SOCIOLOGY 214 – SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
TUE/THU 130 PM TO 250 PM – FALL SEMESTER 2012 – KING 341

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Office hours: 10-noon, TU                Email: ahowell@oberlin.edu

Course description

Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little.

- Edmund Burke

Social movements are collective attempts to change the way people live their lives, how governments govern, and how economic systems produce and distribute goods. We live in a social movement society. Though we are not always aware of the level of activism going on around us, the number and different types of organizations working to create some type of social change is larger than ever before. Globalization and communications technologies have broken down barriers to worldwide participation in movements for change. Understanding how the world is influenced by individuals working together for change is of vital importance.

This class focuses on theoretical domains in the sociological study of social movements and general social processes rather than on specific movements. Substantive work on specific movements is used to explain issues such as mobilization, tactics, and ideology, as well as how the social context in which a movement takes place matters.

Social movements are critical for understanding two of the most central problems in sociology: “How do systems that distribute valued goods change”? and “How are systems of meaning created”? Although social movements have existed for centuries, during the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, they have become common ways for ordinary people to make their identities known and to elicit legal and economic changes.

Course goals & objectives

The major goal of this course is to sharpen your spoken and written ability to critically evaluate sociological scholarship on social movements. By the end of this course students are expected to have achieved the following:

1) Demonstrate knowledge of the major perspectives in social movements research.

2) Critically assess the development of social movements through key theoretical perspectives.

3) Understand how social movements succeed or fail.

Course requirements

In-class discussion, based on informed reading.
Work on developing accurate critical evaluations of readings; convincing applications to other cases; extensions of arguments to other readings; and engagement with the arguments that other students make. Discussion will occur both in small groups and with the entire class. Evaluation of this portion of your grade will be done by me through direct observation. I will take notes in class on who is participating. Twice during the semester students will be scheduled to create discussion questions that will be sent to me via email the night before class, no later than 10 PM. This is your opportunity to address questions and concerns about readings and to essentially shape that day’s lecture and discussion. The combination of in class participation and creating discussion questions makes up 10% of your overall grade.

**Participant observation of a movement group**

Oberlin, as you know, has a wide variety of activist oriented work going on. You are required to attend one meeting (at least) of a movement group on campus and take field notes on what you observe. I will spend some time in class discussing the best practices of participant observation and taking field notes. You will give me a short synopsis/summary (no more than 3 pages) of what you observed as well as your assessment of how the movement group is organizing itself, how it may find success or failure, and how concepts from class readings could be applied to the organization/group. To develop a list of organizations and movement groups on campus I am relying on you. On the Blackboard discussion board I have started a thread in which you can post announcements about group meetings and direct action events happening around campus. My hope is that this list will be nearly exhaustive so you all will have some options to choose from. Your synopsis/summary is worth 10% of your overall grade. More details to come in class. The summary paper is due 12/13, but can be turned in at any time before this date.

**Analytical papers.**

You will write three analytical papers throughout the semester. These should be 4-5 pages. I will hand out instructions for each in class, on the days listed in the course schedule below. You’ll notice there are 5 analytical papers total. You will choose which 3 of the 5 to write. Due dates for these papers are listed below. Late papers will be deducted one letter grade per day returned late. Generally, these papers will pose a set of questions that ask you to evaluate concepts from readings and to assess their relative importance to the success or failure of social movements. These papers are worth a total of 30% of your overall grade.

**Examinations.**

There are 2 exams for this course; the final examination is not comprehensive. These exams are written. I will distribute exam review sheets that you should rely on when preparing for the midterm and final exams. The questions will come directly from assigned readings and lecture/discussion in class. These exams make up 50% of your overall grade.

**Other relevant course information**

*Sociological research can descriptively map the contours and proportions of social life by simplifying features of the social world relevant to a particular interest and representing them with symbols…All such descriptions oversimplify the complexity of the real social world in which we live…But, as with maps generally, such simplified descriptions can help to provide an overarching sense of our social world, where we stand within it, and what it looks like beyond our immediate field of vision.*

- Christian Smith, *Soul Searching*
1 – I am generally easier to reach by email than by phone.

2 – Laptops are permitted in class for course related work only. Please do not come to class if you plan to surf the web. You are wasting both of our time.

