

MDA 300: Activism and Advocacy

Spring 2021 (2 Units)

USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

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OVERVIEW

This class explores activism with a focus on tangible steps to create real change. Students will learn how to match their skills and passions within existing channels and to develop new organizations and movements. We will host guest speakers who have led political campaigns and organizations, created movements, participated in civil disobedience, engaged celebrities, utilized art, and led corporate social responsibility efforts.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- The objective of this class is to empower the students to embrace activism and to advocate for the causes you believe in.
- Students will have the opportunity to hear from extraordinary leaders in their fields- soak up their experiences, ask questions, network.
- Students will be encouraged to be creative and think outside of the box.

GRADES

Class Participation 15%

Weekly Assignments 50%

Final Project 35%

Academic Expectations

Class participation is an important aspect of this course. Students are expected to attend all talks and classes on time, to do the reading, and turn in writing assignments when they are due. You are advised to learn and observe the University's policy on academic integrity as articulated in the current edition of SCampus, which is online at <https://policy.usc.edu/student/>

[scampus/](#)

Policy on Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability should register with Disability Services and Programs (in GFS 120, telephone 740-0776) and get a letter of verification for approved accommodations. Please show the letter to me at the beginning of the semester.

Suggested Reading and Films:

Amaryllis Fox, 2019, *Life Undercover: Coming of Age in the CIA*

Martin Luther King, 1963, *Letter from Birmingham Jail*

Doc Society, 2014, [Impact Field Guide](#)

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and John Cronin, *The Riverkeepers*, 1997 (selected chapters)

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. *Why We're in Vieques*, Outside Magazine, 2001

Wangari Maathai, *Unbowed*

Bill McKibben, *Do the Math*, Rolling Stone Magazine (<https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-188550/>)

Michael Segalov, 2018, *Resist! How to Be an Activist in the Age of Defiance*

Henry David Thoreau, 1854, *Walden*

View:

Chicagoland, Episode 7, 2014, CNN, Sundance Productions

He Named Me Malala, 2015, dir. by Davis Guggenheim

Knock Down The House, 2019, Rachel Lears

Selma, 2014, Ava Duvernay

The Last Mountain, 2011, Bill Haney

CLASS SCHEDULE

Note: Schedule is a draft and dates and/or speakers may be subject to change.

Jan 14: USC Second Semester Begins

Jan 18: No Class, MLK Holiday

Jan. 25: Class 1: Course Overview, Finding Your Passion

Introduction and class overview
How and why I became an activist
Assignments overview and handouts
How to Identify your Passion
Assessing your strengths and weaknesses

Feb. 1: Class 2-Where to Begin

Guest speakers:

Alan Khazei, co-Founder of AmeriCorps
Ellen Ziffren, co-founder, Stand Up 2 Cancer
Aiden Riley, co-Founder, Farmlink

Topic: How do you go from concept to concrete action? What steps are critical start an organization, assemble your team, fundraise, launch your plan?

Alan Khazei, an American social entrepreneur, has worked with hundreds of non-profit organizations. He is the founder of Democracy Entrepreneurs, as well as the Chief Executive Officer of Be the Change, Inc., a Boston-based group dedicated to building national coalitions of non-profit organizations and citizens to enact legislation on issues such as poverty and education. While in college at Harvard, Khazei co-founded AmeriCorps national service program. He later served as Chief Executive Officer of CityYear, an AmeriCorps program engaging 17- to 24-year-olds in a year of service.

Ellen Ziffren is a co-founder of Stand Up 2 Cancer. The former Vice President of corporate communications for International Creative Management, Ellen Ziffren also co-founded Rob Reiner's I Am Your Child Foundation in 1997 and helped build it from the ground up. She spent several years working as a marketing consultant for the Skoll Foundation, which invests in, connects, and celebrates social entrepreneurs around the world.

Aidan Reilly is co-founder and Chief Creative Office of The Farmlink Project, a non-profit with the goal of moving unsold food from farms to communities across the United States. Since starting in April as a response to the pandemic, Farmlink has moved 22 million pounds of food in forty five states and two countries. Aidan is currently a Senior at Brown University.

ASSIGNMENT: Write 2-3 pages describing the issue you want to address and your vision for creating an organization that would advance your cause. Include thoughts on how you plan to organize and/or collaborate with others, plans for fundraising, establishing short-term and long-term goals.

