

*Never doubt that a small group of dedicated individuals can change the world.....
indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.
--Margaret Mead*

FYS 113: *Rage Against the Machine: Protest, Activism, and Social Change*

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Description of seminar:

This is a seminar for students who are interested in participating in and thinking about protest and activism. We will address theoretical questions such as: *What exactly do we mean by protest and activism? What are the motives, goals, and justification for protest and activism? To what extent are various forms of activism or protest effective? Is the nature of activism different in Democratic societies than in societies where power is more concentrated?* There will also be opportunities for you to develop your own skills as an activist by considering questions such as: *How can you be better informed and make more persuasive arguments for causes which you support? Which approach and what kind of risks would you be willing to take to support your cause?* We will pursue these questions by studying specific cases of activism such as the IMF/World Bank protest in Seattle, Muhlenberg student fasting to educate about hunger, and the actions and intent of individuals and organizations such as the Unabomber, EarthFirst, and ActUp. We will study various activist philosophies and approaches through extensive reading by authors such as Martin Luther King Jr., Gloria Steinem, Henry David Thoreau, Edward Abbey, Adrienne Rich, Saul Alinsky, and John Brown. Through frequent writing assignments, we will learn to critique various forms of protest and how to make persuasive arguments for a specific cause in which you strongly believe. Ultimately, we will focus on pragmatic ways to channel our rage and/or passion for meaningful causes to effect change for a better world.

Seminar Philosophy:

This is a seminar course! The professor will not lecture to you. Thoughtful discussion, meaningful dialog, questioning, and concern should characterize our meetings. Everyone will have the opportunity to serve as expert and as novice. Your commitment, your passion, your desire to pull from others in the class are among the minimum expectations. We are in this together – to learn, to grow and, most of all enjoy!

Seminar Organization:

The seminar will meet twice each week on Monday and Wednesdays from 3:00 to 4:15. On most Wednesdays class will go until 6:00. This will allow for activity oriented learning such as service projects. A detailed course schedule is provided. Attendance and active participation are essential for success in this class as outlined in the section on grades. The course is basically divided into thirds. In Part I we will develop definitions for activism and protest as we explore

activist theory and philosophy, and try our hand at different types of activism. In Part II we will take a more pragmatic or “how to” approach to activism. In Part III we will apply what we have learned to develop a plan of action for a specific cause in which each of us believes. Writing and critical thinking will be the skills that are emphasized in each of the classes. You will also have opportunities to develop a web page, give formal and informal oral presentations, and participate in hands-on activities.

Seminar Resources:

Books (available at bookstores everywhere):

Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in a Cynical Time, Paul Rogat Loeb
The Activist's Handbook, Randy Shaw

Articles (provided):

Letter from a Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King Jr.
Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions, Gloria Steinem
Poems by Adrienne Rich
Others to be provided.

Seminar assignments and grading:

Writing

Revision is central to writing and thinking. You will have the opportunity to revise all assignments. Late submission of drafts and revisions will result in loss of credit. Plagiarism, inappropriate use of web and other resources, and inappropriate citation are violations of the Academic Behavior Code and will be dealt with accordingly.

Writing Assignment # 1 – Personal experience with protest or activism – In this short in-class writing assignment you will be asked to reflect on some past participation in activism or protest. You should describe the cause, the event, and the approach taken. You will revise this by working with your classmates.
In class 8/27; Revision 8/29; 20 pts

Writing Assignment # 2 – Outrageous Act - Based on the Steinem article you will perform a meaningful act. This short writing assignment will provide you with the opportunity to reflect on this act.
Due 9/19; 25 pts

Writing Assignment # 3- Analyzing effectiveness – You will be asked to argue whether a particular act was effective in achieving its goals.
Due 10/10; 25 points

Writing Assignment # 4 – Using the work of others as evidence for your case. You will practice the arts of paraphrase and citation.
In class 11/5; 25 points

Writing Assignment # 5 – Making an argument for a cause. In this paper you will defend your cause using the skills learned to date.
Due 11/14; 50 points

