

Teaching Social Action: An Introduction

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This session will introduce a course on social action based on a model at San José State University taught by Dr. Myers-Lipton for more than a dozen years. Students in his classes have averaged one victory per year over that time period. These include: including the increase of the city's minimum wage, the modernization of the city's business tax, the move to a sweat-shop free campus, and the reinstatement of the Equal Opportunity Program for first-time college students.

This session will introduce you to the goals, key features, and issues to consider for creating your own social action course where students learn by doing social action.

1. SOCIAL ACTION COURSE: KEY FEATURES

- Students do social action; instead of just reading about it,
 - Still use “book knowledge” but knowledge is challenged
 - Integrate praxis with theory, while changing structure.
- Attempt to change a policy / used to win 10 campaigns
 - Action-oriented, solutions-based, social change course

** Note: Curricular or co-curricular*

2. STUDENTS LEARN

- Issue Development
- Leadership
- Social Change Theory
- Power and Recruitment
- Target Analysis and Power Mapping
- Strategy and Tactics: legislative or policy / alliance building, media & public relations, disruption, & target meetings / rallying, marching, picketing, street theater, public hearing, walkouts, occupying spaces, direct negotiation with target, lobby day, accountability session)
- Group Dynamics: facilitation, decision making, conflict resolution
- Campaign Plan: event planning, media outreach, evaluation
- Fundraising and Negotiation

Student Victories

- In 2007, *Students Against Sweatshops* got the San José State University (SJSU) President to sign an executive order creating a sweatshop-free campus.
- In 2008, *Students for EOP* led the successful campaign, along with faculty to reinstate the SJSU Education Opportunity Program (EOP).
- In 2010, *Collective Voices for Undocumented Students* won their campaign to allow AB 540 (undocumented) students to use computers from Clark Hall and to receive certain SJSU scholarships.
- In 2011, *Students for Campus Safety* won two of their demands: (1) to have an opt out system rather than an opt-in system for SJSU Action Alerts, (2) to extend the SJSU shuttle service to six blocks off the campus.
- In 2012, the *Campus Alliance for Economic Justice* (CAFÉ J) developed and helped to lead the San Jose Measure D campaign, which won 60% to 40% in the November election, which raised the minimum wage from \$8 to \$10 an hour.
- In 2014, *Students for Racial Equality* led a successful campaign to remove Tower Foundation board member Wanda Ginner after making a racist comment about Latinas.
- In 2015, *Students for DMH* won their demand for air conditioning in Dudley Moorehead Hall.
- In 2015, *College Action Network* won their demand for the institutionalization of a college tour program for third graders that they had developed.
- In 2015, the *Society for Teaching Responsible Options in Nutrition and Growth* (STRONG) worked with food vendors to win three changes to city regulations making it easier and more accessible for fresh carts to sell fresh fruit and vegetables.
- In 2016, *Students for a World-Class City* developed Measure G, the Modernization of the Business Tax, which won 65% to 35% in the November 2016 election, and doubled the business tax by almost \$13 million, focusing on mid to large corporations, with the majority of the money going to fund infrastructure projects.
- In 2017, *Students Against Sexual Harassment* (SASH) won their demand to force the resignation of a professor who had sexually harassed a student, but after a two-week suspension and diversity training, had been allowed to return to his faculty position.
- In 2019, *Students Against Mass Incarceration* (SAMMI) got Santa Clara County to clear and expunge 13,000 cannabis convictions.
- In 2020, the *Student Homeless Alliance* (SHA) convinced the SJSU President to develop a 12-emergency bed program and a \$2 million rental assistance program for houseless students.

3. KEY LESSONS IN TEACHING SOCIAL ACTION WHERE STUDENTS DO SOCIAL ACTION

A. Start Campaigns Quickly

- Term doesn't provide much time (i.e., 2-4 months), so it's key that students start social action projects ASAP
 - Students present own ideas to one another. As time went on, other student groups, faculty, and community orgs have asked to come in and talk to students...
 - Generally, 3-5 projects going on; however, a few times, whole class has worked on 1 campaign.

