

POL 334 Community Organizing & Leadership  
Hybrid Format: **class meets Thursdays at 9:30am**, 1041 CB  
3 Credit Hours, Summer 2023

Instructor: Lara Rusch

Email: [lrusch@umich.edu](mailto:lrusch@umich.edu)

Student Open Drop-in Hours: Thursdays 11am-12pm, Office 3072 CB

Zoom or phone meetings by appointment: <https://calendly.com/lrusch/student-meetings>

---

**Course Description:**

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the theory and practice of local democratic action. The course draws on the history, methods, and lessons of American community organizing traditions and the civil rights movement and relates those past experiences to current issues. In collaboration with local community partners, students learn about effective methods of civic engagement and leadership, as currently practiced in metropolitan Detroit. (Course Catalog)

Community organizing is rooted in effective interpersonal communication, shared interests, and collaborative action: it involves developing respectful public relationships, researching and sharing information, working collaboratively, and building networks across groups. It cannot be learned only from the classroom but must be actively pursued and practiced. *This is an [academic service-learning \(ASL\)](#) course.* ASL courses connect coursework with community engagement to enhance student learning and contribute to civic life. The course project focus for Summer 2023 is **student housing insecurity**.

**Learning Goals**

This course satisfies the Intersections and Social & Behavioral Analysis categories of the [Dearborn Discovery Core](#) and meets Program Goals for the Discipline of [Political Science](#).

**Course Objectives**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Plan and carry out a collaborative action project;
  - Describe and analyze 20<sup>th</sup> century examples of organizing philosophy and practice;
  - Explain and compare the benefits and drawbacks of various types of civic action;
  - Explain the meanings of power, self interest, and leadership in community organizing;
  - Analyze the significance of intersectional identities and inequalities to political behavior;
  - Identify and analyze impediments to political participation and to propose context-sensitive methods of overcoming disengagement.
  - Learn and implement a variety of democratic practices, including holding relational interviews, evaluating meetings, and collective decision-making;
  - Explain, develop and critique campaign strategy, issue framing, and timelines;
  - Identify and cultivate leadership capacity, in themselves and others.
-

## Required Materials and/or Technology:

The updated syllabus, recorded lectures, and all other materials are available online at our canvas website: login <http://canvas.umich.edu/>. You will need access to a computer (mac or pc) with dependable internet access. If you do not have access to either of these, inform me immediately so that we can find solutions.

The primary **required texts** are available from the bookstore and online sellers:

- ❑ *CHANGE! Student Guide to Social Action* by Scott Myers-Lipton (9781138297296)
- ❑ *Stoking the Fire of Democracy* by Stephen Noble Smith (9780879464141)

**A note about the text “Change!”** This book takes a social action approach to addressing policy issues, and includes adversarial tactics used in issue campaigns. This text will guide our campus project and prepare you for the final paper. The campus project will focus on the collaborative aspects of organizing. The goal is to learn about a complex issue and act in collaboration with staff and community partners in the short time we have.

Additional required readings are available on our Canvas site. Other book selections are from the following texts:

- ❑ Berkley, Ezra, et al. (2013). [\*From the Bottom Up: Strategies and Practices for Membership Based Organizations\*](#). Sylvia Rivera Law Project.
- ❑ Bobo, Kim, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max. (2010). *Organizing for Social Change: Midwest Academy Manual for Activists*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Santa Ana, CA: The Forum Press.
- ❑ Han, Hahrie. (2014). *How Organizations Develop Activists: Civic Associations & Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- ❑ Pyles, Loretta. (2014). *Progressive Community Organizing: Reflective Practice in a Globalizing World*. New York: Routledge.
- ❑ Sabl, Andrew. (2002). *Ruling Passions: Political Offices and Democratic Ethics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- ❑ Staples, Lee. (2016). *Roots to Power: A Manual for Grassroots Organizing*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

---

\*See the [Course Blueprint](#) for a detailed schedule with readings, other assignments, and weekly learning objectives\*

---

## Course Requirements, Assignment Descriptions & Grade Distributions

Note: the instructor may modify assignments, schedule, or course organization if necessary to benefit the class as a whole. Students will be informed of any changes via announcements on Canvas and in-class.

Graded Work	Details and Requirements	Points
Attendance and participation	<p>This course <b>requires consistent in-person participation</b> to move the course project forward. This includes constructive and active involvement in group discussions and project activities and completion of short, written assignments during class.</p> <p>Students are expected to arrive in class on time and stay until the end. Each student is allowed one unexcused absence during the semester. Additional missed classes will = <math>\frac{1}{3}</math> grade markdown on the final participation grade, such as from an A to an A-.</p> <p>If you have a personal emergency or illness please let me know when you are able by Canvas message. More than 3 unexcused absences will be considered excessive absences and subject to failure in the class by determination of the instructor.</p>	<b>15</b>
Weekly project facilitator	Each week 1 student will facilitate part of class discussion to keep track of the project, gather ideas, facilitate group decisions, and plan ahead. This includes planning for and facilitating discussion and making sure everyone agrees on action items.	<b>5</b>
Weekly Skills & Concepts Assignments	<p>These will include class activities and discussions on Canvas and annotations of some readings on Perusall (linked through Canvas). Most of these will include a Declaration quiz to receive credit for work you have submitted.</p> <p>All posts must be respectful &amp; constructive, with the underlying purpose of understanding and learning. Any posts that do not meet these criteria may be removed by the instructor and will receive zero points.</p> <p>[Due Wednesdays 11:59 pm]</p>	<b>50</b>
Midterm Exam	This written, in class exam to assess your understanding of key concepts from readings and lectures. A study guide will be provided two weeks in advance.	<b>20</b>

