**GSST 136: Women in Grassroots Organizing**

Fall, 2018

T/Th 3:40-5pm

Sproul 2340

Prof. Katja Guenther

INTN 2033A

katja@ucr.edu

Office hours: [katjamguenther.youcanbook.me](https://katjamguenther.youcanbook.me)

**Course Overview**

Grassroots activism is a major agent of social change—and women are engaged in it *all the time!* This class examines women’s participation in grassroots movements, including grassroots organizing that is explicitly feminist. We will explore why women get involved in grassroots organizing, what activism means to women, and how women work together to create change. We will struggle with the difficult question: What would a just society for *all* women look like? And how can grassroots organizing help get us there? We will also consider the relationships between grassroots activism, feminism, and democracy. Our approach will involve both some theoretical discussions, as well as case studies of different grassroots movements and the women who participate in them.

**Course Goals**

We will work together to:

* Build our knowledge about women’s and feminist grassroots activism;
* Understand what grassroots organizing is and how it is similar and/or different from other models of organizing;
* Explore the different kinds of issues around which women engage from the grassroots;
* Consider the advantages and challenges of grassroots organizing;
* Examine grassroots strategies;
* Discuss possibilities for coalition work;
* Practice evaluating information critically;
* Get inspired to think about different strategies for social change;
* Engage with ideas that are unfamiliar or even unsettling with an open mind;
* Participate in active and collaborative learning;
* Refine skills in active reading, critical thinking, group effort, and verbal and written expression.

**Course Materials**

The materials we will use in this class will be quite variable. We will read scholarly analyses from a range of disciplines (including women’s/gender studies, history, anthropology, and sociology), as well as statements written by grassroots feminist groups and activists, and news items published on-line and in feminist publications and ‘zines, including *Off Our Backs*, a radical feminist paper published from 1970 until 2008. Almost all materials will be available on iLearn, unless otherwise indicated in class.

Students are responsible for *actively* reading all assigned material for each session. I recommend using the attached note-taking template (or something similar you devise yourself) to ensure your understanding of the material, to facilitate your participation in class discussion, and to help you with our exams.

**Graded Components**

Your course grade will be comprised of several components, each of which is worth a set number of points. Details on each component can be found below. The total number of points for the course is 100. It is your responsibility to monitor your progress on iLearn, where grades will be posted as we complete various activities.

Attendance and participation: 20 points

Mid-term and final tests (take home): 45 points (first worth 20 points, second worth 25)

Grassroots presentation: 5 points

Grassroots proposal: 5 points

Grassroots final draft: 25 points

*Attendance and Participation*

This is a seminar-style course that depends on active student engagement in order for all of us to have a valuable learning experience. Please come to every class having read the material and prepared to engage in discussion. Kindly be aware of how you interact with me and your peers and so respectfully and with compassion. Everyone should have the opportunity to participate. If you consider yourself someone who is uncomfortable talking in groups, please push yourself to participate. Absences will be excused only with written verification from a doctor or other relevant medical professional, coach or other authorized leader of an extracurricular activity, childcare provider, or religious leader. For unexcused absences, you have one free pass, and can expect to lose a point for a second class missed and two points for each class missed thereafter. We will sometimes complete written activities in class; please note that the quality of your work on these activities will also be reflected in your participation score.

*Midterm and Final Take Home*

There will be two take-home tests that will include shorter and longer essay questions. Tests should be typed and double-spaced in 11-point or larger font with normal (1”) margins. When citing material from class, please include in-text citations and, if quoting, the page number like this (Garcia 2012: 417); you do not need to include a bibliography for course materials. The first take-home is worth twenty points and the second is worth twenty-five; they will be the same length, but I am working on the assumption that you will *improve* over the quarter.

*Grassroots Research Project*

Students will conduct independent research work on grassroots activism this quarter. You will start by submitting a research proposal in week two. Your project could focus on historical or contemporary grassroots activism, but must be organized around a specific research question. This project is intended to accomplish a few things: 1) Provide you with a chance to learn in-depth about grassroots activism; 2) Apply what we’re learning from the course to an analysis of grassroots activism; 3) Improve your writing skills through a process of drafting and revision; 4) Leave you with a document you could use as a writing sample should you apply to graduate programs that require them.