Feb. 8: Class 3- Programming development for Maximizing impact

Guest Speaker: Ken Levit, CEO of the George Kaiser Family Foundation

Topic: What are the keys to success in running an established organization? How do you maximize impact? What are the challenges/opportunities for working in a smaller town, where your work has a disproportionate effect on the local community?

Ken Levit is executive director of George Kaiser Family Foundation in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Prior to taking on the leadership role at GKFF, Mr. Levit served as president of the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa from 2001 to 2006. From early 1998 through 2000, Mr. Levit was special counsel to George Tenet, director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Mr. Levit practiced corporate law at the firm of Crowe & Dunlevy in Tulsa from 1995 to 1998.

ASSIGNMENTS: 1) Schedule a call to speak with an expert in your field.
2) For Feb. 22- Watch episode of *Chicagoland* (link to be provided)

Feb. 15: No Class, President's Day Holiday

Feb. 22: Class 4: Activism vs. Advocacy, a focus on youth

Guest Speakers:

Liz Dozier, Executive Director of Chicago Beyond
Alicia Novoa, Director of Engagement, Future Coalition

Topic: What are the distinctions between activism and advocacy? When is it best to use each lever?

Liz Dozier has spent her career working tirelessly to disrupt the culture of inequity that is often pervasive in urban neighborhoods largely informed by her experiences as an educator in Chicago Public Schools. During her tenure as principal at Fenger High School, which at the time was known as one of the most violent and underperforming schools in Chicago, Fenger experienced a decrease in its dropout rate from 19% to 2%, a 40% increase in Freshman On-Track to graduate, and double-digit increases in attendance and the school's state graduation rate. In 2016, Dozier launched Chicago Beyond, an impact investor that backs the fight for youth equity by fueling ideas, organizations, and people.

Alicia Novoa is a youth activist, serving at the forefront of the social movements of our time. In high school, Alicia was an organizer for March for Our Lives and led youth outreach on the re-election campaign of her Congresswoman, Stephanie Murphy. In July of 2019, Alicia joined the founding team at Future Coalition, where she serves as Director of Engagement. Alicia has established herself as a voice on youth activism, being featured in MTV news, Teen Vogue, and other publications. Alicia is currently a sophomore at Georgetown University, studying international political economy and business.

ASSIGNMENT: RESIST, Chapter 3: Say It Loud, Say It Clear
Think about your media plan... What is the message you want to communicate and what format do you want to utilize? (op-ed? social media? influencers?) Draft your sample press release and social media tool kit that you would ideally share with the press. What is your target list of press outlets?

Mar 1, Class 5: Public Relations and Social Media

Guest Speaker: Ken Sunshine, CEO and co-Founder, Sunshine Sachs

Topic: Learn about how to best utilize the press and public relations to influence public opinion. What is the most important part of creating a campaign and implementing it?

Ken Sunshine is CEO and founder of Sunshine Sachs Consultants. Sunshine Sachs specializes in corporate image programs, crisis communication, reputation management and issues management, as well consumer and lifestyle marketing, public affairs, media relations, event promotion, and communications skills training. In 2014, the firm was named the number one public relations agency in New York by *New York Observer*. Clients have included Barbra Streisand, Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Lopez, Lin Manuel Miranda and Ben Affleck, to name a few.

ASSIGNMENT: Watch *He Named Me Malala* or the film of your choice that depicts a powerful social message with the ability to change hearts and minds (not simply reinforce existing beliefs.) Write 1-2 pages about why you thought this film was impactful, and how you envision creating a public engagement campaign around the storytelling.

Mar 8, Class 6: Advocating through Art

Guest speakers:

Lindsay Geutschow, Principal, The Raben Group

Gretel Truong, Vice President, Impact Campaigns

Topic: Some of the most powerful influences have come from non-traditional forms of communication: art, music, theater, film. Explore examples of artists who have influenced the masses using their artistic format.

Lindsay Guetschow is a principal in The Raben Group's Impact Entertainment practice, where she brings 15 years of experience building impact campaigns that drive meaningful and measurable change. She has developed and led campaigns for films, nonprofits, and foundations engaging communities around the world in cultural and progressive policy change. She served as the film campaign director at Malala Fund, and previously served as the senior director for marketing and strategic alliances at Participant Media. The heart of Lindsay's work lies at the intersection of powerful storytelling and impact.

