

**Topics in American Politics:
Citizenship and Activism
(Political Science 349)
Rutgers University, Summer Session 2003**

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The United States is rightly proud of its long history of active citizen engagement in politics and policymaking. Indeed, Alexis de Tocqueville, the first great observer of American democracy, commented on Americans' unique mastery of the "arts of association." But more recently, pundits have deplored Americans' withdrawal from the public arena. Today, Americans don't even vote, the simplest of all forms of political action, and participation in the grassroots organizations essential to a vital community life—PTOs, town councils—has dropped precipitously. Today, the American mantra seems to be: "They're in charge" or "What can *I* do about it?"

But what if you think that "they" are doing a bad job? What if they aren't addressing the issues that matter to *you*? What if *you* want to do something about it?

This course is about how citizens—young and old—*can* mobilize and act for social change. Readings for the class will provide the theoretical context to help you understand the evolution of the organizing tradition, and the practical skills to give you the ability to be an active citizen. In the first week of class, we will read case studies that examine citizen campaigns, hear guest lectures from organizers about their own advocacy experiences, and have workshop sessions where you practice and develop skills necessary to organizing. Most important, you and your classmates will plan an actual project down to preparing the press conference to announce it! In the second week of class you will partner with experienced community organizers to teach activism and advocacy skills to the attendees at the New Jersey Youth Leadership Conference co-sponsored by the American Red Cross, the Global Partnership in Activism and Cross-Cultural Training (GPACT) and the Rutgers Citizenship and Service Education (CASE) Program. On the final day, you will conduct the press conference for your course project, de-brief the training experience, and discuss the application of your new skills in your real lives as citizens.

Required readings

All assigned readings are required. Readings are drawn from the following texts:

- Jan Barry, *A Citizen's Guide to Grassroots Campaigns* (Rutgers University Press, 2000).
- Kimberly Bobo, *Organizing for Social Change* (Midwest Academy for Activists, 2001).
- Si Kahn, *Organizing: A Guide for Grassroots Leaders* (National Association of Social Workers, 1991).
- Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson, eds., *Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

However, you will **not** have to purchase any texts. Instead, a course packet and all assigned reading will be available online through the library's online "Reserve Desk." To read course ma-

terials online or download them to read later, go to: <http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/> and click on IRIS. At IRIS, click on Reserve Desk, enter Shafer and click Instructor. Click on Shafer and then pick the reading you want from the list.

You will need a Rutgers username and password to access the reading. If you are registered Rutgers student, use your Eden username and password. If you are registered just for Summer Session, take your term bill receipt to any Rutgers computer lab. Present it to the attendant, and (s)he will walk you through getting a username and password for the Rutgers computer network.

The Global PACT Trainer's Manual will be provided on the first day of class at no charge.

Grades

You will be evaluated based on class participation, several short papers and presentations, a group project that involves the planning of a hypothetical advocacy campaign, and performance as a trainer's assistant at the New Jersey Youth Leadership Conference.

This class is run as an intensive workshop experience. **On time** attendance at **all** regularly scheduled class meetings and conference sessions is **required**. Any unexcused absence will result in 12.5 percent subtracted from your grade. An accumulated lateness of 15 minutes counts at the equivalent of an unexcused absence. To be excused, an absence must be documented to your college's dean of students, doctor's note or other verifiable proof.

20%	Class participation
20%	One-page papers and presentations
20%	Group final project
30%	Conference performance
<u>10%</u>	<u>Conference journal</u>
100 %	Total

Class Expectations

This will be an intense course in which I will make high demands on you. Unlike most courses, it requires substantial, graded group work and active participation, often in the form of required public presentations. Unlike most courses, it also requires that you actually practice the skills and knowledge you have acquired in a live setting. I want to be clear, therefore, about what you are signing up for. First, and most important, since you will be acting as an assistant trainer at the New Jersey Youth Leadership Conference, you will be assuming—and be graded upon—the responsibility to work with, teach and lead the attendees. Second, because you are learning to be an organizer, someone who—by definition— works in groups, 40% of your grade is a group grade. Third, because organizers must communicate with the public, and because as trainers you will have to communicate with conference organizers and attendees, I will cold call you—stand you up in front of the class, and ask you to perform. Your grade and your group's grade will depend on your ability to get the message across. Fourth, I expect you to do the assigned readings **prior** to class. Again, I cold call and expect hot answers. Finally, almost every night you will have a short (roughly one page) written assignment. You **must** have the assignment in hand to get into class the next day. And just because the papers are short, they are *not* easy—and I will not grade them easily.

