

# ESM 442: Communication for civic engagement & grassroots organizing

Winter 2024

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Wed 4-5:15, Bren 1510

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**Welcome:** In ESM 442, we will explore the tactics and communication strategies used by groups and social movements to affect change. Consider for example, any trending social movement hashtag – when does a hashtag become more than just a word, when does it actually spur a shift in public consciousness or policy – this is the type of puzzle our course will attempt to address. Groups, which may consist of social movements or formalized interest groups or non-governmental organizations, exist for the very purpose to instill change. In this course, change refers to any intent to move away from the status-quo. Without the perceived necessity for change, groups of any kind are unlikely to emerge.

This course will address civic engagement & grassroots organizing from four thematic areas: 1) traditional and contemporary theories of organizations; 2) the on the ground tactics employed by groups & social movements; 3) institutional barriers to organizational success and; 4) the role of communication in organizational efforts. Course lessons will rely on foundational group theory, contextualized by current events and the experiences of activists. Importantly, we will draw from a diverse set of cases that address issues of social and environmental concern. YOU will be the gatekeepers of this information and expected to contribute this knowledge on a weekly basis (as will be discussed at our first meeting).

## Learning Objectives:

1. Chart and predict a path forward – what should the future of grassroots look like?
  - a. Identify ‘repertoires of action’ or the tactics used by organizations to promote public engagement & affect change
  - b. Explain how tactics change in response to political institutions and characteristics of the policy space
  - c. Compare and contrast the communication strategies employed by groups and social movements in the traditional communication environment and now in the context of Web 2.0
  - d. Apply your understanding of how institutions shape organizational efforts & processes in order to predict the potential for success on the part of current environmental movements

**Course Flow:** everything you need to do will be updated on Canvas weekly. I will make it really clear how I want you to engage with the materials. The weekly flow will be something along the lines of this:

- Read/listen to/watch the following (1-3 sources, very manageable)
- Complete your grassroots organizing activity for the week and come prepared to share in class
  - Wks 2 & 3 - Identify the organizations involved (network/stakeholder map);
  - Wks 4 - 6 - Observe their tactics and communication efforts (analysis of repertoires of action);
  - Wks 7 & 8 - Describe the intuitional / policy landscape (flow chart);
  - Wks 9 & 10 - Predict opportunities for success and sources of failure (mock consultant).

**Assessment:** This course is assessed based on regular attendance, in-class participation, and submitting 4 mini summaries based on the above bullets.

## Course Outline

Week	Theme
1 (no in person class)	Org research, read view canvas
2	Research pitches
3	Special topic - Civil Rights
4	Organizational Theory 101
5	Repertoires of Action pre 2.0
6	Repertoires of Action post 2.0
7	Contemporary Communication
8	Institutional Landscape
9	Predicting the Future
10	Recap

**\*\*We will have 2-3 guest speakers this year, and their availability is still TBD.**

Readings & activities are updated on Canvas