

Organizing for Social Change

Fall 2025

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

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

01: 595: 312:03 (Latin and Caribbean Studies)

Thursdays, 2-5 pm

Room 133 Labor Education Center

Office Hours: By appointment: you can make an appointment by emailing jessica.galvez@rutgers.edu or come see me before or after class

TA's: Julia Kaniuk jmk575@scarletmail.rutgers.edu, Avery Gordon amg652@scarletmail.rutgers.edu, Madison Miley msm393@scarletmail.rutgers.edu

Course Overview

Organizing is how people come together to pursue their collective interests and win. Organizing is moving people into Relationship, Action, Teams and Leadership in order to:

- Build their collective power
- Take greater control over their own lives
- Alter the relations of power
- Achieve shared goals

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:

- Building the Organization
- Strategy, Campaigns and Tactics
- Forms of Power
- Strategic Research and Power Analysis
- Effective Actions
- Building Teams and Coaching
- Public Narrative

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 handed in by midnight, the night before class
- You have the option to skip THREE weeks of your choice.

Organizing Practicum:

In order to receive full 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. *Specific community organizations and unions that have been partnering with the class: AAUP/AFT, New Labor, Make the Road NJ, 1199 New Jersey, Brandworkers, NJ PIRG, NJ CRAN, NJ Alliance for Immigrant 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 of your choice by October 9** 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 the TA's and I 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 and class discussions. Please remember that you **MUST** substantively refer to **at least 4** different class readings *pertaining to the question* and you cannot just mention the article, you must engage with it. 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! Spend some time going through the reading list and choosing the readings you will discuss carefully. Also, I advise making an outline, writing a first draft and then revising to a polished second draft. 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 cover 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: October 30, 2025

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 12, 2025

Class Campaign and Attendance

You will also be working with peers from this class and the previous class 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. These are not optional, they are a core part of the course.

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

Click on the folder for the week you want, then the file you want to download. Many of the readings are in Adobe Acrobat format. If your computer doesn't have it, you can download the reader for free at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>

Grading

Weekly Reaction Papers	35%
Essay One	15%
Essay Two	15%
Class Campaign/Attendance	35%** <i>After three unexcused absences your total attendance grade will be zero which means the highest grade you can earn in the class is a 65% (of course excused absences that you communicate with me about will not be counted against your grade).</i>

Week 1: September 4

*****See if you can download and read prior to the first class:**

- Barack Obama. 1990. "Why organize? Problems and promise in the inner city." In Peg Knoepfle (ed.). *After Alinsky: Community Organizing in Illinois*. Springfield, IL: Illinois Issues, University of Illinois at Springfield.
- Rinku Sen, *Stirring it Up* Introduction: Community Organizing-Yesterday and Today

- Isabel Wilkerson, “When Will the North Face its Racism?” NY Times, Jan. 10, 2015.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/opinion/sunday/when-will-the-north-face-its-racism.html>
- Ben Austen “The Death and Life of Chicago” NYTimes, May 29, 2013
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/02/magazine/how-chicagos-housing-crisis-ignited-a-new-form-of-activism.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&

Introduction to Organizing: This class will begin by asking students to think about their own beliefs and passions. It will go on to provide students with an understanding of what organizing is and isn’t.

Week 2: September 11

Relations of Power: What is power? The next two classes will provide students with an understanding of the nature of power and the use and sources of power in organizing for social change.

Readings for Week 2:

Read all:

- Marshall Ganz, “What is Organizing?” 2 pager
- Michael Gecan, *Going Public*: Preface: Why Organize? xi-xix Introduction: 1-16
- Kim Bobo, Kendall and Max *Organizing for Social Change*: 6-13
- Ed Chambers, *Roots for Radicals*, “The World As It Is and the World As It Should Be” 21-43
- Charles M. Payne “Give Light and the People Will Find a Way: The Roots of an Organizing Tradition” 67-102 in *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*, University of California Press.

Choose 2:

- Keanga Yahata-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 18

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-schranzt?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/PMSHAGAintro.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 25

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
- Gordon Whitman, Stand Up! Team, Finding a Home Base in a Movement for Change pp. 83-108
- Chris Surratt, “A Clean Slate” in *Small Groups for the Rest of Us*, 57-75

Week 5: October 2 NO CLASS YOM KIPPUR

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 9

Deadline for choosing an org to work with

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 16

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 23

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 30

Understanding People is Key to Organizing People

Emotional Intelligence
Hand Model of the Brain
Triggers
Reappraisal
Coaching
How to be an anti-racist

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

Choose 3:

- 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
- Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, Movement Cultures. 83-112
- Sanford F. Schram, “Middle-Class Melancholia” *The Return of Ordinary Capitalism: Neoliberalism, Precarity, Occupy*, 32-44
- Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper “Collective Identity and Social Movements” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 27 (2001), pp. 283-305.

Self-care- In addition, read the following 2:

- “Pace Yourself”, in Beautiful Trouble, 158-159
- Sustainability Documents from Selah/Jewish Funds for Justice including: 
 - Monthly Tool: Personal Ecology
 - Energy and Wellness Index Parts 1 and 2
 - Time Management Matrix
 - Urgency Index

Week 10: November 6

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 13

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 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 20

Building the Organization continued

Relational Organizing and Telling Our Stories

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/>

Week 13: November 25

Circles of Commitment, Leadership Pathways, Systems and Structures

Group work on Targets, Tactics, Short Term Goals, Message, Timeline

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
- Narrative Power Analysis, *Beautiful Trouble*, 244-245

Optional:

- 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 4

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 12