This is the first practical social change text devoted to students working in an academic environment. While there are many books about community organizing and social change, there are no college texts focusing on how to provide real-world experience with academic content taking into consideration the flow of the academic term. CHANGE! A Student Guide to Social Action is written specifically for faculty and staff to use with college students with the goal of helping students bring about the change they believe is necessary to make our community a better place to live.

Dr. Scott Myers-Lipton is Professor of Sociology at San Jose State University, and is the author of Ending Extreme Inequality: An Economic Bill of Rights Approach to Eliminate Poverty (Paradigm 2015), Rebuild America: Solving the Economic Crisis through Civic Works (Paradigm 2009), and Social Solutions to Poverty: America’s Struggle to Build a Just Society (Paradigm 2006), as well as numerous scholarly articles on racism, education, and civic engagement.

He co-founded the successful efforts to raise the minimum wage from $8 to $10 in San Jose and to modernize San Jose’s business tax. He also co-founded the Gulf Coast Civic Works Campaign, an initiative to develop 100,000 prevailing-wage jobs for local and displaced workers after Hurricane Katrina. He has worked to help students develop solutions to poverty by taking them to live at homeless shelters, the Navajo and Lakota nations, the U.S. Gulf Coast, and Kingston, Jamaica. He is also on the Board of Directors for the National Jobs for All Coalition.

Scott Myers-Lipton is the recipient of the San Jose/Silicon Valley NAACP Social Justice Award, the Elbert Reed Award from the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Association of Santa Clara County, the Changer Maker Award from the Silicon Valley Council of Non-Profits, and the Manuel Vega Latino Empowerment Award. He lives with his wife, Diane, and his two children, Josiah and Ella, in San Jose. In addition, Scott and Diane are the proprietors of the Sequoia Retreat Center, a meeting space dedicated to individual and social transformation.
The book is very effective in part because the book is structured to align with the academic semester. Just three weeks into the semester, I can see that my students have already carried out as many actions as they accomplished all semester long last year without the book. The narrative is compelling, the examples from prior college student campaign successes are inspiring, and the focus on policy change is pushing my students to make clearer and more focused demands.

Miriam Shakow, Associate Professor of Anthropology, The College of New Jersey

For the past decade, the Bonner Foundation has been exploring how to develop a social action track within our network of 65 plus colleges. With the book, CHANGE! A Student Guide to Social Action, we now have the vehicle to help the Bonner network take this next step. Faculty on all college campuses should consider adopting CHANGE! so as to provide an effective and powerful social action experience for their students, and skilled civic leaders for their communities.

Robert Hackett, President, Bonner Foundation

CHANGE! comes at a moment in U.S. history which demands the creation of ever more powerful social and economic justice change agents, a job that higher education has done poorly. It’s part roadmap, part compass, part toolkit. But above all, it’s a practical guide for faculty who want to foster a new generation of able and smart activists.

Kent Glenzer, Ph.D., Dean, Graduate School of International Studies and Management, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey
This book is dedicated to all the college students who want to bring about a more democratic, equitable, and just world.

Taylor & Francis
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In 2007, *Students Against Sweatshops* got the San Jose 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 re-instate the SJSU Education Opportunity Program (EOP), which now serves over 2,000 first-generation, low-income students.

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, and (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 lead the San Jose Measure D campaign, which won 60% to 40% in the November election and 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 she made a racist comment about Latinas.
• In 2015, Students for DMH won their demand for air conditioning in Dudley Moorehead Hall.
• In 2015, College Awareness 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, Spartans 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-sized 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.
... community organizing provides a way to merge various strategies for neighborhood empowerment. Organizing begins with the premise that (1) the problems facing inner-city communities do not result from a lack of effective solutions, but from a lack of power to implement these solutions; (2) that the only way for communities to build long-term power is by organizing people and money around a common vision; and (3) that a viable organization can only be achieved if a broadly based indigenous leadership—and not one or two charismatic leaders—can knit together the diverse interests of their local institutions.¹

Barack Obama, 1988

This book is a guide for college students to learn about the social change ideas of community organizers, like Barack Obama, and to utilize them within the confines of a college academic term. This book is different than most books designed for college students. This book not only has the student analyze a problem and develop a solution, but it also implement it. Instead of just reading about social change, students learn about it by actually doing it. Of course, students will still use “book knowledge,” but the idea is that this knowledge will be challenged by what is learned from social action, by developing a more critical and deeper understanding of public issues and community change by integrating praxis with theory, while at the same time
changing social structure. Thus, this book provides an action-oriented, solutions-based experience of social change.