Writing Assignment # 6 – Letter to a public or private authority regarding your cause.
In class 11/14; Revision due 11/26; Mailed on 12/5; 25 points

Writing Assignment # 7 – Final paper – Plan of action for your cause
This is your opportunity to put it all together in a final paper. You will define and defend your cause and develop a plan of action to effect change.
Draft due on 12/5; Final revision due on December 10 at 1:30 PM; 100 points

Web Page

You will learn the art of web page construction and will have the opportunity to construct one dealing with your cause. You must incorporate images, text, and links to relevant resources. Due on 11/28, 50 points

Presentations

Presentation #1 – A 5-10 minute presentation on an activist or activist organization in which you will analyze effectiveness.
In class 9/10 and 9/17; 10 points

Presentation # 2 – In teams of two you will lead a class on a specific approach to activism. *The activism handbook* will serve as your starting point. See course schedule for topics. Creativity and energy are expected. 25 points

Participation

Class participation

The following point scheme will be used in assessing class participation everyday:

Physically or mentally absent: 0 points

Present but only partially engaged: 1 point

Present, engaged and participating: 2 points

Significant contributions to the class: 3 points

There are 28 class meetings. Participation is worth 75 points.

Campus programming: There will be numerous campus programs related to activism. From a hunger banquet, to a poetry reading by Adrienne Rich, to a performance by the Guerilla girls. You are expected attend at least two of these events and turn in a paragraph describing the event. More information to follow. 20 points

Grades will be calculated as a straight percentage of the total points (450 points).

A=91-100%, A-=90%, B+=89%, B=81-88%, B-=80%, C+=79%, C=71-78%, C-=70%,
D=60-69%, F=<60%.

Academic Behavior Code:

Please familiarize yourself with the Muhlenberg College Academic Behavior Code and the College policy on plagiarism. All violations will be dealt with accordingly and with zero tolerance.

Date		Class themes (activities)	READING	Event
27-Aug	m	What are activism and protest?	SOC intro	
29-Aug	w	Who the heck are you and can you make a difference?	SOC 1	
3-Sep	m	Issues of difference and rage	SOC 2&3	
5-Sep	w	Where do you live and does that matter?	SOC 4	
10-Sep	m	Well known activists: analyzing what they do?		World Game*
12-Sep	w	On civil disobedience: Rage against the Machine	PROVIDED	Population Talk
17-Sep	m	Well known organizations: analyzing what they do?		
19-Sep	w	Community Service I	SOC 5	Hunger banquet*
24-Sep	m	How far would you be willing to go?	MLK	
26-Sep	w	Community Service II	SOC 6	
1-Oct	m	Reflections on Community Service	SOC 7	
3-Oct	w	Your Cause (Library Skills to Effect Change)	SOC 8	
8-Oct	m	no class		
10-Oct	w	The writer as Activist (Adrienne Rich)	AR	Adrienne Rich*
15-Oct	m	Elected Officials	AH 2	
17-Oct	w	Coalition Activism (Environmental Ethic)	AH 3	Robert Weiner
22-Oct	m	Protest and Activism through the Arts	PROVIDED	
24-Oct	w	The Media (Web Page Development)	AH 5	
29-Oct	m	Ballot Initiative	AH 4	
31-Oct	w	Lawyers (Web Page Development)	AH 6	
5-Nov	m	Direct Action	AH 7	
7-Nov	w	Living Activists	SOC 9	Guerilla Girls
12-Nov	m	Activism and religion	SOC 10	
14-Nov	w	Letter Writing	SOC 11	
19-Nov	m	The Scientist as Activist	PROVIDED	
21-Nov	w	no class		
26-Nov	m	How far would you be willing to go? Revisited	SOC 12	
28-Nov	w	Student Presentations		
3-Dec	m	Student Presentations		
5-Dec	w	Student Presentations		

SOC=Soul of A Citizen
AH=Activist's Handobook
MLK=Martin Luther King Jr.
AR=Adrienne Rich
*=required