Gretel Truong is Vice President of Impact Campaigns at the non-profit Represent Justice. Prior to her campaign working to reform the criminal

justice system, Gretel's prior experience includes working on the global Stand #withMalala campaign, using *He Named Me Malala* to advance the movement for girls' secondary education. She also worked as the Communications Director on the Just Mercy campaign. Gretel produces creative and impact-driven content and partnerships through multi-media films, events, and digital mobilization around the globe. She describes herself as a "Believer in the power of storytelling to create action for change."

ASSIGNMENT: Write 1-2 pages on your vision for a storytelling campaign that would advance your cause. How do you incorporate film, public events and digital mobilization?

Read selected chapter from *Life Undercover*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/10/books/amaryllis-fox-life-undercover-cia.html>

Mar 15, Class 7: Unconventional Advocacy

Guest speaker:

Amaryllis Fox, Former United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Officer

Topic: You don't need to work for an NGO to save the world. Hear from an extraordinary woman who put her life on the line to fight for peace and social justice in the most unexpected places.

Amaryllis Fox is a bestselling writer, peace activist, and CIA veteran. Her recent book, *Life Undercover*, has been translated into 23 languages and was chosen by Time Magazine, the Washington Post, the New York Times and People Magazine as a notable book of the year. It is being adapted into a television series by Apple, featuring Brie Larson. Her viral video about the importance of listening to our enemies has been viewed over 130 million times worldwide. She is the host of #1 Netflix series THE BUSINESS OF DRUGS. Previously, she hosted History Channel's AMERICAN RIPPER and has offered guest commentary on global events for CNN, MSNBC, FOX News, NatGeo, BBC, Al Jazeera, and other global news outlets. Amaryllis has a BA from Oxford University in Theology and Jurisprudence and an MA in International Relations from the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband and daughters.

ASSIGNMENT: Write 1-2 pages describing your experience with your mentorship call. Was it easy or difficult to get the meeting? What did you learn? Did you send a thank you note (if not, please do that too!)

Mar. 22: Class 8: Corporate Activism & Social Responsibility

Guest speakers:

Corley Kenna, Director of Communications, Patagonia

Maggie Schmerin, Director of Public Relations, United Airlines

Rama Variankaval, Director of the Center for Carbon Transition, J.P.

Morgan Chase

Topic: What responsibility do corporations have to their shareholders, and what responsibility do they have to society? Too often corporations are seen as the obstacle to social change, but many corporations are stepping out to take the lead and advance social progress. Hear how companies can utilize both the products/services they provide, as well as their marketing might, to change behavior for the greater good.

Corley Kenna is the Director, Global Communications and Public Relations at Patagonia, where she focuses heavily on a campaign promoting sustainability and climate change. She previously worked as the Director of Corporate Communications for Ralph Lauren, and served as Managing Director at the public affairs company, Burson-Marsteller, and worked as a research assistant at the U.S. State Department.

Maggie Schmerin (bio to come)

Rama Variankaval is the head of the newly announced Center for Carbon Transition (CCT) at J.P. Morgan Chase. He's been tapped to lead a team that will function as a center of expertise for clients looking to reduce their carbon emissions. <https://renewablesnow.com/news/jp-morgan-commits-to-carbon-neutrality-wants-clients-to-do-the-same-716324/>

ASSIGNMENT: Think of a corporation (or several) who might be a good fit

to support your efforts. Write 1-2 pages describing a partnership with a corporation that would be mutually beneficial. What do you bring to the table for them? Why should they care about this cause? How can you give them recognition for being good corporate stewards?

Mar. 29, Class 9: Innovating for Justice

Guest Speakers:

Susan Abrams, CEO, Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center
Eric Ward, The Proteus Fund

Topic: Addressing hate and intolerance through innovative campaigns

Susan Abrams is the CEO of Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center. She has been recognized for both her executive leadership and innovation by the Stevie Awards for Women in Business. Under her leadership, the museum has employed cutting-edge technology to teach the lessons of the past and inspire positive change in the world. This includes a partnership with the USC Shoah Foundation to create holographic video recordings of Holocaust Survivors with voice recognition capability that enables the recordings to respond to visitors' questions in a powerfully lifelike way. The Museum inspires individuals and organizations and provides a universal wake-up call to action: Take history to heart. Take a stand for humanity. Abrams previously held leadership positions at Northwestern University and Chicago Children's Museum, in addition to working as a consultant at McKinsey & Company and an analyst at Goldman Sachs.

