Collective Action and Political Change:
Activism, Participation, and Protest

Political Science 795E
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Course Description:
This course examines the multiple, often competing, ways in which scholars have theorized how diverse kinds of collective actors both shape and are (re)shaped by politics. Drawing on select case studies, principally from Latin America, Europe, and the U.S., and varied theoretical approaches from a range of disciplines—including not only several subfields in Political Science, but also Sociology, Anthropology, Feminist Studies, Geography, African Diaspora Studies, History, Cultural Studies, and more—we will explore the following questions, centered on Activism, Participation, and Protest (APP, for our purposes):

- What does political activism look like? How do we know it when we see it?
- What does activism entail? (e.g. demonstrating, protesting, signing petitions, canvassing, doing graffiti, engaging in civil disobedience, drafting policy briefs, living alternatively, running for office, crashing windows)
- How/when/why does one form/modality of APP shift to another? (e.g. protest to participation)
- Where does APP happen? In the streets, in civil society, in participatory institutions, on the internet, elsewhere, all of the above?
- What forms of collective action/activism constitute what 20th century social science called “social movements”?
- Are other concepts available to characterize today’s activism?
- What frameworks might we need to develop to better apprehend contemporary forms of APP?
- What modalities of APP are most effective, why, and to what ends?
- When and how does collective action shift scales, from local, to national, to global and (sometimes) back again?
- How and why do contemporary protests/mobilizations emerge?
- What is the role of the larger political, organizational, discursive environment in that emergence?
- How and why do they decline, “fail,” or end? Do they have “afterlives”? If so, what are their effects?
- How do we assess APP success? APP failure?
- How does the policing/militarization and criminalization of protest affect mobilizational outcomes?
- How do shifting concepts and discourses regarding diverse forms of collective action reflect changing theoretical and political agendas in different disciplinary arenas and on national, regional and transnational scales?


**Course Materials:**
Most article-length required readings can be accessed on Moodle [indicated by an (M) below] and are organized online by date and topic in accordance with the Course Outline. The following are the books we will be reading good chunks of or in their entirety. They are available for purchase online through the UMass-Amazon agreement. Many are also available as e-books through the W.E.B. Du Bois Library and some can also be accessed through a variety of other online sources.


Lang, Sabine. 2013. *NGOs, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere.* New York: Cambridge University Press.


**Course Requirements:**
Class participation, which will count for 50 percent of the grade for this course, will be assessed on the basis of: 1) active participation in seminar discussions; 2) online critical reading responses to seminar readings for 9 of our 13 class meetings, to be posted on Moodle no later than noon on the day of class; and, 3) organization and facilitation of seminar discussion, working with one or more partners, at least twice during the semester (material posted for each these count as the equivalent of a reading response).

Each week, facilitation teams of 2-4 students will prepare discussion questions and brief (no more than 2-page) analytical reflections on required readings. These, along with well sequenced questions for class discussion, should be posted to Moodle no later than noon on the day of that class. Facilitators also will prepare brief oral presentations—no longer than 5-7 minutes each—that
pull together the readings into some kind of critical framework, relate them to previous weeks’ readings, and frame questions for class discussion. Teams will meet during the preceding week to plan their collaborative presentations and will co-facilitate discussion with the instructor during class. Discussion techniques may include small group breakouts, role plays, games, or debates, but at least part of the seminar time should be spent in whole group discussion.

The final paper will count for the remaining 50 percent of your grade. It should be no more than 20-pp. long and may take one of the following forms: A) a research paper, drawing on course materials and original research; B) a research proposal or dissertation prospectus; C) a “rehearsal” of imagined comprehensive exam questions (two or more); D) a paper that is a draft comp for either the inter/intra-disciplinary field or contemporary theory; or E) a dissertation chapter on a topic relevant to this class.

You will submit three installments on the final paper (all due at noon on the Monday before class meets): a brief topic statement on October 3; a 2-3 pp. paper proposal on November 7; and full a rough draft, for peer review, on November 28. Students will exchange rough drafts with a partner and write peer reviews of each other’s work. These various installments will not be graded, but this 50 percent of your grade will be reduced by half a letter grade (A to an A-) for each that is not turned in on time. The final draft of the term paper must be posted to Moodle by 5pm on Friday, December 19. Your grade will be reduced by one half letter grade for each day or part of a day that the paper is late, no exceptions.
Course Outline
Fall 2016

September 6—Introduction: Activism, Participation, and Protest
Background readings for your perusal (will not be discussed in detail during first class, but will be referenced throughout the semester):

- Butler, Judith. 2011. Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street. (M)

Part I: Making Sense of Black Lives Matters and other Contemporary Mobilizations/APP: Theoretical, Historical, and Comparative Perspectives

September 13—Black Lives Matters: Shaking Up Politics and Conceptual Approaches
Readings:

- “Time Person of the Year: Black Lives Matters.” (M)
- *A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement by Alicia Garza*. 2014. (M)

September 20—Historicizing Today’s Black Activism
Readings:


**September 27—Comparative Perspectives on Black Movements and Racial Politics: Activism, Participation, and Protest in the Afro-Latin American Diaspora**

Readings:
- Perry, Keisha-Kahn. 2016. Geographies of Power: Black Women Mobilizing Intersectionality in Brazil. *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 14 (1); Part I of special issue on Special Issue on Afro-descendant Feminisms in Latin America: Brazil, guest edited by Sonia E. Alvarez and Kia Lilly Caldwell. (M)

**RESEARCH TOPIC STATEMENT DUE BY NOON ON OCTOBER 3 ON MOODLE.**

**Part II—Back to the Future: (Re)Viewing the Present through the Lenses of (now) Classic Social Science Paradigms**

**October 4—From Interest Groups to Social Movements to Political Process to Contentious Politics**

Readings:

**October 11—NO CLASS, Monday schedule followed**

**October 18 and 25—Rethinking Political Activism: Cultural Politics, Everyday Politics**

Readings:

- Abers, Rebecca and Luciana Tatagiba. 2015. Institutional Activism: Mobilizing for Women’s Health Inside the Brazilian Bureaucracy, ed. Federico M. Rossi and Marisa Von Bulow. Burlington, VT: Ashgate. (M)

November 1—The Politics of/surrounding Civil Society and Civic Participation, Social Capital, Public Spheres

Readings:
- Lang, Sabine. 2013. NGOs, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere, selections.

RESEARCH PROSPECTUS DUE MONDAY, NOVEMBER 74 BY NOON ON MOODLE.
November 8—The Vexing Politics of NGOs: Development’s Darlings, Neoliberalism’s Handmaidens or ???
Readings:
- Lang, Sabine. 2013. *NGOs, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere*, selections.

November 15—*Global Advocacy Networks and Transnational Feminisms*
Readings:
- Lang, Sabine. 2013. *NGOs, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere*, selections.

November 22—Thanksgiving Break

Part III—Looking Forward: Conceptual Incursions into 21st Century Activism, Participation, and Protest

ROUGH DRAFT/NARRATIVE OUTLINE OF FINAL PAPER DUE NOV. 28 AT NOON, FOR PEER REVIEW

November 29—*Anti/Alter-Globalization APP and the World Social Forum Process*

December 6—*Rethinking APP in the late 2010s: Mass Mobilizations, Popular Uprisings and Protest Politics*
Readings:
• Della Porta, Donatella. 2015. *Social Movements in Times of Austerity: Bringing Capitalism Back into Protest Analysis,* all.

December 13—Student Research Presentations/Public Conference (time to be arranged)

FINAL PAPERS MUST BE POSTED TO MOODLE NO LATER THAN FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19 BY 5PM.