Schedule

Reading assignment for discussion on Day One:

Barry, Jan. 2000. "Citizens in Action," from *A Citizen's Guide to Grassroots Campaigns* (ch. 1).

Kahn, Si. 1991. "Organizing," from *Organizing for Social Change* (ch. 1).

Day One. Monday, Aug. 4. Introductions and Identifying Issues.

Assignments for tomorrow:

- 2-minute presentation on why your issue is important
- Read Jan Barry's "Rebuilding Urban Neighborhoods" (ch. 2)

Day Two. Tuesday, Aug. 5. Filtering and Focusing Your Issue. Resources and Research.

Two-minute presentations on why your issue is important.

Assignments for tomorrow:

- 2-minute presentation on your focused issue, using resource sources.
- Read Jan Barry's "Saving a Swamp" (ch. 3)

Day Three. Wednesday, Aug. 6. Networking and Mobilizing. Who Are the Decisionmakers?

Two-minute presentations on researched issues.

Assignments for tomorrow:

- Read Kim Bobo's "Developing a Strategy" (ch. 4 from *Organizing for Social Change*). Bring the work-sheet to class.

Day Four. Thursday, Aug. 7. Strategy and Tactics. Short- and Long-term Goals.

Bobo worksheet exercise.

Assignments for tomorrow:

- 2-minute presentation as a "call to action" on your issue.
- Read "The Strategic Determinants of a Countermovement" by Victoria Johnson (ch. 12 of *Waves of Protest*, edited by Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson.)
- Read Jan Barry's "Navigating the Media" (ch. 9)

Day Five. Friday, Aug. 8. Working with the Media.

Two-minute calls to action. Draft press release. Sound bite development.

Assignments for tomorrow:

- Revise your group press release into a polished version.
- Practice your 30-second sound bites (what is your group; what is your issue)
- Read "Sacrifice for a Cause" by Eric L. Hirsch (ch. 3 of *Waves of Protest*, edited by Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson.)

Day Six. Saturday, Aug. 9. Conference preparation and training rehearsal.

Sound bite and press release presentations. Preparation for New Jersey Youth Leadership Conference.

Assignments for Monday:

- Review GPACT manual and meet with your senior trainer and training team

Day Seven. Monday, Aug. 11. New Jersey Youth Leadership Conference.

Training day one

Assignments for tomorrow:

- Prepare day two with senior trainer.
- Attend evening speaker with training team, lead discussion section.
- Debrief day one with entire training team.
- Write conference journal

Day Eight. Tuesday, Aug. 12. New Jersey Youth Leadership Conference.

Training day two, submit conference journal

Assignments for tomorrow:

- Prepare day three with senior trainer.
- Attend evening speaker with training team, lead discussion section.
- Debrief day two with entire training team.
- Write conference journal

Day Nine. Wednesday, Aug. 13. New Jersey Youth Leadership Conference

Training day three, submit conference journal. Judge NJYLC group presentations.

Assignments for tomorrow:

- Prepare day four with senior trainer.
- Debrief day three with entire training team.
- Write conference journal

Day Ten. Thursday, Aug. 15. New Jersey Youth Leadership Conference

Training day four, submit conference journal

Assignments for tomorrow:

- Debrief day three with entire training team.
- Finish and practice group presentation
- Write conference journal

Day Eleven. Friday, Aug. 15, AM. New Jersey Youth Leadership Conference

Training day five, submit final conference journal—overall assessment of conference

Day Eleven. Friday, Aug. 15, PM. Group presentations and de-briefing

Final group presentations in the form of a press conference, rally, or mobilizational meeting (as appropriate to your issue), followed by question-and-answer period. Discussion of how to apply your new skills and training experience in real life.