

DePaul University School for New Learning  
**HOW TO BE A CULTURAL ACTIVIST**  
AI 148 - Spring 2006  
Loop Campus, Mondays, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.  
Thomas Tresser

**Course Description**

Freedom of expression vs. censorship. The artist as agent of change or entertainer of the privileged. Intellectual property vs. freeware. The Slow Food movement vs. Globalization. Teaching evolution or creationism. Public education vs. home schooling.

These are just a few of the controversies that swirl around the arena of American culture. There are many groups working to preserve the widest access to the arts, culture and means of expression. This course has a definite point of view: which is that creativity is an essential component of a vital democracy.

This course will show you several ways to be an organizer around issues of culture and creativity. During this course students will be given an introduction to community organizing strategies and tactics and will be exposed to a number of cultural policy controversies and the key players who are working to make a difference in those areas. We will hear firsthand from cultural activists and learn how to be effective organizers for cultural democracy. This class will combine readings, class exploration and an out-of-class research project where students will pick a cultural cause that is meaningful to them and research that issue and do a presentation on that issue to the class.

**About the Instructor**

Tom Tresser is a consultant, producer, educator and trainer who can help individuals, companies and communities leverage and amplify their creative assets in order to solve problems, create economic value and trigger civic engagement. Tom has been a long-time advocate for an increased appreciation for the role of creativity in the life of the community. In 1991 he started an organization that organized artists and cultural workers for political activism and taught "Arts and Public Policy" at Roosevelt University, where he organized a center for the study of cultural policy. Tom was Director Cultural Development at Peoples Housing, a nonprofit community development corporation operating in northeast Chicago, where he organized a community arts program that combined culture and economic development. Tom served as lead organizer for the Chicago Park District for two years in a pilot project that transformed a major regional park into a community cultural center. In April 2004, Tom was elected to a two-year term for the Local School Council for the Abraham Lincoln Elementary School in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood. He lectures on "The Politics of Creativity" and conducts leadership training sessions for artists and creative professionals. He teaches classes on arts and civic engagement at DePaul University and Loyola University.



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**Competencies Offered**

A3x	Can identify the social and historical context of a particular artist/social activist and explain his/her point of view.
A5	Can define and analyze a creative process.
H1i	Can understand change methodology, plan change within a community, and assess its likely impact.
H2x	Understands cultural activism and can identify and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of social change groups who use creative, non-traditional methods of organizing.

## Attendance and Participation

Regular attendance is required. Attendance will be taken. Students who miss more than two class sessions may be asked to drop the course. Students are expected to be in class on time, and to remain until class ends. Each member of the class will make a name card for their classroom desk. You'll be responsible for your own name card, so please remember to bring it to class.

## The Learning Experience

We will use a combination of lecture, discussion and presentations. Our required text is "Organizing for Social Change – Manual for Activists" (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) by the staff of the Midwest Academy. This paperback is available at the DePaul Loop Campus Bookstore in the DePaul Center, as well as from online bookstores. Other readings will be posted on the course's Blackboard website.

There will be a writing assignment that will be due in Weeks 7 and 9 (students registered for two competencies will be doing two writing assignments):

Choose the assignment that matches the competence you are seeking:

A3X - Prepare a short profile of an artist who has been effective or powerful in social justice, political organizing or community change. Bring in a sample of this artist's work and explain it to the class.
A5 – You have just been appointed the new Director of the Sierra Club. Explain how you will bring creativity to the organization – what steps will you take to use creative methods to accomplish its mission?
H1I - Research an organizing tool or tactic and discuss the pros and cons of this tool and tell us how it might be used in a creative manner to advance one of the three issues being explored by our three Issues Teams.
H2X – Analyze a group that is using non-traditional, creative or theatrical tactics for social change (a group not covered in the mini-case histories) and prepare a short report describing their methods and philosophy and discuss their strengths and weaknesses.

- Detailed instructions will be available at the first class and posted on the Blackboard site.
- Please identify the topic(s) that you will be covering and submit a paragraph explaining your topic at the Week 4 class (April 17). If you know the topic(s) you'd like to cover, you can submit the proposal sooner
- The first paper will be due Week 7 (May 8) and the second, if you are doing a second, Week 9 (May 22)
- Students will make individual presentations of their findings at the final class

### March 27 (#1) – Introduction

- Statement of the instructor's limitations and biases
- Pretest
- What is creativity and why is it so important?
- What are some ways to look at culture as a basis for civic engagement?
- Introductions where students discuss their own activism interests and history
- What does "winning" look like?
- For this class: Read "Chapter 2, "Models of Community Organizing" from *Democracy in Action* (posted on Blackboard course site)
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### April 3 (#2) – Introduction to Organizing

