



# Independent Study Guide

by Morgan Goodwin



" *We have plenty of men and women who can teach what they know; we have very few who can teach their own capacity to learn.*" - Joseph Hart

This guide is intended to help you conduct an independent study on organizing or related sustainability and social change topics. You can teach yourself to be a better leader and you can contribute greatly to the movement by increasing your understanding of what has come before and what is going on now.

I received one course's worth of credit for working on my campus climate change group this semester and it was an incredibly rewarding experience. Not only did I have more time to focus on organizing work, but I also had the attention and experienced minds of my advisors who helped develop my thinking about student activism. I didn't choose this course because I felt inexperienced on the subject of organizing. Quite the contrary, I wanted to push my level of activism to a much higher level than it already was.

The process for creating an independent study will be different at every school, but it seems most are fairly similar. At Williams, the process could begin as late as the first day of classes, and the forms must be completed at the end of the first week when the drop/add period is over.

For those of you who feel like you care more about activism or classes, seriously consider this. For those of you who are considering taking time off from school to organize full time, this is a must. But remember, this is not a way to get out of school work in order to spend more time on activism (well, not entirely). This is a serious academic pursuit that will help us all become better climate activists. We need to be as wise and informed as we can possibly be, because after all, we're trying to organize a really serious movement.

I'll be happy to answer any questions you might have at [morgan.goodwin@gmail.com](mailto:morgan.goodwin@gmail.com) or 413.884.5240.

Morgan Goodwin

## **Regarding this document:**

This is the proposal I wrote at the beginning of the semester, with an added list of what I actually read and did. This is intended to be a guide and maybe a template, but most of all to give an example of how easy it is to engage in this sort of learning. Feel free to copy as much of it as you feel comfortable doing.

## **On independent studies in general:**

- The learning is up to you – you are the best judge of what is important.
- Follow your nose. Talk to lots of people about what you're trying to learn – suggestions for books and articles come from the most unlikely places and might be better than what you originally had planned.
- Find an advisor or two – someone who respects your enthusiasm and believes in your desire to be a better organizer. Plus, talking to professors about how you're fighting climate change with your mind raises the status of the movement and will hopefully encourage them to become more interested as well.
- Be bold – take risks with your learning
- Don't let academics get in the way of action. My advisor was really great about reminding me to write about what was going on instead of the theory I was reading.



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Independent Study Proposal  
Title: Campus Organizing: Empowering students to save the world  
Advisor: Professor Alex Willingham, Political Science  
Semester: Fall, 2007

College campuses have a long history of leading social change. The students behind this kind of social change have used theories of social organizing, intuition and enthusiasm to help their peers go from concerned citizens to passionate, vocal and active leaders. Organizing is a pursuit that I want to learn more about and I want to improve at.

This class will be my attempt to analyze my practical applications of organizing theory. I chair the campus group that fights global warming and will use this group as my case study. My primary focus is organizational development; how to increase the membership, capacity (skills and teamwork) and commitment among a group of volunteers. My secondary foci are continuing a high-school outreach program to motivate and advise high school environmentalists, and organizing a campus-wide teach-in in February (Focus the Nation). I cannot accomplish these secondary foci without achieving the first, and expertly developing new leaders who share the same ambitious vision.

Last year my friend and I started a new kind of student group. We were frustrated with the inactivity of the campus environmental group, so we formed something called the Thursday Night Group to focus specifically on climate change, clean energy and environmental justice. We saw this group as an opportunity to test the theories we had been working on about how student groups function well or not. As we tried different ideas, some failed and others succeeded, but building off our successes has laid the foundation for us to continue to grow.

I am focusing on some specific questions: what kind of group structure will effectively 1) sustain a growing membership, 2) include new members in decision making processes, 3) develop new leaders and 4) make strategic long term plans? Specifically, what mechanisms, understandings or materials are needed to help a group achieve these goals? As I have identified issues that have come up, such as how to retain new group members, how to recruit among non-traditional environmental

audiences and how to increase member's empowerment, I have found wisdom in Saul Alinsky and other organizing literature. A greater understanding of this literature and the stories of other organizers will clarify and guide my present struggles for positive social change through citizen engagement.

