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The Center for Campus Organizing is an organization composed of students, faculty, staff, and alumni working to extend the base for peace and justice organizing in the United States.

The surge in student activism (Inerfeld, Infusion, Fall 1995) is becoming apparent everywhere, not just large or prestigious institutions on the coasts. One indication of the tremendous demand for knowledge about social and environmental justice issues is the fact that our program in Human Relations has the most minors at St. Cloud State University in central Minnesota. As a small nontraditional interdisciplinary program, we address issues of oppression and social justice which make connections between the personal and the global. We offer courses which provide alternatives to conventional wisdom and challenge mainstream paradigms. Non-western, non-dominant (women, communities of color, gay/lesbian/ bisexual/transgender, disabled, indigenous, etc.) perspectives are studied. At the core of this program, we attempt to teach skills in citizenship for participatory democracy.

Since almost all schools (K-12 and higher education institutions) claim they are teaching about democracy and citizenship, I have taken a verbal survey in my classes for the last fifteen years asking students to identify the citizenship skills they have acquired as a result of their education. Almost without exception, each class identifies some combination of the following five "skills": 1) vote 2) salute the flag 3) say the Pledge of Allegiance 4) pay taxes 5) obey the laws. Occasionally, someone will say, write to your legislator, but when asked how many have written, very few actually have. In addition, when asked what democracy means, the usual response is limited to, "of the people, by the people, for the people."

These responses are not a reflection of any individual deficit but rather are an indictment of our educational system. Despite all the mission statements devoted to democracy and citizenship, colleges and universities are not teaching (and rarely have taught) the kinds of knowledge and skills necessary for citizens to act in a participatory democracy. For those who already understand the nature of the U. S. empire and its concomitant ideologies, this lack of citizenship skills comes as no surprise. However, to many people in the U. S., it can be a revelation.

Given the continued (it is not new) globalization of the economy, the decline of nation-states, the increasing concentration of wealth and corresponding intensification of impoverishment, global ecological destruction, massive extinction of species, and increased militarization of the world, people need access to alternative perspectives about these issues and how they are interrelated. Under these circumstances, it is less useful to speak of national citizenship. Instead, we all must be challenged to think of ourselves as global citizens and learn how nonwestern and/or nondominant peoples are challenging the hegemony of elite policies and practices all over the world.

Unfortunately, many people complete their formal education only to realize that they must learn the information and skills needed for democracy and justice on their own. Because this was my

own experience, I wanted to provide an opportunity for others to study and practice these skills. The activities provided for students are the same activities that I continue to learn from myself. Each quarter, I learn with and from the students in my classes.

In a nutshell, the key skills for active global citizenship taught in our program are:

1. **Critical Analysis skills:** A) identifying ideologies and methods of social control B) evaluating the veracity of information and conducting critical and investigative research; and C) locating sources of information which provide alternative perspectives.
2. **Development of a theoretical framework** which includes A) a structural, systemic and global analysis of social and environmental issues; B) understanding international capitalism and the interrelationships between various forms of oppression; C) knowledge of grassroots social movements all over the world and the historical and contemporary circumstances which led to their development.
3. **Citizenship skills:** A) re-evaluating personal values and creating a lifestyle congruent with those values; B) confronting injustices and educating others about them. C) learning organizing skills such as developing educational programs; conducting fund-raising campaigns; lobbying; writing letters, articles and press releases; facilitating communication through various media; and utilizing boycotts, direct action and civil disobedience where appropriate.

For many people "educated" in the United States, these are very controversial issues and skills. Therefore, they must be taught in an environment where honest and respectful disagreement is encouraged while hostility, derision, ridicule and other forms of social control are challenged.

In a Change Agent Skills course, students choose issues and projects on which to work as they develop various citizenship skills. They first investigate their chosen issue by gathering information from mainstream and alternative sources. Locating alternative information is not an easy task at first, since many people rarely encounter alternative press, if at all, and have little knowledge of grassroots and citizen action organizations or how to find them. Next, students apply their critical analysis skills by comparing the information and interpretations of the mainstream press to the alternative perspectives, identifying the underlying values and motivations of each and drawing conclusions about veracity.

Distilling the information they gathered into a cohesive and understandable form is the next challenge. This year students in the Change Agent course used the Center for Campus Organizing (CCO) Action Guides as a model for developing useful flyers. They quickly gained insights into their topics as they selected information and annotated the resources which would best present the key issues to a reader. They experienced excitement but also frustration as they contacted often understaffed activist organizations. Working in groups at this point, students exercised their creative abilities as they negotiated the selection of their specific goals and action plans. The CCO's Campus Organizing Guide provided students with clear and easy guidelines for various action strategies. (Lengthy organizing manuals can overwhelm people with too much detailed information.) Students then used their newly developed action guides for educating, organizing, lobbying, writing letters, planning direct actions, or implementing whatever plan they had developed.

Over the years students have made significant contributions to social justice through their projects. To list just a few, students have: conducted a needs assessment which led to the establishment of a battered women's shelter; exposed illegal questions on the employment applications of major businesses; successfully organized to require courses on women, people of color and non-western perspectives at the university; coordinated the first Gay/Lesbian Awareness Day on campus; challenged the use of Indian mascots; and critiqued Peace Corps recruitment on campus.

Another component of the course is a Personal Action Project in which students examine their own values and try out some changes in their personal lives to make the world a better place. A list of suggestions is provided but they are not limited to it. Examples are: 1) *Watch less or no television. Read and subscribe to alternative press publications. Question everything.* 2) *Challenge the production, sale and utilization of unnecessary or dangerous products;* 3) *Become a vegetarian or eat less meat and study the global consequences of the production and consumption of beef;* 3) *Challenge oppressive behaviors and educate others about racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic, xenophobic, etc. comments, jokes, actions;* 4) *Use fewer resources, consume fewer unnecessary items;* 5) *Boycott businesses or organizations which are destructive to the environment or which perpetuate oppression of any kind;* 6) *Respect the habitats of other species and challenge policies and actions that destroy them;* 7) *Join an activist group, organize your own group, start a consciousness raising group, raise money for social change, etc.* Students are enthusiastic, sometimes passionate, about their chosen personal projects. They understand that personal choices are political actions.

The culture of hopelessness and helplessness which serves the rich and powerful can be challenged by an informed and skillful citizenry. I am pleased to join with CCO and other students and faculty who are learning and teaching skills for social action.

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