In this book, each chapter focuses on a different part of the process of social action, with the student learning how to turn a social problem into a social solution, and developing and implementing a campaign to achieve that solution. Importantly, the book allows students to get started on social action projects early in the semester, and then provides with the necessary tools, skills, and knowledge to run an effective campaign. In the past decade, students in my Social Action class at San Jose State University (SJSU) have used this format to run 30-plus campus, city, state, and national campaigns, and they have won 10 of them.

More specifically, the skills in this book include:

- issue development
- leadership
- recruitment
- target analysis and power mapping
- strategy and tactics
- event planning
- media outreach
- facilitation
- decision making
- fundraising
- negotiation
- evaluation

My own journey into the world of social action began in the early 1980s. I was playing professional tennis and I had achieved some success, but the life of a professional athlete was ill suited for me. It required traveling 35 weeks out of the year, which might seem fun, but is actually quite exhausting. However,
professional tennis did give me the opportunity to travel around the world. It was wonderful to meet people from so many different cultures; at the same time, I saw a lot of social suffering. This led me to the decision to retire from professional tennis and to figure out what I could do to make the world a bit better place to live in.

In college, I was a political science major, so I decided to start by working for a member of congress in Northern California. I volunteered and then worked in Congressman Tom Lantos’ office, and it was there that I met Edna Mitchell, the Dean of Education at Mills College, who was also the congressman’s chief of staff. She suggested that I use my desire to “make a difference” and become a teacher. I told her I had never thought about being a teacher, but it sounded interesting. After checking out the program at Mills—an all-women’s college but with graduate programs open to men—I decided to give teaching a shot. This lead to becoming a high school history teacher for several years, and it was in a high school classroom that my life would be changed forever.

My first job was to teach world and U.S. history at Gunn High School in Palo Alto. In one of my world history classes, I was teaching about World War II, and a freshman student asked me a question about the Holocaust. I answered her by discussing the concentration camps, the number of Jews that were killed, and the methods in which they were murdered. She interrupted me and said, “no, you don’t understand my question. What I am asking is HOW could it happen?” It was then that I understood she was asking a much deeper question. She was asking how was it possible for humans to treat each other in such a barbaric and inhumane fashion. This student’s question led me to search for an answer, and it changed the direction of my life.

Soon after, I left high school teaching to pursue a master’s degree in the Humanities at San Francisco State, focusing on
the philosophy of Mohandas Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther
King, Jr., I also began working at the Beyond War Foundation
as a fellow, focusing on developing non-violent methods of
resolving regional wars and nuclear war. During this fellowship,
John Anderson, a former IBM executive and Beyond War staff
member, suggested I pursue a doctorate. After reflecting on my
original question about how to make a difference, I decided to
do a Ph.D., focusing on how to bring about social change and
to create a more just and egalitarian society.

In 1989, I arrived in Boulder, Colorado, to start a doctorate
program in Sociology at the University of Colorado, as well as to
become the Assistant Director of the International and National
Voluntary Service Training (INVST) program, a project that I
developed along with Cindy Mahrer as part of the Beyond War
fellowship. After one year of working on the program design
with Dr. James Scarritt and Gaia Mika, the INVST program
accepted its first class with the goal of developing “scholar activ-
ists,” who were trained to analyze and solve community and
global problems through a two-year academic curriculum that
included fall and spring service-learning projects and a domestic
and international service experience.

Service-learning, which is the integration of course concepts
and community action, was becoming popular at this time, as
academia was looking for ways to develop civicly engaged stu-
dents who could apply their critical thinking skills, and to make
their curriculum more relevant. In the 1990s, research confirmed
what practitioners had assumed: service-learning was effective
at making students more civicly engaged, globally concerned,
less racially prejudiced, and better critical thinkers.