## The Course

The course will consist of two week sections. A tentative outline of sections is as follows:

1. Saul Alinsky and Miles Horton – what principles of organizing are alive today?
  1. *Events: Leadership retreat, Kick-off meeting – are we following the model?*
2. Case studies: Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, Williams anti-war and civil rights movement – what does this tell us about inter-campus organizing?
  1. *Events: Statewide summit – getting students to take on something really big*
3. Environmental Justice: The divides and difficulties in the modern movement.
  1. *Analyze group for diversity in color and class. Are we just?*
4. A deep look at the youth climate movement – what are the goals and strategies today?
  1. *Events: Step it up national day of action and*
  2. *Powershift 2007 Natl conference: are we being strategic as a movement?*
5. Apathy vs. engagement in students – who becomes a leader?
  1. *Berkshire outreach – high school summit? (to be determined)*
6. Organizational structure: what model meets the needs of the movement?
  1. *Evaluate campaigns and organizational development of the semester. What worked and what didn't?*

These sections will have core readings which will be supplemented as sources are found and I find more articles of interest. Each two week block will result in a long (~1200 word) blog post relating my practical organizing to the lessons learned in the reading. The 6<sup>th</sup> and final post will be followed by a more comprehensive manual (10-15 pages) of key lessons learned from this semester. Ideally, this can become a resource for other student leaders to use.

Blog posts are ideal for several reasons. I plan to post on my personal blog as well as the largest blog of the youth climate movement, [itsgettinghotinhere.org](http://itsgettinghotinhere.org) which receives around 4,000 visits a day. First, blogs are public and available for comment, potentially providing feedback from a wider range of people than most student work is subjected to. Second, this work is social and should not be isolated. Third, I believe public blog posts about the issues and innovations in this social movement are necessary to the movement because they make it more accessible, open and tangible.

Professor Willingham will serve as my primary advisor, meeting occasionally to discuss my understanding of the readings, proofread blog posts and give general feedback. Stewart Burns, director of the office of community engagement will act as a second advisor, and potentially collaborate with him on his community organizational goals. Professor Willingham will be edit and grade my final paper and the coursework in general.

**Syllabus: (This is what I actually did. See below for the original proposal.)**

**Section 1:**

1. George Santayana, *The Last Puritan* (NY Scribner's, 1936), pp. 128-129
2. Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*
3. Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle*
4. Kai Erikson, *Everything in its path*
5. Baker, *Developing Community Leadership*, pp 347, quoted in Charles Payne, *I've got the Light of Freedom*.
6. Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*

Group Centered Leaders

<http://itsgettinghotinhere.org/2007/09/27/group-centered-leaders/>

**Section 2:**

7. *Soul of Environmentalism*. Michel Gelobter, et. al. 2006
8. *Death of Environmentalism*. Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus. 2004
9. Tools for Radical Democracy: How to Organize for Power in Your Community (Jossey-Bass / Kim Klein's Chardon Press)

Do you think this is a movement?

<http://itsgettinghotinhere.org/2007/10/26/do-you-think-this-is-a-movement/>

**Section 3:**

10. Power Shift – materials, panels, workshops, discussions

Increasing Engagement on Campus

<http://www.williamsrecord.com/wr/?view=article&section=opinion&id=9370>

**Section 4:**

11. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Albert O. Hirschman

12. *Gaviotas: A Village to Reinvent the World*, Alan Weisman 1998
13. *Paths in Utopia*, Michael Buber 1950

#### Organizational Ingenuity

<http://itsgettinghotinhere.org/2007/11/30/organizational-ingenuity/>

#### **Section 5:**

14. *Break Through: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility*, Michael Shellenberger, Ted Nordhaus

#### MYCA Semester Wrap up

<http://itsgettinghotinhere.org/2007/12/10/mass-youth-climate-action/>

#### **Section 6:**

Overview of Course, produce this document.

Wrote letter to campus group leaders.

#### **Syllabus: (proposed)**

1. *Rules for Radicals*. Saul Alinsky
2. *In Struggle, SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960's*. Carson, Claybourne. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
3. Robert Fisher and Joseph Kling, "Leading the People: Two Approaches to the Role of Ideology in Community Organizing," *Radical America* 21 (1987): 31-45.
4. Ira Shor and Paulo Freire, *A Pedagogy for Liberation : Dialogues on Transforming Education*, South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1987. See chapter 7
5. Carol Mueller, "Ella Baker and the Origins of 'Participatory Democracy,'" in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, edited by Vickie L Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse and Barbara Woods, New York: Carlson, 1990,
6. Mike Miller, "Organizing and Education," *Social Policy*, Fall (1993): 51-63.
7. Michael Jacoby Brown, *Building Powerful Community Organizations: A Personal Guide to Creating Groups That Can Solve Problems and Change the World*, Arlington: Long Haul Press, 2006.
8. *Soul of Environmentalism*. Michel Gelobter, et. al. 2006
9. *Death of Environmentalism*. Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus. 2004
10. *The Trap*. Astra Taylor <http://www.salon.com/books/review/2007/07/10/trap/index.html>
11. *Ignition*. John Isham and Wade Sissel
12. *The Great Turning*. David Korten
13. *The Web of Life*. Fritjof Capra
14. Vote.com
15. Moyer, "Doing Democracy," Intro., charts, ch. 10
16. Materials from seminars, workshops, friend's recommendations, etc.