*Grassroots Inspiration*

Each week starting in week three, one or two students will be signed up to present about a historical or contemporary grassroots activist or organization of your choosing, ideally related to your final paper. This presentation should be a short (5-minute) presentation that tells us about the goals and work of the activist or organization. In your presentation, please include what *you* find inspiring or resonant about this organization, movement, or activist. Your presentation can be informal (no PowerPoint!), but do be sure to rehearse to make sure your timing is right. If you would like to distribute a hand-out, email it to me at least one hour before class for copying or bring copies yourself: katja@ucr.edu.

*Grassroots Research Paper*

The final draft of your research paper should be 8-10 pages and may focus on any approved research question of interest to you. You will submit a proposal in week three. Your proposal should include a specific research question, a brief discussion of why this question is important, and a plan for how to execute your research. Expect to submit a 1.5-2 page document. You should include the bible

ographic information for at least two potential *scholarly* sources for your paper. In your proposal, you should also mention if you plan to conduct an interview, use websites, and/or utilize an archive. (Did you know that UCR’s library includes the personal archive of Native American activist Janette Costo? And that you can access several major databases of original sources of women’s writing and other documents through our library website, including Women and Social Movements in the United States 1600-2000?).

**Course Policies**

* Extensions for tests or papers can only be arranged with written documentation of a legitimate conflict from a relevant authorized person (doctor/nurse, coach, religious leader, etc.). Vacation plans, parties, work conflicts, oversleeping, and speeding tickets are NOT legitimate excuses for missing class or class deadlines. Students who turn in written work late without an extension can expect a deduction of 1/7 of the total points available for that assignment for each day late.
* In the event that a family or medical emergency prevents you from coming to class, please be sure to get notes from another student. Except for students who are provided a notetaker by the University, all students are expected to take their own notes. I do not distribute or post PowerPoint slides (if I even use any in this course).
* Because you may want to bring readings to class on your tablet or laptop, electronics will be permitted in this classroom. Please do NOT use your technology for non-class-related work; if I detect you are doing so, I will ask you stop or to leave the classroom. I encourage you to use old school notebooks for notetaking.
* If you have an issue during the quarter that may affect your work in this course, please let me know ASAP. Do not wait until the last week of the quarter or, even worse, until after the quarter is over to reach out for assistance. I will always do my best to talk with you about if and how you can complete the course successfully, but I need to know if you need assistance.
* All of us learn in different ways and with varying degrees of success. If you know of any factors that may hinder your ability to complete this course successfully, please let me know *as soon as possible* so we can work with you to try to develop a strategy for successful course completion. If these factors are recognized disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please provide me with appropriate notification (if you haven’t already done so, you may ask for assistance from the Student Special Services, 125 Costo Hall, phone: (951) 827-4538, e-mail [specserv@ucr.edu](mailto:specserv@ucr.edu)).
* Students who violate university standards of integrity are subject to disciplinary sanctions, including failure in the course and suspension from the university. Since dishonesty in any form harms the individual, other students, and the university, I strictly enforce policies on academic integrity. I expect that you will familiarize yourself with UCR’s Standards of Student Conduct, available on line at http://conduct.ucr.edu/policies/academicintegrity.html. Lying, cheating, and/or plagiarizing may result in an F in the course, as well as in disciplinary action through the university.
* Incomplete grades are available only in exceptional circumstances and only if a student has completed more than half of the required material with a grade of C or higher.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

*Please listen for announced changes in class and/or on iLearn*

Week Zero/September 27

* Introductions, syllabus review

Week One/October 2 & 4

* Sign up for presentations on Thursday, October 4th
* Hernández-Castillo, Aída. 2018. “Searching for Truth in Community.” Pages 107-129 in *Feminist Freedom Warriors,* edited by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Linda E. Carty. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
* bell hooks. 2000. *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics.* 
  + Be prepared to discuss sections 1-4 on Tuesday and 5-16 and 19 for Thursday (okay to skip 18 & 19 unless you’re interested)

Week Two/October 9 & 11

* Paper proposal due in class on Thursday, October 11
* Morris, Tiyi. 2005*. “*Local Women and the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi: Re-visioning WomanPower Unlimited.” Pp. 193-214 in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, edited by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard. New York: NYU Press.
* Regua, Nannette. 2012. “Women in the Chicano Movement: Grassroots Activism in San José.” *Chicana/Latina Studies* 12 (1): 114–52.