I continued this work in the mid 1990s, starting two more
INVST programs at Saint Mary’s College of California in 1996
and San José State in 1999. However, by 2005, many of the
social problems that service-learning faculty were addressing
had worsened. In addition, I was under pressure to raise $50,000 each year to operate the SJSU INVST program. These two factors led me away from a leadership model, which focused on developing civicly engaged leaders, and toward a “policy service-learning” model, which still focused on leadership, but now emphasized changing social structure.

What came out of this thinking was a semester course on “Social Action”, where students develop campaigns to try to change a social policy. Now, after a decade of teaching this class on social action, I have taken the best ideas from the history of community organizing and combined them with what I have learned teaching my social action class. Using this collective knowledge, my students have won ten campaigns and have had their lives transformed. My hope is that this knowledge has the same positive results for you.

Lastly, I would like to thank my wife, Diane, and my two children, Josiah and Ella, for always inspiring and encouraging me. I would also like to thank Bobby Hackett, President of the Bonner Foundation, for his encouragement throughout the writing of this book.

Note
This book is a guide for college students, but I also wrote it for you—the faculty or staff member—to have as a resource to teach college students how to do social action effectively within the confines of a college academic term. This book combines the best ideas from the history of community organizing with what I have learned from teaching my Social Action class over the past decade. Using this collective knowledge, my students have won eleven campaigns, so I know that what is in this book works. As the old saying goes, “the proof is in the pudding”. I strongly believe that if you use this book, your students will also have victories, as well as transformative experiences.

What is unique about this community organizing book is that it is designed specifically for students in higher education. Importantly, it gets students into their campaigns quickly. That is why the book starts off in Chapter 1 with the selection of their campaign issue. As you know, an academic term does not provide much time (i.e., two to four months depending), so it is key that the students start their social action project as soon as possible. When I first started teaching social action, my students presented their own ideas to one another. However, as the Social Action class has become more well known, other student groups,
faculty, and community organizations have asked to come in and talk to my Social Action students about joining their campaign. This might happen to you as well. Generally, there are three to five projects going on during the academic term; however, there have been a few terms when the whole class has worked on one campaign.

To ensure that your students get their campaigns up and running quickly, I recommend that the first four chapters be taught in the first three weeks of the academic term. Thus, by the end of the three weeks, you will have had your students select their issue, set their expectations, explore the key theories surrounding social action, and begin building power. As for the rest of the academic term, each chapter can take one or two weeks to complete. Upon completing Chapter 9, the students will have several more weeks of the academic term, so you may want to include another book. I have my students read Ending Extreme Inequality, a book that I wrote in 2012, since it introduces them to a variety of social action campaigns from a variety of perspectives. A few weeks before the end of the academic term, you will want to discuss Chapter 10 on evaluation and Chapter 11 on the hero’s and shero’s journey, which serves as the conclusion of the book.

This book also works well for students since it does not overwhelm them with too many things to do at once, which can often happen in a fast-moving campaign. The book asks students to perform an action and then gives them time to reflect. Many times, an “action” chapter (e.g., “Campaign Kickoff”, Chapter 7) is followed by a “reflection” chapter (e.g., “Group Dynamics”, Chapter 8). Thus, the book paces the action steps and offsets them with reflection, research, and critical thinking. In addition, an assignment accompanies each chapter. If you are having the students write up and turn in the assignments which
is what I do—I suggest that students in each group talk about their responses to the exercises collectively, but that they write up their answers individually. This creates a good balance between group and individual work. In addition, I encourage my students to integrate the text into their assignments to demonstrate they have done the reading. Lastly, I recommend that you discuss previous social action events that have occurred at your college. For example, I tour the campus with my students to discuss the various types of social activism that have taken place on campus. As the years have passed, I have also invited former Social Action students back to campus to discuss their campaigns. This connection between former and current students provides inspiration to the latter and helps create a pipeline to careers in social action, as many of my former students continue to work for the betterment of the community in the non-profit and government sectors, and in the business world. Importantly, this course is designed to be taught every academic term, since some campaigns take three or four terms to complete. Oftentimes, the next semester’s Social Action students will pick up where the previous students have left off and continue the campaign, which allows for completing campaigns that take longer than one academic term. However, whether a campaign continues or not is completely left up to the students.