Eric Ward brings over 30 years of leadership in community organizing and philanthropy. Eric began his civil rights work when the white nationalist movement was engaged in violent paramilitary activity that sought to undermine democratic governance in the Pacific Northwest. Eric founded and directed a community project to expose and counter hate groups with the Community Alliance of Lane County, and has held leadership positions with various regional and national foundations. He is currently Co-Chair for The Proteus Fund.

ASSIGNMENT: Imagine a museum exhibition that would influence viewers' perception of the problem you wish to address.. what would it look like? Who would you ideally partner on for this?

April 5. Class 9: Navigating Politics

Guest speakers:

U.S. Congressman Eric Swalwell, Representative from California's 15th district

California State Senator Henry Stern, representing Senate District 27

Topic: How to be an effective advocate by engaging your elected officials. Hear what works and what doesn't when you go to make your case, from the perspective of the Congressional Representative sitting across the desk.

Eric Swalwell in 2012 was elected to represent California's Fifteenth Congressional District, which includes a large part of the East Bay. Now in his fourth term, he's working hard to bring new energy, ideas, and a problem-solving spirit to Congress, with a focus on advancing policies that support equality, opportunity, and security. Congressman Swalwell serves on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, where he chairs the Intelligence Modernization and Readiness Subcommittee. He also serves on the House Judiciary Committee. Additionally, he is co-chair of the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which makes committee assignments and sets the caucus' policy agenda. He also founded and is chairman emeritus of Future Forum, a group of almost 50 young Democratic Members of Congress focused on issues and opportunities for millennial Americans including student loan debt and home ownership. In his first term, Congressman Swalwell co-founded the bipartisan United Solutions Caucus to bring new Members together; the group meets regularly to advance common-sense solutions and overcome the partisan divide. And in his second term, Swalwell cofounded the bipartisan Sharing Economy Caucus to explore how this burgeoning new economic sector can benefit more Americans.

Senator Henry Stern is a sixth-generation Californian and native of the greater Los Angeles area who has represented the nearly one million residents of the 27th Senate District since first being elected to serve the 27th Senate District in November 2016.

Stern has chaired the Senate Natural Resources & Water Committee since 2018, where he has worked tirelessly to bolster the state's wildfire preparedness, push to have the state address the climate change emergency, improve our democracy and fight to help some of California's most vulnerable members. He was also recently appointed as Chair of the Joint Legislative Committee on Emergency Management.

In addition, Stern sits on the Senate's Budget, Environmental Quality, Judiciary, and Energy, Utilities & Communications committees, as well as the Budget Subcommittee on Resources, Environmental Protection & Energy.

ASSIGNMENT: Is there pending legislation that would positively impact your issue? Who are the supporters, who are opponents? Write 1-2 pages on your plans to reach out to elected officials. What specifically would you like to discuss?

April 12: When to use the law, and when to break it- litigation vs. civil disobedience

Guest speaker: Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., attorney, author, activist

Topic: When is civil disobedience a useful tool for change? What is its role in history of peaceful protests?

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. has spent his life as an activist and advocate for environmental and social justice. He serves as President of the Board of Waterkeeper Alliance, the world's largest organization dedicated to advocacy for clean water with over 300 chapters internationally. He has been voted by Time Magazine as a "Hero of the Planet" for his work on environmental law and activism.

Kennedy served as Senior Attorney for NRDC and also served a 30 day sentence in a Puerto Rican prison for civil disobedience against the U.S. Naval bombing in violation of the Clean Water Act. Kennedy will discuss when the greatest strategy to enact change is to litigate and when grassroots advocacy is the better course of action. He will describe his experience participating and leading civil disobedience and the history of peaceful protests.

ASSIGNMENT: Write 1-2 pages about a civil disobedience that inspired you or you think was particularly effective. What could you do to advance your cause using civil disobedience?

April 19 & April 26 Final Presentations

FINAL ASSIGNMENT: Create an ACTION plan. Present your vision for the organization you want to join, create or shape. It can be a non-profit, a film production or a socially responsible corporation. How will you be an activist and what will you advocate for?

Students will work individually, or in groups of up to 4 people. The final presentation should be presented to the class in a 15-20 minute presentation.