B. Action is offset with reflection, research, critical thinking

- Perform action, and then reflect. Thus, "action" (e.g., campaign kickoff) is followed by "reflection" (e.g., group dynamics)

C. Use Pedagogies In Addition to "Teacher Talk"

- Must actively engage students
 - do give lectures, but do small group work on campaigns
 - when texted discussed, often have students facilitate to encourage an active role
 - also have former students come talk
- All de-center me from traditional role of teacher, and asks my students to take center stage.

D. One Caution: Expect a Bit of Chaos as students come to terms with their power

- Be clear as possible about your role (i.e., "guide on side") and be transparent and honest about your expectations.
 - tell students while they are much more in control of the class than in other college courses, but remind them power is shared (e.g., I still set curriculum, give short lectures, provide guidance for groups, and evaluate their work).
 - FYI: don't give students a higher grade if they win campaign; rather, evaluate work on written and oral assignments.

E. May Have to Talk with Administrators and Larger Community.

- When concerns raised, I explain to administration and to the press that I am teaching about DEMOCRACY and POWER.
 - Assure them that students choose projects to work on is based on their interests.
 - not coercing them into particular project; have choice
- Projects students select may have a liberal or conservative bent, or no bent at all (e.g. more printers for the library or air conditioning for an old building).
- Provide examples of students working in public realm:
 - Business classes having students help solve problems for local companies,
 - Engineering courses that design power grids or create software protection programs for real customers.
- Tell administrators that students trained in social action makes campus better, more productive space to be.

4. CHANGE! A GUIDE TO TEACHING SOCIAL ACTION

Below is an outline of the chapters of my new book entitled "CHANGE! A Guide to Teaching Social Action" (Routledge, Jan. 2022)

Chapter 1: Social Action – An Overview

- A. Social Action's Role in the American Experiment in Democracy
- B. U.S. College Social Action (abbreviated)
- C. Benefits of Social Action for Students, Campus, and Society
- D. The Vision: Bringing Social Action into the Classroom
- E. Overcoming the Challenges of Teaching Social Action

Chapter 2: Developing a Social Action Class – Things to Consider Before Class Begins

- A. Academic Course vs Co-Curricular
- B. Prerequisites
- C. Creating a Social Action Syllabus

- D. Teaching Style
- E. Classroom Norms
- F. The Students
- G. Building Allies: On Campus and in the Community
- H. The Role of Place
- I. Each Semester vs. Every Year (or Other Year)

Chapter 3: Launching Student Campaigns

- A. On Your Mark: Preparing Students for the Road Rarely Traveled (Class 1)
- B. Go! Students Choose Their Issue (Class 2-4, 1st part of class)
- C. Get Set: Setting the Tone (Class 4, 2nd part of class)
- D. Change Theory: Applying it to the Students' Issues (Class 5-6)
- E. Building Power: Student Recruitment and Allies (Class 7-8)
- F. Walking Tour (Class 9)
- G. Research: Historical Overview, Power Mapping, and Target Analysis (Class 10-11)
- H. Group Dynamics (Class 12)
- I. Strategy and Tactics (Class 13-14)
- J. Campaign Kickoff (Class 15-16)

Chapter 4: Campaign Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation

- A. Timeline and Campaign Plan (Day 17)
- B. Campaign Implementation: "Series of Actions" Begin (Day 18)
- C. Campaign Execution and Case Studies (Day 19-28)
- D. Campaign Evaluation (Day 29-30)
- E. Day of the Final: Campaign Notebook and Group Presentation (Day 31)

Chapter 5: Epilogue

- A. Next Semester
- B. Mainstreaming Social Action: Regional and National Implications
- C. Social Action Internship Program
- D. Pipeline to Jobs and Graduate School
- E. Campaigns: Victorious, In Progress, and Inactive
- F. Former Social Action Students: Impact of Social Action