STPEC 191
Pioneer Valley Activism and Community Organizing
A First-Year Seminar

Fall, 2015
Alternate Mondays (see schedule), 11:15-12:45

Professor Sigrid Schmalzer
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Office hours by appointment

Course Description
This course is built around visits by four extraordinary local activists who will share their experiences and perspectives on activism and community organizing in the Pioneer Valley. Readings and/or audio-visual materials relevant to the visitors' work will be shared on Moodle. Please come having reviewed the materials and be prepared to ask questions and participate in a thoughtful discussion of the visitor's work and the issues it raises. In addition to the four visits, the class will meet three other times (including the introductory meeting) to discuss larger questions of the relationship between the study of Social and Behavioral Sciences and engagement in social activism and community organizing. The four meetings with activists will be open to the wider UMass public (so please feel free to invite your friends), and we can expect extra people in the room on those occasions. The other three meetings will be smaller conversations just for those enrolled in the course. Note: This class was originally designed as a "brown bag lunch series." You should feel free to bring a lunch if you would like.

Course Objectives
This class satisfies the new requirement that all first-year UMass students enroll in a small, 1-credit seminar. It is further intended to introduce SBS Exploratory Track students to some of the possibilities of social science majors, and in particular the STPEC major. Given that it is just a 1-credit class and that it comes on top of many other obligations in your first semester, I am committed to keeping the time investment reasonable, the stress level minimal, and the "bang for the buck" as big as possible. Completing the very reasonable requirements for the course will provide:

• An introduction to the STPEC major and the SBS college;
• A chance to discuss important issues in an intimate intellectual community;
• Exposure to local activists and organizations, with the possibility for future internship opportunities; and
• An opportunity to practice effective note-taking during lectures and discussions;
• Guidance in the art of analyzing primary source materials; and
• Low-stakes practice in writing a college paper based on an original argument.
Course Requirements

1) Attendance at all class meetings
This course meets only seven times during the semester. For that reason, even one absence represents a significant reduction in your course experience. Please do everything you can to avoid absences. If despite your best efforts you must miss a class, you may make up that absence by writing a three-page (double-spaced) paper on the materials for that meeting.

2) Participation in class discussion

3) Final paper
4-6 pages, double-spaced
In this paper, you will use your notes from the four presentations and the accompanying assigned readings to compare and contrast the ways that different activists and organizers in the Pioneer Valley approach the task of social and political transformation.

SCHEDULE

September 14: INTRODUCTIONS
Meeting:
11:15-12:45, Dickinson 216

We will introduce ourselves and I will introduce the course and the Social Thought & Political Economy program — an undergraduate major in SBS.

We will also discuss: What is Social Science? What is Social Justice? Where do the two meet?

September 28: Frances Crowe
Meeting:
11:15-12:45, in Herter 601

Reading:
Please read as much as possible of Frances Crowe's memoir, Finding My Radical Soul. It is on reserve at the library. I especially recommend you read the following chapters:
"Read on, Be Inspired, and Get Active" (pp. xvii-xviii); "Draft Counseling" (pp. 87-103); "Radical Community Action" (pp. 177-188); and "Media and Democracy Now!" (pp. 237-246)
Speaker information:
Tireless activist Frances Crowe turned 96 years old in 2013. Judges won't send her to jail anymore, but she keeps risking arrest in her struggles against war and for social justice and environmental sustainability. Among her many efforts: Resisting war taxes and opposing war from Hiroshima to Afghanistan; Providing draft counseling for thousands of conscientious objectors; Building the Sanctuary Movement to protect political refugees from U.S.-sponsored dictatorships in Latin America; Smuggling drinking water to barricaded UMass students protesting CIA recruiting on campus; Fighting anthrax research at UMass; Making UMass the first university or college in the country to divest from South Africa; Bringing Democracy Now! to the Pioneer Valley; Directing Northampton's Friday Night Free Film Series on anti-war, social justice, and environmental topics; and Agitating against nuclear power and for safe, clean alternatives.