Another unique aspect of the book is that it requires a different pedagogy than “teacher talk”, with the professor up front and students in rows, silently taking notes. A curricular or co-curricular class on social action demands that the students are actively engaged. Thus, while I do give short lectures each time the class meets, the students also spend a good deal of time in small groups working on their group projects while I come around and help them through the challenges they are facing. In addition, when we discuss the text, I often have a few of my students facilitate the discussion so as to encourage an active role
in the classroom. Additionally, I have my former students who have led campaigns come and talk to the students about the lessons they have learned. All of these experiences de-center me from the traditional role of teacher and ask my students to take center stage, moving them away from being receptors of knowledge to being active creators. It also begins the process of getting my students to believe that social change is possible, which many of them are fairly skeptical of. This idea of having student voices and actions at the center of the class should occur throughout the experience, which helps overcome their “schooling”, which has taught them that their voice is secondary to the teacher’s. My one caution is to expect a bit of chaos as the students come to terms with their power. My suggestion is to be as clear as possible about your role as “guide on the side” and to be transparent and honest with the students about your expectations. Thus, I tell my students that while they are much more in control of the class than in other college courses, I also remind them that our power is shared in that I still set the curriculum, give short lectures, provide guidance for their groups, and evaluate their work. With regards to evaluating their work, I do not give students a higher grade if they win their campaign. Rather, I evaluate their work based on the written and oral assignments.

It has been my experience that teaching social action causes concern among administrators and the larger community. When concerns have been raised, I have explained to the administration and to the press that I am teaching about democracy and exploring how power works. I assure them that what projects the students choose to work on is based on their interests and value system and that I am not coercing them into a particular project. I also remind them that the students have choice. The projects that the 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). I also tell them that there
are many examples of college students working in the public realm, including business classes having students help solve problems for local companies, or engineering courses that design power grids or create software protection programs for real customers. Similarly, social action experiences provide hands-on, project-based learning opportunities that focus on democracy, power, and various forms of inequality. One other thing I tell administrators is that having students trained in social action makes the campus environment a better, more productive space to be, because without the training, it is more likely that students will be responding to the concerns they have without a full, developed plan, which can have negative consequences for the campus environment.¹

Last of all, I will be creating an on-line discussion group for faculty and staff who are interested in sharing best practices of social action. If you are interested, please contact me at smlipton@gmail.com and I will connect you to this on-line discussion group.

Note

One of the highlights of the campaign is to choose what issue you are going to work on. This chapter is designed to help you choose a social action project you will work on with others in a group. Right now, you may have some general idea of what social problem you want to improve or correct. The process of choosing an issue is called issue development. Developing an issue means that you identify a solution to a social problem that you and others in your group feel strongly about and whose demand is specific, simple, and winnable, with the result of the campaign being a positive, concrete change for the community.

As you are aware, the academic term is short, generally between ten to 16 weeks, so the sooner you choose an issue, the quicker you can begin to work on the campaign. To start the issue development process, it is first necessary to understand the difference between personal and social problems, and issues.

**Personal and Social Problems**

Most of us think in terms of *personal problems*. For example, imagine you get sick but you decide not to go to the doctor because you don't have health insurance. When the problem gets solved by either you getting better or perhaps by going to a free
clinic, you might chalk up your experience to the fact that you are a student with a part-time job, and you didn’t have enough money to buy health insurance. You come to the conclusion it is a personal problem, something that affects only you. If your personal problem gets solved, you may not think about it again until the next time you become sick.

