

Union Organizing

37:575:360:01

Instructor: Shaun Richman

Course Description

This course is intended to give students an overview of union organizing strategy and tactics. We will be exploring the contemporary challenges that unions face in their efforts to organize workers, as well as some history of how modern union organizers have arrived at current “best practices.” Students will get hands-on practice with some basic organizing tactics – with opportunity for more if desired.

Books and Readings

The only books that are assigned in large part or in entirety are “Restoring the Power of Unions” (2010) by Julius G. Getman and “Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement” (2004) edited by Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss. It is available for purchase at the university bookstore. All other assigned readings will be posted on Sakai.

Grading Policy

Attendance and class participation will count for 30% of your final grade. There will be one mid-term take-home exam, also worth 30% of your grade. There will be a final paper, due May 10, that will be worth 40% of your grade for the semester.

Course Schedule

Week 1 - January 25 Introduction to Union Organizing

Week 2 - February 1 What Do Workers Want?

Assignments due:

Readings:

- Richard B. Freeman (2007) “Do Workers Still Want Unions? More Than Ever.”
EPI Briefing Paper #182
- Studs Terkel (1974) “Working.”
Frances Swenson, hotel switchboard operator (pgs. 32-36)
Hobart Foote, utility man (pgs. 168-174)
Babe Secoli, supermarket checker (pgs.282-286)
Betsy DeLacy, patients’ representative (pgs.497-501)

Week 3 – February 8 Formation & Implementation of National Labor Relations Act – 1930’s and 40’s

Assignments due:

Readings:

- Priscilla Murolo & A.B. Chitty (2001) “From The Folks Who Brought You the Weekend.” (pgs. 192-201)
- Nelson Lichtenstein (1982) “Labor’s War at Home.” (pgs. 67-81)
- Charles J. Morris (2005) “The Blue Eagle at Work.” (pgs. 17-40)

Week 4 – February 15 The Taft-Hartley Amendments and the Roll Back of NLRB rights.

Assignments due:

Reading:

- Julius G. Getman (2010) “Restoring the Power of Unions.” (pgs. 179-220)

Week 5 – February 22 The Boss Fight

Assignments due:

Reading:

- Kate Bronfenbrenner (2009) “No Holds Barred: The Intensification of Employer Opposition to Organizing.” EPI Briefing Paper #182

Exam #1

Week 6 – March 1 Effective Union Tactics

Assignments due:

Reading:

- Kate Bronfenbrenner and Robert Hickey (2004). “Changing to Organize: A National Assessment of Union Strategies.” (Found on pages 17-61 in “Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement”)
- Steven H. Lopez (2004) “Overcoming Legacies of Business Unionism: Why Grassroots Organizing Tactics Succeed.” (Found on pages 114-132 in “Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement”)

Week 7 – March 8 Working with Organizing Committees

Assignments due:

Readings:

- Robert A. Penney (2004) “Workers Against Unions: Union Organizing an Anti-Union Countermobilizations.” (Found on pages 88-113 in “Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement”)
- Theresa Sharpe (2004) “Union Democracy and Successful Campaigns; The Dynamics of Staff Authority and Worker Participation in an Organizing Union.” (Found on pages 62-87 in “Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement”)
- Lowell Turner (1998) “Rank-and-File Participation at Home and Abroad.”

Mid-term take-home exam.

Week 8 – SPRING BREAK

Week 9 – SPRING BREAK

Week 10 – March 29 **A History of Organizing Strategy in the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union**

Assignments due:

Readings:

- Julius G. Getman (2010) “Restoring the Power of Unions.” (pgs. 35-138)

Week 11 – April 5 **The Organizing Conversation**

This week’s class will take the form of a 1-day American Federation of Teachers Organizing Institute training for prospective new organizers. We will be joined by guest lecturers who are seasoned union organizers, as well as workers and job-seekers who wish to explore careers as union organizers. We will engage in a series of role-plays to train, as union organizers train, in “get in the door,” “get the story,” union vision,” “inoculation” and “call the question” techniques that make up “the organizing conversation” that leads to full-scale organizing efforts. While this week’s class will formally last just the regular two hours and 55 minutes, the full training will extend until 5:00 PM. Students are invited – although in no way required – to stick around and gain this first-hand experience in the practice of union organizing.

Week 12 – April 12 **How to Survive as an Organizer / Shop Talk**

Assignments due:

Readings:

- Leslie Bunnage and Judith Stepan-Norris (2004) “‘Outsiders’ Inside the Labor Movement: An Examination of Youth Involvement in the 1996 Union Summer Program.” (Found on pages 225-250 in “Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement”)
- Julius G. Getman (2010) “Restoring the Power of Unions.” (pgs. 138-178)
- Stephen Greenhouse. (2009) “Some Organizers Protest Their Union’s Tactics.” *NY Times*.
- Daisy Rooks (2004) “Sticking It Out or Packing It In? Organizer Retention in the New Labor Movement.” (Found on pages 195-224 in “Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement”)

Week 13 – April 19 **Workers Centers & Alternative Model Unions**

Guest Speaker: Carrie Gleason, Retail Action Project

Assignments due:

Readings:

- Josh Eidelson (January 29, 2013) “Alt-Labor.” *The American Prospect*.
- Josh Eidelson (July 17, 2013) “Who Should Fund Alt-Labor?” *The Nation*.

Week 14 – April 26

Can The NLRB Be Fixed?

Assignments due:

Readings:

- Julius G. Getman (2010) “Restoring the Power of Unions.” (pgs.257-287)
- Charles J. Morris (2005) “The Blue Eagle at Work.” (pgs. 184-200)

Week 15 – May 3

New Visions for Union Organizing

Assignments due:

Readings:

- Bill Fletcher Jr. and Fernando Gapasin (2008) “Solidarity Divided.” (pgs. 197-216)
- Julius G. Getman (2010) “Restoring the Power of Unions.” (pgs 288-324)
- Richard D. Kahlenberg and Moshe Z. Marvit (August 31, 2012) “Why the right to form a union should be a civil right.” *Washington Post*.
- Karen J.G. Lewis (March 4, 2013) “Fight for the Whole Society.” *The Nation*.

Week 16 – May 10

FINAL PAPER (NO CLASS)