Week Three/October 16 & 18

* Starhawk. 2003. “Why We Need Women’s Actions and Feminist Voices for Peace.” *Off Our Backs* 33 (3/4): 16–17.
* Buehler, Jan. 1985. “The Puget Sound Women’s Peace Camp: Education as an Alternative Strategy.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 8 (2): 40–44.
* Kricorian, Nancy. 2006. “CodePink: Women for Peace.” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 34 (1/2): 532–33.
* Svirsky, Gila. 2004. “Local Coalitions, Global Partners: The Women’s Peace Movement in Israel and Beyond.” *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 29 (2): 543–50. doi:10.1086/521238.
* Mackie, Vera. 2017. “One Thousand Wednesdays: Transnational Activism from Seoul to Glendale.” In *Women’s Activism and “Second Wave” Feminism: Transnational Histories*, edited by Barbara Molony and Jennifer Nelson, 249–71. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Week Four/October 23 & 25

* Bell, Shannon Elizabeth, and Yvonne A. Braun. 2010. “Coal, Identity, and the Gendering of Environmental Justice Activism in Central Appalachia.” *Gender and Society* 24 (6): 794–813.
* Turner, Terisa E., and Leigh S. Brownhill. 2002. “Women’s Oil Wars in Nigeria.” *Labour, Capital and Society* 35 (1): 132–64.
* Rivera Library visit, on Thursday, October 25th. Classroom TBA; meet at Rivera.

Week Five/October 30 & November 1

* Garcia, Victor. 2008. “Silvia Tlaseca and the Kaolin Mushroom Workers Union: Women’s Leadership in the Mexican Diaspora.” *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 34 (1): 42–47.
* Mills, Mary Beth. 2005. “From Nimble Fingers to Raised Fists: Women and Labor Activism in Globalizing Thailand.” *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 31 (1): 117–44. doi:10.1086/521238.
* Coulter, Kendra. 2011. “Unionizing Retail: Lessons From Young Women’s Grassroots Organizing in the Greater Toronto Area in the 1990s.” *Labour/le Travail* 67 (Spring 2011): 77–93.
* Chen, Michelle. 2013 “Fed Up.” *Ms.* 26-31*.*
* Mid-term due at the beginning of class, Tuesday, October 30

Week Six/November 6 & 8

* No class on Thursday, November 8
* Tillmon, Johnni. 1972. “Welfare Is a Women’s Issue.” *Ms.*
* Mimi Abramovitz. 2001. “Learning from the History of Poor and Working-Class Women’s Activism.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 577: 118–30.
* Nadasen, Premilla. 2002. “Expanding the Boundaries of the Women’s Movement: Black Feminism and the Struggle for Welfare Rights.” *Feminist Studies* 28 (2): 270–301.
* Povitz, Lana Dee. 2017. “Hunger Doesn’t Take a Vacation: The Good Activism of United Bronx Parents.” In *Women’s Activism and “Second Wave” Feminism: Transnational Histories*, edited by Barbara Molony and Jennifer Nelson, 15–35. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Week Seven/November 13 & 15

* Berer, Marge. 2000. “Safe Sex, Women’s Reproductive Rights and the Need for a Feminist Movement in the 21st Century.” *Reproductive Health Matters* 8 (15): 7–11.
* Boston Women’s Health Collective history
* Nelson, Jennifer. 2005. “‘Hold Your Head up and Stick out Your Chin’: Community Health and Women’s Health in Mound Bayou, Mississippi.” *NWSA Journal* 17 (1): 99–118.
* Davis, Kathy. 2002. “Feminist Body/Politics as World Traveler.” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 9: 223–47.
* Thomsen, Carly. 2013. “From Refusing Stigmatization toward Celebration: New Directions for Reproductive Justice.” *Feminist Studies* 39 (1): 149–58.

Week Eight/November 20 & 22

* Chapters 6, 7 & 8 from Silliman, Jael, Marlene Fried, and Elena R. Gerber Ross, Loretta Guitierrez. 2004. *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice*. Haymarket. Chicago.
* NO CLASS on Thursday, November 22—university closed for Thanksgiving holiday

Week Nine/November 27 & 29

* Keating, Cricket. 2005. “Building Coalitional Consciousness.” *NWSA Journal* 17 (2): 86–103.
* TBD

Week Ten/December 4 & 6

* Grassroots research paper due at the beginning of class on December 4th
* Come prepared for class on Tuesday to talk briefly about your research paper
* No class Thursday, December 6

Final due Saturday, December 8, no later than 6pm via EMAIL as a WORD document only to katja@ucr.edu