There is another way to think about this same story, and that is to see it as a social problem. Imagine that when you become sick, you begin to talk to your roommates and classmates about your problem, and they share with you the fact that they cannot afford health care either. Slowly, you begin to see that what you are facing is not just a personal problem affecting you, but rather a problem affecting many. And while you don’t actually do anything to change society, you are now aware that what has happened to you is also happening to many others, and you now define it as a “social problem”. This social problem—i.e., the inability to access health care due to cost—along with a host of other social problems, are a standard feature of most undergraduate Social Problem courses in sociology, which focus on understanding the causes underlying them.\(^1\)

**Issue**

Importantly, there is a third way to look at this same situation, and that is to see it as an issue. Using the framework of an issue, you would come to the same conclusion as above, but you would take the additional step of actively solving the social problem. Thus, after talking with your roommates and classmates about how they too have been unable to go to see a doctor because of a lack of health care, you decide to pull a group of students together and to demand that the university president provides financial support to cover the cost for students who cannot afford health insurance. Surprisingly, few sociology or other
disciplines have courses that focus on issues. This book is written to correct this shortcoming.

As Frederick Douglass, the renowned abolitionist, once stated, “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.” Thus, in order to create change, it is critical that a demand is made to the people in power, and this is what an issue allows for. Importantly, I am not using the word “issue” as it is normally understood as a topic of debate, but rather how it is used in the world of social action. For community organizers, an issue is a solution to the problem, which is composed of a specific demand (i.e., a concrete, measurable request) that requires a yes or no answer. The demand should be simple, stated in a single sentence, with there being a right and wrong side. A campaign has anywhere between one and three demands. A general rule in social action is to have no more than three demands, otherwise the campaign loses focus. Importantly, an issue delivers concrete, positive change in people’s lives, and it should be winnable in a reasonable amount of time. In addition, you should feel strongly about an issue, as this will encourage you to put time and energy to do something about it, and make you willing to fight for it.

Importantly, an issue requires a clear target, which is the lowest ranking person who can meet your demand. If the target is the city council, or a state agency, these bodies are still composed of people, and your group should identify the members that are critical for your group to convince in order to win. For example, if the city council has seven members, you will need to identify who are the four members that are the most likely to be persuaded, and target these folks. A mistake that can happen is that a group makes the demand to the wrong person. The person either doesn’t have the authority to agree to the demand because it is not her or his purview, or the demand has been made too high up the chain of authority, and there is another person at a
lower level that can make the decision. Of course, if the target who has the ability to make the decision denies your request, you can always go to the next level up (e.g., from the provost to the president, or from the president of the university to the chancellor of the system), but it is important to go through the correct chain of command and start with the person that has the authority to meet your demand.  

Many times, my students have chosen an issue because it directly affects them. For example, several of the leaders of the minimum-wage campaign were minimum-wage workers or recently had been minimum-wage workers. Similarly, the students working on air conditioning in Dudley Moorehead Hall were all students who had a class in the building. If the issue directly affects you, it means that you have a direct stake in the outcome, which generally leads to more commitment and energy for the social action project. A direct connection to the issue also allows you to be seen more easily as a stakeholder by your allies and opponents. However, it is possible to work on an issue that doesn’t directly affect you. For example, my students worked with local food vendors to change a city ordinance to make it easier for the vendors to sell fresh fruit and vegetables on the sidewalk. The students were not food vendors and several of them did not live in the poorer sections of town where there were no supermarkets, but they felt passionately about the need to provide healthy food in these “food deserts”.

**Issue Identification**

Normally, it takes several months to identify an issue to work on. This involves going out into the community to talk to people and asking them questions about what problems they are facing and what problems they think are most important. As part of this gathering of information, surveys and questionnaires are completed, and individual and small group meetings are held. After
identifying what the community thinks are the major challenges it is facing, you dive deeper and ask folks such things as, “What do you mean by a ‘good education’?” or “What does ‘affordable health care’ look like to you?” After you have uncovered what people mean when they say “good” or “affordable”, you explore various solutions and test out potential demands with the community. This above process is called issue identification, and it ensures that you choose an issue that matters to the community and that it is winnable.5

Unfortunately, you do not have one to two months to determine an issue since the academic term is not much longer than this. If you did a normal issue identification process, the term would be over before you had the chance to actually do anything. Thus, to make the issue identification process conform to an academic term, it needs to be shortened to one to two weeks. To shorten the process, you will need to come to the next class (or meeting) with an idea for a policy change. For the purposes of this book, policy is defined as a rule, law, regulation, norm, or practice of an institution. The policy change can be on campus, or in your city, county, state, or nation. Please note that as you move to larger arenas (from campus to city to state to nation), you will need more people, power, and energy to win.

