Grassroots Community Organizing  
Anthropology 397H - University of Massachusetts Amherst  

Application and FAQ's for Spring 2014 - DUE NOVEMBER 15TH!!

“My whole life, I have valued justice and truth... By taking this course and learning about it, I realized that this is my passion and I want to organize at the grassroots for the rest of my life. This class helped me to understand that even though there are some awful, horrible things going on in the world that are seemingly impossible to change, I truly can make change if I believe in myself and make the effort.” --GCO Student, 2011.

Welcome to Grassroots Community Organizing! GCO is a five-credit honors course held in the spring semester that is open to all five-college students. Enrollment is not limited to Honors students. The course focuses on how people in marginalized communities mobilize to combat poverty and political disenfranchisement. During our spring break, we work alongside grassroots organizations that are working toward social justice. In the past we have worked with the Alliance to Develop Power in Springfield, MA, Virginia Organizing in Danville and Fredericksburg, Virginia, City Life Vida Urbana in Boston, MA, Alternatives for Community and the Environment in Boston, MA, and Maine People’s Alliance in Portland, ME.

Student facilitation is one of the most unique things about GCO! Each section of this course is facilitated by a team of undergraduate students who are intensively trained to facilitate peer learning. This makes the class community a unique and empowering space where students are able to build an actual learning community and push each other to think about who we are and how we interact with social justice work.

Admission to GCO requires that you fill out this application. We will use this application to get a sense of why you are interested in taking this course, what experiences you have had working in groups or on teams, and how you might engage in a participatory classroom that is focused on learning through group discussions and activities. Because the class size is small, and the class is student facilitated, active and responsible participation is essential. The class asks you to make a serious commitment and will be especially attractive to those who are looking for a challenge. Sensitive and/or controversial issues will come up over the semester, so we ask that you please keep an open mind, be respectful of your fellow students, and try and push your learning beyond your comfort zone. While these are some of the most challenging aspects of the course, the rewards of sharing your personal opinions, experiences, and analyses will produce strong connections with others in your class and result in the creation of a meaningful learning community. The course readings and the weekly reflections require a large time commitment.
This course is challenging, but if you are willing to dedicate your time and effort the benefits will be huge.

There is no class like GCO on this campus, nor is there one quite like it anywhere else in the country that we know of. We hope this sounds like the class for you! For more information about the course and the actual trips, please refer to the attached FAQ (frequently asked questions).

If you would like to speak to someone involved with the planning of the class, feel free to stop by the UACT (UMass Alliance for Community Transformation) office, located in 217 Gordon Hall or email us at uact@anthro.umass.edu. A committee of GCO facilitators, trainers, and the Director will review all applications.

Logistics:
- The class will meet once a week on Thursdays, 4-7 PM.
- All participants in GCO must attend a mandatory retreat on the weekend of February 15th. There are no exceptions to this commitment.
- The course fee will be $250 to cover travel and accommodations in the communities where we work and for supplies for the retreats and trips. This fee covers half the actual cost of your participation, and UACT funds the remainder. Books for the course will run between about $20 and $50, but there is a lending library in the UACT office. If you have any issues with being able to afford this, please contact us so that we can discuss options.

Unofficial Transcript:
Please include an unofficial copy of your transcript with your application. Our goal is to make a diverse learning community and we will use the transcript to begin to understand where you are in your academic careers and how GCO can be an asset. Since this class is unlike any other class we will not base acceptance on your academic achievements but instead we hope it will allow us to better compose a class dynamic that will be both challenging and rewarding for you.

Applications will be accepted through Friday, November 15, 2013. Please submit completed applications in one of the ways listed below:
- Submit applications to staff or slide them under the door of office 217 in Gordon Hall (418 North Pleasant St.) or in the UACT mailbox in Gordon Hall 206 (Mailroom).
- As an email attachment to UACT@anthro.umass.edu.
- In person at the Anthropology Department’s main office, 217 Machmer Hall.
Applications must be in .pdf, .doc or .docx format. Note that your scanned transcript should be sent with your application if you submit electronically.
Grassroots Community Organizing Application 2014

Please type your responses in directly - do not hand-write. Thank you!

