 40-76

Choose One additional:

- David Vogel, “Why Businessmen Distrust Their State: The Political Consciousness of American Corporate Executives” *British Journal of Political Science*, 1978 pp. 45-78.
- Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, "Business Power and Social Policy: Employers and the Formation of the American Welfare State" pp 277-283
- Colin Gordon “Why No Corporatism in the United States? Business Disorganization and its Consequences” *Business and Economic History*, Volume 27, no. 1, Fall 1998.
- Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, “Who Passes Business’s ‘Model Bills’? Policy Capacity and Corporate Influence in US State Politics” *Perspectives on Politics*, September 2014, Vol. 12, No. 3.

Week 14: December 10, 2026

Public Narrative: Story of Self, Us, Now

Readings for Week 14:

- Marshall Ganz, “The Power of Story in Social Movements”, *American Sociological Association Annual Meeting*, 2001, 16 pp. and Marshall Ganz and the New Organizing Institute, “Creating Shared Story: Story of Self,” “Story of Us” and “Story of Now”.
- James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography and Creativity in Social Movements*, University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp. 69-99.

FINAL ESSAY DUE: December 17th 5 pm