Importantly, you should put forward policy change projects that you are passionate about and are interested in. This is key since you will be working on this issue for the entire semester, so you need to be passionate about it. For a social action group to become activated, a minimum of three students must choose a policy change, since there needs to be enough people to do the group work. Three people also allows for you to learn how to work in groups, which is a democratic skill.

In preparing to decide on what issue you will be working on, please be aware that you will need to participate, which means you need to play an active role in the group discussion and be
willing to share your ideas, which may involve taking risks. This may be difficult or scary, since you may be a quiet person or have not had a lot of opportunities to talk in college courses. However, social action requires that all group members participate and contribute, and while folks might take different roles in the group, everyone is expected to contribute their ideas to help the group move forward. Also, you must make a commitment to actively listen, which means that when others are talking, you are listening with your ears, but also listening by looking at facial expressions, tone of voice, and hand movements so that you really hear what the person is saying. Importantly, you will want to respond to comments in a respectful manner. Active listening will also be discussed in Chapter 8, which focuses on group dynamics.

Once you have chosen your issue as part of the below assignment, your group will want to frame the issue in the most effective way possible. A good frame for your issue expresses the values of your group, as well as connects to the shared values of your future allies and to the larger public. For example, conservative organizations have used the frame of “family values” or “pro-life” when arguing for various restrictions to abortion, while liberal organizations have used the frame of “fairness” and “self-sufficiency” to increase the minimum wage. The frame that your group selects will be used on posters and in press releases, and it will be repeated over and over by your group members, and it will shape your organizational rap (discussed in Chapter 4) and campaign message (discussed in Chapter 7).6

Case Studies
Over the past decade, my students in Social Action have used this issue development process to win eleven campaigns. All of their policy changes started with the same process described above, so this should give you some confidence that what you
are about to go through will work and be meaningful. Of course, my students have lost some of the campaigns they have created, but whether they have won or lost, they have all gone through this same process. Let’s discuss five of these campaigns, with a focus on how their issues were developed and framed.

In the fall of 2011, Natasha Bradley, an SJSU student, began to become nervous about her safety. That academic year, there had been a murder in one of the campus garages, and the students on campus were not informed by the campus police for several hours about what had taken place. At the same time, there had been two sexual assault cases reported near the campus. Natasha had originally joined a social action group focusing on increasing the African American graduation rate, but she was so passionate about this social problem that she convinced her group of six students to switch their focus to campus safety. They named their group *Students for Campus Safety*.

*Students for Campus Safety* decided on the following policy changes: (1) the University Police Department (UPD), which oversaw the evening escort program, should increase its service from one to six blocks surrounding the campus; (2) the university should change their Alert SJSU system to automatically send alerts to all campus members, even if they have not signed up; and (3) the UPD should increase the number of campus blue light call boxes, which provide remote locations with access to the police. In addition, *Students for Campus Safety* chose their target, the UPD police chief, and they focused all their actions on him. Notice that the first two demands were very specific, while the third policy change could have been more specific if the group had stated how many blue lights they wanted to increase. Specificity is important so the target knows what he is saying yes or no to. Furthermore, specificity (i.e., in this case, a quantitative number) allows the group to estimate the cost of
the proposed policy changes. Within the year, *Students for Campus Safety* would go on to win all three of their demands.

Reflecting back on the campaign, Natasha, one of the key student leaders, stated:

Originally our group wanted to address the graduation rate of Latino and African-American males at San José State but once safety on the campus became an issue, we immediately changed it. At the time of the project, I was already in my last year of school so I had already been familiar enough with the campus and the surrounding city that walking around alone was never an issue. But for the first time, walking to the bus stop scared me because I thought that something was going to happen to me. So when the opportunity arose to make myself and other students feel safer, I jumped at the opportunity. During the fall semester in 2011, there were a combination of sexual assaults and robberies that took place within a short period of time both on and off campus, leaving many students, like myself, feeling unsafe even walking around campus at night. Our group wanted to implement three ways to create a safer campus for students, staff, and faculty. What I learned about from the campaign is that social change is actually possible. When people care enough about an issue and there’s enough people from different sectors, then a lot can be accomplished and can be accomplished quickly.