Personal Information

Name: _____________________________________
University or College: ________________________
Spire ID # (if applicable): _____________________
Year of Graduation: __________________________
Major(s): ___________________________________
Local/Campus Address: ____________________________________________________
Cell Phone: _________________________________
Winter Break Address: ______________________________________________________
Email Address: _______________________________

How did you hear about GCO?

Do you have a close friend, roommate, or significant other applying to the trip?
If yes, please list names:

Do you meet the criteria for van drivers (valid driver’s license through March 31 2013, over 21, no moving violations in the past year, comfortable driving a minivan or a 15 passenger van) and are you interested in driving?

What languages do you speak? How comfortable are you with communication and comprehension in these languages?

Certification Statement:

I, _____________________________, certify that all of the above information is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

________________________________________________________________________
(Signature)                                                              (Date)
Narrative Questions:

Please type your answers on a separate piece of paper. We expect to have more applicants than spaces available in the three sections of the class that we can offer this year. Please be thoughtful and thorough in your responses to the following questions so that we can get a good sense of who you are.

1. Why do you want to participate in GCO 2014? What do you hope to gain from this experience?

2. Please describe what this quote means to you:

“The ‘we’ is all of us in this country who want social justice and social change. We are women who face sexism in our daily lives and bear the economic burden of raising our children; we are poor people who want more jobs, fair wages, good working conditions, and access to the basic necessities of life, like housing health care, and education; we are people of color who want to live in a society free of racism and with equal rights; we are gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals who want to live in a world that honors who we are and gives us equal rights; and we are all people who want to live in a safe world...” (Linda Stout, Bridging the Class Divide).

3. Please describe a cross-cultural experience you’ve had and how it affected you.

4. Please describe your learning style. This question will not affect your acceptance. We will use this information to balance the classrooms with different learning styles. How do you tend to participate in class or group settings? Please provide some examples.

5. What are your experiences with community service or community organizing? What do you see as a difference between these two? What do you hope to learn about them?

6. What special skills or experiences could you bring to your GCO class? (e.g. first aid, baking, mediation training, art, music, story telling, yoga, etc.)

7. Do you have any special needs/concerns? Please explain any special dietary needs including veganism, vegetarianism, or medical or religious restrictions.

8. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS about the Grassroots Community Organizing course

Can anyone take this class?
Yes the class is open to all majors at all grade levels. Last year, people from over 15 different majors, all years, and 4 different colleges in the Five College System participated.

Does this class make me an organizer?  Do I have to be an organizer to take this class?
No, and no.  This is a class about grassroots community organizing as a method for making social change and addressing issues of inequality and injustice.  In the class you will learn some organizing tools, as well as learn about how some organizations are making change.  You do not need to have a background in organizing, nor do you need to want to be an organizer.  Although many students do leave the class wanting to be organizers, many students do not, and they still learn a great deal from the course content, class community, and work over spring break.

What if I just want to go on the trip but don’t want to take the class?
The trip is an integral part of the class. Our goal in this class is to understand how people in diverse communities mobilize local knowledge and local resources to address the structures and policies that affect their lives. The trip offers us an opportunity to bring the classroom to the real world and the real world to the classroom. Because we discuss the curriculum and learning that we’ve done in class during spring break and vice versa, neither piece would make sense without the other.

How much does the trip/class cost?
The cost to students this year is $250. The fee is all-inclusive and pays for items such as room/ board, food, transportation, training, and suport in your host community. Also included are a T-shirt and a weekend retreat (including food and lodging). The total expenses per student actually run significantly higher than the student fee. Spring break expenses are subsidized by supplemental UACT fundraising and UMass funds. We would be happy to talk with you about the cost of the class and what you might do to raise funds to cover the fee.

Will I have any other expenses in this class?
Last year, books for this class ran $20-30. While we think it is a good idea for people to purchase and mark up their books, we do place several copies on reserve in both the library tower and the UACT office. Everyone on the trip will need a WARM sleeping bag (you can rent them from the UMASS Outing Club) or other bedding, and a raincoat.

How do you develop partnerships with community organizations?
Our community partners are well-established grassroots organizations that have come to find GCO to be a fruitful mechanism for advancing their organizational goals. Our partners have a commitment to developing student leaders and introducing students to Community Organizing.
Where will we be going?
In the past we have visited Ivanhoe, VA, Cape Charles, VA, New Road, VA, Jonestown, MS, Holyoke, MA, and Springfield, MA. Our community partners for this year are in the works!