**Course behavior expectations**

*Who speaks, sows. Who listens, reaps.*

- Argentine proverb

I do want you to speak in class (in fact I will implore you to almost every day), but keep in mind that the most effective way for you to be an effective speaker is to also be an effective listener. This allows for actual discussion and not just people talking past each other. Learning in our classroom should be a collective endeavor therefore the success of the whole depends on the ability of individuals to participate with this goal in mind. Please turn off cell phones during class. If there is a specific reason you need your phone on (i.e. emergency) let me know. Do not talk or whisper conversations with your neighbors (unless otherwise directed) during class, it is distracting to the rest of the class and to me. We only meet for about 2.5 hours per week. Be present (not just in the physical sense)! When interacting in class be respectful of other opinions and listen intently. Intelligent and thoughtful discussion about social issues can be intense, so be certain you frame your comments in a respectful manner.

**Honor code**

This course is covered by the Oberlin College honor code which means that you are to produce your own work unless otherwise instructed. Consulting with librarians, tutors, and me is okay, but the work you submit must be yours. Any case of suspected plagiarism will be reported to the Honors Committee. For every assignment you must write/type at the top of the first page, “I affirm that I have adhered to the honor code in this assignment.” For more information see:


**Special needs**

I encourage students with documented disabilities, including non-visible disabilities such as chronic diseases, learning disabilities, head injury, attention deficit/hyperactive disorder, or psychiatric disabilities, to discuss appropriate accommodations with me. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Office of Disability Services in Peters G-27/G-28.

**Required course materials**

All course readings are provided to you on Blackboard.

**Course Schedule and Reading list**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/4</td>
<td>Syllabus overview and course introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/6</td>
<td><em>What is a social movement?</em></td>
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2) Frank, Thomas – “Why Johnny Can’t Dissent”

**Theoretical foundations.**


**Media**


3) From activists – Cyberactivism and Greenpeace:

   [http://archive.greenpeace.org/cyberstory/cyberactivism.htm](http://archive.greenpeace.org/cyberstory/cyberactivism.htm)

* Instructions for analytical paper #1 distributed

**States and Political Opportunities**


* Analytical paper #1 due via email by 10 PM

**Midterm review sheet distributed in class**

3) Noonan, Rita – “Women against the State: Political Opportunities and Collective Action Frames in Chile’s Transition to Democracy.” *Sociological Forum*

* Instructions for analytical paper #2 distributed

10/9  Midterm examination

10/11  Cultural Resistance, Framing, and Identity

1) Williams, Rhys – “Constructing the Public Good: Social Movements and Cultural Resources.” Social Problems

2) From activists – Check out Reverend Billy of the Church of Stop Shopping on Youtube and at:

   http://www.revbilly.com/

10/16  3) Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow – “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment.” Annual Review of Sociology

* Analytical paper #2 due via email by 10 PM

10/18  4) Polletta, Francesca – “‘It was like a Fever…’ Narrative and Identity in Social Protest.” Social Problems

10/30  5) Bernstein, Mary – “Celebration and Suppression: The Strategic Uses of Identity by the Lesbian and Gay Movement.” American Journal of Sociology


11/6  7) McAdam, Doug – “Gender as Mediator of the Activist Experience: The Case of Freedom Summer.” American Journal of Sociology

* Instructions for analytical paper #3 distributed in class

11/8  Direct Action


11/13  2) Soule, Sarah – “The Student Divestment Movement in the United States and Tactical Diffusion.” Social Forces

* Analytical paper #3 due via email by 10 PM


* Instructions for analytical paper #4 distributed in class
11/27  Organizing and Organizations

1) Ginsburg, Faye – “Saving America’s Souls: Operation Rescue’s Crusade against Abortion.” In Fundamentalisms and the State.


* Analytical paper #4 due via email by 10 PM


12/6  4) Morris, Aldon D. – “Black Southern Student Sit-In Movement: An Analysis of Internal Organization.” In Social Movements: Readings on their Emergence, Mobilization, and Dynamics.


* Final examination review sheet distributed in class.

12/13  6) Staggenborg, Suzanne – “The Consequences of Professionalization and Formalization in the Pro-Choice Movement.” In Social Movements: Readings on their Emergence, Mobilization, and Dynamics.

* Instructions for analytical paper #5 distributed in class

12/?  Final examination

* Analytical paper #5 due via email by 10 PM

**Grading scale**

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<tr>
<td>93-96</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-92</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>83-86</td>
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This syllabus is tentative and may be subject to change.