Notice Natasha’s passion about the issue, her personal connection to the issue—which helped to maintain her motivation—the group’s use of three demands, and how this social action project convinced her that social change is possible.

In the fall of 2013, Professor Maria Luisa Alaniz, a faculty member from the Department of Sociology and Interdisciplinary
Social Sciences, came into the Social Action course on the second day of class, when the students were beginning the process of choosing their issue, to ask for help on a campaign she was involved with. After five years of doing this course, this was quite a common practice, as faculty and community members were aware that Social Action students would choose their projects early in the semester, and since the students had been successful previously, they began asking if they could come into class to present their policy change and to ask the students to join them. Dr. Alaniz informed the students that a member of the SJSU Tower Foundation, the university’s fundraising unit, had made a blatantly racist comment, stating “I contribute to this University because these little Latinas do not have the DNA to be successful.” She noted that a university vice president, and member of the President’s Cabinet, was present at the meeting and remained silent. This was particularly shocking since San Jose State had a “See Something, Hear Something, Say Something” campaign against racism in response to a recent hate crime on campus.

Dr. Alaniz informed the students that a Latina staff member, who was also present at the meeting, had made an informal complaint, but no action was taken. She encouraged the staff member to make a formal complaint, which she did. However, Dr. Alaniz was worried that no action would be taken unless more pressure was brought to bear upon the campus administration, particularly the president. Thus, she asked the students to become involved to help remove the member of the SJSU Tower Foundation who made the racist comment. Out of a class of 35, 14 students (13 Latinos and one African American) decided to join this campaign.

The 14 students felt strongly about this issue, were willing to put in time and energy to do something about it, and were willing to fight for it. In response, the students created Students
Students for Racial Equality, and they developed three demands: (1) the removal of the Tower Foundation board member, (2) a letter of apology from the university to the Latina staff member who was present at the meeting and made the formal complaint, and (3) mandatory anti-racism trainings for administration, faculty, staff, and students. Students for Racial Equality targeted the university president, and all actions were focused on him. Within three days of the group’s kickoff event, the president was pushed to act, with the president announcing that the board member was stepping down. At this time, the president also announced the resignation of the vice president who was present at the meeting but did not challenge the racist comment. Within the year, the second demand was met, as the president apologized in a letter to the Latina staff member who had filed the informal and formal complaint.

Once again, the issue directly affected the students since they had personally felt the negative impacts of racism. In addition, as members of the campus community, students had a direct stake in making the campus community an open and welcoming space for all students. This direct connection with the issue can be seen in the words of Estelia Velasquez, one of the main student leaders for Students for Racial Equality, when she stated:

What motivated me to become involved with Students for Racial Equality was the issue that we were presented with. When Dr. Alaniz came and spoke to the class about the racist comment that was made during a Tower Foundation board meeting, I was appalled that someone who donates to the University believes that Latinas do not have the DNA to be successful. And the fact that the University was taking so long in addressing the issue made me angry and made me think that making racist remarks towards Latino/a’s was acceptable when it is not. This motivated me
because as a Latina. I do have the DNA to be successful and I wanted to show the University that we do matter and that they need to work differently in how they work out these issues.

Again, Estelia was incredibly passionate about the issue because it directly affected her. While it is not necessary to have a direct connection with the issue, it does help with motivation and allows for you to speak to the issue personally.