5 Reflection Journal Entries	Respond to prompts to reflect on your intellectual growth and document your questions, interests, and leadership development over the semester.  [Due Saturdays by 11:59pm on weeks due]	<b>50</b>
2 interview summaries	Plan and complete two interviews and a detailed written summary and reflection of each interview. These must include at least one campus stakeholder and at least one community stakeholder focusing on their interests, motivations, and organizational involvement. Specific guidelines will be provided.	<b>30</b>
Course Project Contributions	This grade will include your role in course deliverables; these may include compiling information, developing a researched document, planning a meeting or event, or other outcomes identified as important to the project team by the 6th week of the semester.  This will also include personal and peer review.	<b>10</b>
Final Paper: Campaign Strategy	This is a take home, written final exam to demonstrate what you learned about the organizing process by proposing a hypothetical but achievable issue campaign to further our goals from this term. Detailed instructions forthcoming.	<b>20</b>
Total		<b>200</b>

Grading Scale: A = 94-100%, A- = 90-93%, B+ = 87-89%, B = 84-86%, B- = 80-83%, and so on.

---

### What to Expect: an overview of the Weekly Schedule

Our weekly structure will typically include the following:

- On canvas, a written instructions front page of main topics and materials for the week
- A lecture presentation (narration over powerpoint) and/or other visual sources to explain and expand on key concepts from the readings
- Skills and Concepts assignments are due Wednesday nights to prepare for classes on Thursdays.
- Each Thursday in class we will review main ideas and 1-2 students will lead course project discussions and planning.
- Journal Entries due Saturday nights on the weeks they are due.

## Reflection Journal Entries

In academic service-learning (ASL) courses, it is especially important that students reflect individually on their personal development and community experiences. Such reflections are also built into democratic organizing models. Journal prompts will help you synthesize the conceptual and practical aspects of the course and to reflect on your own development during the semester. You will have the opportunity to revise these for increased credit within a given time frame.

## Meeting with the Instructor

Each student is required to meet with Prof. Rusch at least once this semester in person. Be prepared to ask a content-related question, meaning a question related to understanding course terms and concepts that underlie the theory and practice of community organizing. These may include the meanings of terms (beyond basic definitions), political institutions and processes, activism and social movement history related, or questions about interview topics and processes. You are also invited and encouraged to ask about deadlines, requirements, other courses, career goals, or just to chat about politics!

---

## Course Policies

**Communication:** I will respond to any electronic communication as soon as possible, within 48 hours, and typically within a few hours. Each email message should state the subject or purpose, and include your first and last name in the message. Because of federal privacy regulations, please send all emails through your UM email account. **Check your umich email daily Monday through Friday** to keep up with any announcements.

**Check your Canvas settings** to make sure you will receive course notifications. Choose to receive updates “ASAP” for inbox messages, grading, and announcements. (Go to Canvas > Account and Notifications > and change course activities to “notify me right away”.)

**Late work:** There is a 24 hour grace period for all late assignments. After that grace period, you will not be able to submit an assignment unless you contact the instructor to request an extension with a markdown. If you are having difficulty with any assignment or anticipate an unavoidable time crunch, **contact the instructor ASAP**. If you contact the instructor in advance with a specific request and the request is approved, there will not be a markdown.

**Writing Guidelines:** All papers should be written in 12 point font in Calibri, Times New Roman, or Ariel, with 1 inch margins, and they must follow guidelines for citations described below. Papers and case study reports can be posted as a Word document or using Google docs, as submissions to the Canvas assignments. Do not include a title page unless specifically instructed to do so.

**Citing Sources:** For papers, use either the Chicago Manual of Style or the APA manual’s guidelines to include in-text citations and bibliographies at the end of papers. Be consistent

within any paper regarding which style you use. You do not need to include a title page unless specifically requested within an assignment.

Chicago Manual instructions: [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

APA instructions: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/03/>

---

## University Policies

### Academic Honesty

You are responsible for understanding the meaning of plagiarism for this class. You can avoid plagiarism by knowing what it means and by knowing how to correctly cite and paraphrase work by others. For a clear explanation of plagiarism, see the university's Tutorial on Academic Integrity. Plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, or any other form of academic misconduct will result in a failing grade on the assignment and may lead to a range of disciplinary actions as described in the Code of Academic Conduct.

On our course Canvas site see the Page: Course Policy on ChatGPT and Other IA Tools. Violation of this policy is also a violation of academic integrity.

### Attendance

The instructor makes the final decision to excuse or not to excuse an absence. An instructor is entitled to give a failing grade (E) for excessive absences or an Unofficial Drop (UE) for a student who stops attending class at some point during the semester.

### University-wide Policies or Statements Relevant to Courses:

Please see the 'Course Policies' Menu on Canvas for information on the following:

- University Attendance Policy
  - Academic Integrity Policy
  - Counseling
  - Disabilities Services
  - Safety Statement
  - [Harassment, Sexual Violence, Bias, and Discrimination](#)
-