CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Course Description:
Civic engagement consists of collective actions designed to address issues of public concern. It can take many forms: from volunteerism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic engagement encompasses a range of activities such as setting up a neighborhood improvement organization registering residents to vote or collective action to create change.

This course will emphasize the importance of building social capital (positive helping relationships) through consensus organizing techniques. Students will learn how to help clients and communities undertake collective action as opposed to solely services provision or individual clinical practice.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the completion of the course the student will be able to:

Knowledge:

1. Compare and contrast models of community organization.
2. Acknowledge that communities with the greatest and most diverse civic engagement are often resilient and strong.
3. Identify and criticize methods of building civic infrastructure to address problems of common concern.
4. Verify and explain that communities are the interface between individuals and social institutions.

Skills:

1. Engage community members to define and create change
2. Shape group goals and strategies for action.
3. Utilize evidence based practice to determine efficiency of civic engagement efforts.
4. Create capacity for self help and secure new resources.
5. Evaluate the fit between a community and its larger environment.

**Values and Ethics:**

1. Promote the importance of involving people in their own communities.
2. Advocate for institutions to act on behalf of the poor.
3. Shape diversity and self-determination as a means to empowerment.
4. Insure social justice through shared decision making.

**OUTCOMES**

1. Utilize mutual self-interest to bring disparate parties together.
2. Prepare people and institutions to make choices about what really matters and motivate them to act on those choices.
3. Transform social service agencies by increasing client involvement.

**Text Books – Readings**


**COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

There will be three major assignments with detailed instructions provided each week in class

1. **Assignment 1** - Each student will examine an existing program within a social service organization (field agency is acceptable) and analyze the impact the program has on increasing civic engagement. Compare and contract how a community organizing approach could be used to address the same issue and how that approach would utilize civic engagement. The paper should be 12-15 pages. 30% of final grade. Due October 1st.

2. **Assignment 2** - Pick a particular issue effecting the low income population of San Diego and analyze one particular local program design that attempts to address the problem (e.g. affordable housing, crime, health care, unemployment etc.) Complete a web search and select another program design addressing the same issue from another
city either domestic or foreign that utilizes a consensus organizing approach. Determine program effectiveness through research on evidence based practice. Critique the evidence. Compare and contrast both approaches. The paper should be 12-15 pages. 30% of final grade. **Due October 29th.**

3. **Assignment 3** - Students will select a class partner and working in pairs conduct an in depth interview with representatives of an existing neighborhood based organization that claims to use a community organizing strategy to achieve their goals. What civic engagement/community organizing theories shape their efforts? Analyze and critique their strategy, making suggestions to increase effectiveness. Pay particular attention to the values within the organization that shape their approach. Look closely at their methods to increase civic engagement. Each student pair will make a 20 minute class presentation detailing their interview and analysis. Each student will write an individual paper as well. 12-15 pages 30% of final grade. **Due December 3rd.**

4. **Class participation** - Studying civic engagement acquires you to be an enthusiastic participant! 10% of final grade.

**Grading Criteria**

Grades will be determined in accordance with the policies set forth in the Graduate School of Social Work handbook. The following is a summary of the school’s policy.

Grades of A or A- are reserved for student work that not only demonstrated mastery of content, but also shows the student has A) undertaken complex tasks B) applies critical thinking skills C) demonstrates creativity. This is a rare grade and given to outstanding and superior work.

Grade of B+ is given to work judges very good. This grade denotes that a student has demonstrated more that satisfactory understanding and exceeded expectations. This is an extremely good grade and will be given sparingly.

Grade of B is given to students who meet the basic requirement of the assignment. It denotes the student has done satisfactory work and meets the expectations of the course. This is a good grade and the most common indicating the student has achieved an acceptable mastery of the course material.

Grade of B- denotes less than satisfactory performance, reflecting a moderate grasp of content and is below expectations. Grade of C reflects a minimal grasp of the assignments, poor organization of ideas and/or several significant areas requiring improvement.

Grades of C- to F denote a failure to meet standards, reflecting serious deficiencies in student’s performance on the assignments.
**Late Assignments**

Papers late one to seven days will be accepted and graded one full letter grade lower. No papers will be accepted after 7 days and an F will be recorded.

### COURSE TOPICS AND OUTLINE

| Aug. 27 | Social Capital  
| Definition  
| Importance  
| Southern California Context  
| *Reading:* Putnam | Chapter 1, 2, 3 |

| Sept 3 | Labor Day  
| (No Class-Campus Closed) |

| Sept 10 | Identifying Stakeholders  
| Internal and External Potential Partners  
| Shared Interest and Values  
| *Reading:* Putnam | Chapter 4, 5, 6, 7 |

| Sept 17 | Organizational Process versus Social Service Delivery  
| Convening and Building Trust  
| Growing Leadership  
| Developing Issues  
| Gaining Knowledge, Confidence and the Skills to Act  
| *Reading:* Putnam | Chapter 8, 9 |

| Sept 24 | Self-Help and Engaging External Partners  
| Developing Resources that the Community Controls  
| Gaining Resources from Others, Including Government and Business Institutions  
| Forming Relationships through Mutual Self-Interest  
| *Reading:* Eichler Intro, Chapter 1, 2, 3  
| Heath | Chapter 1 |

| Oct 1 | Consensus Organizing  
| Limitations of Conflict  
| Community Real Estate Case Study  
| Role of Organizer |
Reading: Eichler Chapter 4, 5
Heath Chapter 2

First Assignment Due

Oct 8
Breaking Stereotypes
Developing Diversity as an Asset
Mon Valley Case Study
Reversing Negative Generalization
Using Assets Not Needs
Reading: Eichler Chapter 6
Heath Chapter 3

Oct 15
Setting Agendas
Identifying Indicators- Words and Images that Hold Attention
Framing-Linking issues to Values and Emotions
Programs for Change
Reading: Eichler Chapter 7
Heath Chapter 4
Putnam Chapter. 10 – Concl.

Oct 22
Strategies and Tactics
Causes of Problems
Progress through Honesty
Exploring Options
Sharing Credit
Reading: Eichler Chapter 12
Heath Chapter 5

Oct 29
Forming Partnerships
Tactics, Tasks and Functions
Gaps in Ability to Reach Goals
Identifying Capacities
Recruitment
Readings: Eichler Chapter 8
Heath Chapter 6

Second Assignment Due

Nov 5
Building Personal Relationships
Class Differences
Finding Value in Everyone
Working with those you dislike
Readings: 
Eichler  Chapter 9
Heath  Chapter 7

Nov 12  Building Institutional Relationships
Governmental
Philanthropic
Corporate
Readings:  Eichler  Chapter 10
Heath  Chapter 8 & 9
Visit website: www.bettertogether.org

Nov 19  Using Consensus Organizing in the Non-Profit World
Guest Lecturer – Jessica Robinson, MSW
Readings:  Heath  Chapter 10-Concl.

Nov 26  Politics and Political Participation
Polarization
Apathy
Potential Expressions
Reading:  Eichler  Chapter 13

Dec 3  Developing Organizing Capacity
Finding Yong Talent
Spotting Organizing Ability
Seeking “Natural” Organizer
Reading:  Eichler  Chapter 11, Epilogue
Visit website: www.consensus.sdsu.edu

Oral Report
Group Presentations
Class Feedback and Analysis
Third Assignment Due

Dec 10  Oral Reports
Remaining Group Presentations
Class Feedback and Analysis
Final Comments from Professor
BIBLIOGRAPHY