- Guest lecturer on organizing in Chicago
- Discuss readings
- Class discussion on cultural issues facing America
- Class votes on the three issues we will focus on for the rest of the class
- Class divided into 3 teams for investigation of the chosen issues – these teams will be called Teams A, B and C
- Framework for team work will be presented, assignments given
- For this class: Read Chapter 2, "The Fundamentals of Direct Action Organizing" from textbook, *Organizing for Social Change* + take home mini-quiz

### **April 10 (#3) – Creativity & Organizing**

- How can creativity be applied to the tasks of organizing for social change
- Framework for applying creative strategies to the organizing process
- Case study: The Yes Men
- For this class: Read Chapters 3, 4 from textbook, *Organizing for Social Change* + take home mini-quiz

### **April 17 (#4) – First Reports of Issues Teams**

- Discuss readings
- Teams A, B, and C will give their first reports to the full class
- These presentations will be designed to give an overview of the issue that the group has been investigating
- Case study: Billionaires for Bush
- For this class: Read Chapters 11, 12 from textbook, *Organizing for Social Change*
- Description of proposed writing assignment(s) due

### **April 24 (#5) – Arts and Social Change**

- Discussion of reading – how best (if at all) should artists and other creative people participate in social change and challenges to power?
- Case study: The Guerilla Girls
- Next team assignment given for field work
- For this class: Read “Artists in Times of War” by Howard Zinn (posted on Blackboard course site) + take home mini-quiz

### **May 1 (#6) – The Politics of Hip Hop**

- Introduction to the players and positions of hip hop activists
- Guest artist
- Case study: National Hip Hop Political Convention
- For this class: Read articles: “Hip Hop as a Political Tool,” Principles of 2006 National Hip Hop Political Convention, “Where Politics and Hip Hop Collide,” “Hip-Hop, Ghetto-centricity and the Commodity Fetish” (all posted on Blackboard site)

### **May 8 (#7) – Field Reports from Teams**

- Evaluation forms for the team presentation will be distributed so everyone can rate the presentations on the same set of criteria
- Each team will present their report from their research on an organization that is working on the issue they are studying, including account of meeting or public action that organization has sponsored.
- First writing assignment due

### **May 15 (#8) - Creativity and Community Change**

- How do the arts build communities? Discussion of readings
- Case story of instructor’s experience as Director of Cultural Development at Peoples Housing
- For this class: Read: “Packing for the Trip” and section on the Village of Arts and Humanities from *Beginner’s Guide to Community-Based Arts* (posted on Blackboard course site) + take home mini-quiz

### **May 22 (#9) – Creativity and Personal Development**

- Discussion of individual creativity and innovation
- What stops us from being creativity?
- How can build our own creativity “muscles”?
- For this class: Read “Definitions of Creativity” posted on Blackboard site.
- Reminder of final presentations
- Second writing assignment due (if student is doing two writing assignments)

**No class May 29**

### **June 5 (#10) – Final Class**

- Post test
- Presentations by students
- Summary by instructor

## Evidence to be Submitted

For each competence there will be one writing assignment as outlined above. More detailed guidelines will be distributed in class. The paper shall be at least six pages (typed/word processed, double-spaced, 1" margins on all sides) and reference at least five outside sources.

### Grading and Evaluation

Attendance	10 points
Class participation	15 points
Mini-quiz on readings	20 points
Team work	15 points
Individual writing/research assignment(s)	30 points (20 for content, 10 for presentation)
Post test	10 points
Bonus for attending all 10 classes	05 points

## Policy in the Issuing of Incomplete (IN) Grades

The grade of Incomplete (IN) will be issued only in the case of exceptional circumstances that prevent the student from completing required work within the timeframe of the quarter. Students who want the grade of IN to be issued must make a formal request by no later than the final class period, using the SNL Request Form for IN Grades (supplied by the instructor). This request will specify the final deadline by which the student may submit outstanding course work for evaluation. Work submitted after the established deadline will not be evaluated, and the grade will be entered as an F. There will be no exceptions to this policy, and no justifiable basis for grade appeal.

## Plagiarism

Students are expected to observe the University's established guidelines regarding academic integrity, including the following statement regarding plagiarism, as quoted from the University's "Handbook for Undergraduate Studies":

Plagiarism is a major form of academic dishonesty involving the presentation of the work of another as one's own. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or in part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's. Copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with acknowledgement.

Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment which has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency.

The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement.

Plagiarism, like other forms of academic dishonesty, is always a serious matter. If an instructor finds that a student has plagiarized, the appropriate penalty is at the instructor's discretion. Actions taken by the instructor do not preclude the College or the university taking further punitive action including dismissal from the University.

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