What will we do while we are in the community?
This year we will likely be participating in trainings, canvassing, making phone calls, attending community meetings, and participating in or attending events and actions. Work will vary by community based on the initiatives identified by our community partners. Our community partners are invested in your learning and development, and they will offer trainings throughout the week on campaign issues, power analysis, organizing skills, local history, etc.

Where will we stay? What will we eat?
In most cases we sleep on the floor of a community center or church in sleeping bags. We prepare our own food and pack a lunch each day. Food is plentiful and tasty though basic.

What is the relationship between our class and our community partners?
Our community partners are co-educators of GCO students, not simply spring break sites. Both UACT (the organizational host of GCO) and our community partner organizations view our relationship as a true partnership. Experienced community organizers from our partner organizations come in to our class at least once during the semester (in person or virtually). We work together to plan several weeks of our class curriculum so that students are well prepared to engage in the work, and we work together to determine the training and activity plan for spring break itself. Our facilitators and staff get to know our partners through conversations, visits, and in some cases summer internships or other intensive staff-level involvement.

Is alcohol allowed on the trip?
Absolutely not. You will be living in close quarters with your fellow students and you will be ambassadors representing UMass. You will also, in many cases, be a public face of the organizations we partner with, and it is important to respect and maintain the reputation of our community partners. For this reason, all GCO trips absolutely prohibit the use of controlled substances. It’s just not that kind of spring break.

Can you accommodate special dietary needs?
Yes, within reason. Vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free are regular accommodations we expect to be able make whenever requested. We do our best to accommodate everyone’s dietary choices, but we cannot make special shopping trips or bring our own food to meals. Cooking is a shared responsibility. For people with allergies or special diets we work as a group to accommodate each other without expending too many additional financial resources.

Can I choose the community where I will work?
Sorry, no. In applying to GCO you agree to go to the community and work with the organization to which you are assigned. We need to do this in order to insure that we have assembled well-balanced teams.
Can you assure me that I will be in the same section as my partner, roommate, friend or whomever?
No, we cannot. In fact, we try to enroll people who know each other well in different sections and we have an explicit policy that prohibits people who are romantically involved from being placed in the same class. There are good reasons for all of this (supported by many years of experience) and we will be happy to explain them to you if you stop by the office.

How do I sign up for this course?
Admission to the course requires that you fill out an application. Applications are available at the UACT office in Gordon and the Anthropology Office in Machmer. You can also find our application on line at: www.umass.edu/uact. You can also email us a uact@anthro.umass.edu if you have questions or stop by and visit us in our office in 217 Gordon Hall. Applications for Spring 2014 are due Sunday, November 15, 2013.

If I am accepted, how do I get added on SPIRE? How is the course listed?
All accepted students are enrolled by the program Director (and professor of the course) into two different sections. Students receive four credits of ANTH 397H and one credit of ANTH 397S. We give five credits for this class because of its intensity, and to recognize the significant amount of work students do over spring break. SPIRE shows ANTH397H as a 4-credit course, but you will receive 5 credits.

Why do I have to apply?
We have roughly 45 openings in 2014, and we expect more applications than that. GCO requires a considerable commitment. We are looking for people who have given some thought to this unusual academic undertaking, and a thoughtful application is what we have found to be the best way of ensuring that all students know what they’re getting into. The application process also helps us assemble diverse classes that have a good mix of skills, backgrounds, and interests.

Why are interviews held/What can I expect at an interview?
Interviews are sometimes held depending on the number of spaces available and the number of applications received. In the event that we do request an interview, you will be meeting with GCO staff who may ask you to expand upon your responses to the application questions.

What role do diversity and identity play in UACT and GCO?
We believe that our classrooms should reflect at least the full diversity of the student body at UMass and across the five colleges. We discuss complex issues of identity and power in our classroom, as these are vital to both our local social justice work and to our ability to engage fully with the work of our community partners. UACT’s leadership team strives to create within our organization, and within our GCO classrooms, the dynamic, complex, and engaged diversity that we envision for the future in our institutions and communities at large.