October 13 (Tuesday with a Monday schedule): Reclaim Our Schools/ Reclamar Nuestras Escuelas

Meeting:
11:15-12:45, Campus Center 911-915

Reading:
Reclaim Our Schools Facebook page

"Holy State Takeover!" http://edushyster.com/holy-state-takeover/

Newspaper article:

An Assessor, "Testing, Privatization, and the Future of Public Schooling"

Speaker information:
A representative from Reclaim Our Schools will be joining us today. Reclaim Our Schools is "a coalition of parents, students, teachers, educators and community [in Holyoke] to involve the stakeholders of the community in all education decisions and policies and fight back against the attack on public education."

October 26: Discussion

Meeting:
11:15-12:45, Dickinson 216

Please come prepared for a lively discussion of the first two presentations and the related readings. How do these activists / organizers approach their causes? How do they seek to educate
people about the issues and mobilize people to take action? What underlying ideas about society, community, power, etc. shape their approach to political activism and social change?

**November 9: Michaelann Bewsee, Arise for Social Justice Springfield**

**Meeting:**
11:15-12:45, Campus Center 917

**Reading:**
SPEAK (a zine by and for the Springfield community, published by Arise)
Arise website and Facebook page (please browse...)

**Speaker information:**
In 1985, Michaelann Bewsee and a group of other women on welfare organized Arise for Social Justice to support the rights of low-income people in Springfield, MA. Twenty-seven years later, Bewsee and Arise continue to work overtime both to provide direct services to people in need and to organize Springfield residents—especially poor, homeless, at-risk, unemployed, and otherwise marginalized people—to tackle the deep-rooted causes of poverty in their city. Arise has won many important victories, from the safeguarding voting rights and increasing political representation, to the creation of Sanctuary City (a tent city established in response to shortages of beds in the homeless shelters), to the defeat of a proposed new biomass plant that would have raised already high levels of asthma in Springfield. Arise is currently focusing on three areas, all of which would benefit from the assistance of committed student interns: environmental health and climate justice; homelessness; and reforming the criminal justice system. Bewsee sees these three areas to be closely inter-related and is helping Arise create a vision of what a just, sustainable Springfield would look like.

**November 23: Out Now**

**Meeting:**
11:15-12:45, Campus Center 917

**Reading:**
Out Now website ([http://outnowyouth.org/](http://outnowyouth.org/), please browse)

And for a better understanding of the philosophy that drives Out Now's "Our Liberation" theater project, please consult:


**Speaker information:**
From their website: "Out Now originated in 1995 as a weekly support group for LGBTQ youth from the greater Springfield area. There was one advisor and no more than five young people regularly attending weekly meetings held in a donated church space. Since then, Out Now has grown its youth membership, added advisors, and increased visibility, become a nonprofit, and now holds an important voice in the local movement for peace and justice."

Among the many projects in which Out Now organizers engage, the visitors to our class will especially introduce "Our Liberation!", which they describe as follows: "An interactive performance workshop that we present at school and community organizations. This project uses Theater of the Oppressed techniques in which the audience and presenters work together to strategize and disrupt incidents of oppression. Theater of the Oppressed calls on participants to re-imagine the roles of actor and spectator, merging them together to create spect-actors. With the increased attention being paid to peer abuse and harassment and how it contributes to increased rates of suicide among LGBTQ youth, we believe that our Theater of the Oppressed workshop has great potential to empower our audiences to intervene and stop oppressive and violent behavior among peers that has its roots in racism, homophobia, and other oppressive systems."

December 7: Discussion

Meeting: 
11:15-12:45, Dickinson 216

Please come prepared for a lively discussion of the first two presentations and the related readings. How do these activists / organizers approach their causes? How do they seek to educate people about the issues and mobilize people to take action? What underlying ideas about society, community, power, etc. shape their approach to political activism and social change?