A third case study is from 2010, when a group of students created the Campus Alliance for Economic Justice (CAFÉ J) and developed a policy change to raise the minimum wage in San Jose from $8 to $10. Marisela Castro—the daughter of farmworkers—came up with the idea for raising San Jose’s minimum wage. At the time, Marisela was working at an afterschool program, and it was there that she saw kids taking snacks and putting them into their backpacks. When Marisela talked to the kids about why they were taking food, the students disclosed that they did this because they didn’t have enough food at home, and their brothers and sisters were hungry. Marisela asked them if their father and mother were working, and the kids told her that both of them were working, and their dad was working two jobs, but they were at minimum wage, so there wasn’t enough money to buy food sometimes. Marisela was outraged. After telling me this story in my Wealth, Poverty and Privilege course, she looked at me and said, “Profe, we have to do something. This can’t continue for another generation!” In the course, the students had read about raising the minimum wage at the local level, and after class, she came up to me to discuss the possibility of doing this in San Jose. I told her that there was no action component in the Wealth, Poverty and Privilege course, but there was an action component in Social Action, and that she should considering taking it the following semester, which she did.
At the beginning of the next semester, Marisela presented her idea of raising the minimum wage, and three students from the class joined her. After several meetings, these four students decided to put forward a city ballot measure to be voted on by the people to raise the minimum wage from $8 to $10. Their main target was the voting population in San Jose, with a secondary target being the city council, since they had the power to put the measure on the ballot without having to collect the almost 20,000 signatures, which was what eventually happened.

Hundreds of meetings later, and with students from three consecutive Social Action classes working on this issue, and with the help of their allies in the labor, faith, and non-profit communities, San Jose voted 60% to 40% in November of 2012 to enact one of the largest one-time minimum-wage increases in the history of the nation.

Once again, the issue directly affected the students. Eighty percent of the students at San Jose State work, and about one-quarter of them make minimum wage, with many more making just above minimum wage. In addition, the students became a major stakeholder and worked closely with the other stakeholders (i.e., unions, non-profit organizations, and the faith community) to win this campaign. One of the key organizers of the campaign, Elisha St. Laurent, was a single mom who had been a minimum-wage worker. Yet, soon after she began to work on this issue, she became aware of how hard it is to bring about social change and to win a campaign. She began to lose interest in the campaign and began thinking it was only important because it was a class project. However, Elisha was then asked to speak at an event about her experience being a single mom and living on a minimum-wage job. This changed everything. After this event, she began to feel more connected to the issue and more motivated to work on the campaign. Elisha went on to become one of the key leaders of the minimum-wage victory,
which goes to show that if a group provides its members with meaningful action, it leads to individual transformation. At the same time, if the group does not provide its members with meaningful action, students lose interest, and the group becomes less effective.

A fourth case study is from the fall of 2006, when, on a cold November evening, a group of 40 SJSU students slept out on campus to show solidarity with the poor and homeless. A report had been released showing that Silicon Valley was now the “homeless capital” of Northern California, with 7,600 people without housing on any given night. The students responded to this report by calling for a campus sleep out they entitled “Poverty Under the Stars” to demonstrate their solidarity with the poor, an event that they have continued each November up to the present day.

As part of the sleep out, the students watched *When the Levees Broke* by Spike Lee, a movie that had just been released showing how over 1,830 died, 250,000 houses were destroyed, and 500,000 people were displaced because of Hurricane Katrina. The students were deeply moved by the social suffering they saw and were outraged to learn that the public infrastructure had not been properly maintained, that the immediate response from the government had been shamefully slow, and that the rebuilding had taken too long.

After the students woke up, we got breakfast and went to class. That morning, I happened to be teaching about how unemployment was reduced from 23% to 10% as part of the New Deal programs. I went on to discuss how President Roosevelt created the Civil Works Administration in 1933 with an Executive Order and that, within two months, 4.2 million Americans were hired to do public works (e.g., school repair, sanitation work, and road building). The students and I saw the connection between FDR’s public works program and what we
had seen the previous night, and we began to formulate a solution: hire Gulf Coast residents at living wages and rebuild their public infrastructure. We named the project the *Gulf Coast Civic Works Project* (GCCWP).

The next step was to reach out to Gulf Coast organizations to understand if this was something that they might support. The students and I wrote many non-profit organizations involved in the rebuilding, and we received a very enthusiastic response. Then, 100 students from around the country traveled to Louisiana and Mississippi to talk first-hand with the communities most impacted by the damage, and after conducting hundreds of interviews with Gulf Coast residents, the students outlined four demands, which were included in the federal legislation that became known as House Resolution 4048: The Gulf Coast Civic Works Act. The demands, which were based on what they had heard from the community, were: (1) create 100,000 public works jobs at prevailing-wage jobs (2) if workers do not have these skills, paid apprenticeships should be provided; (3) the local communities affected by Hurricane Katrina should decide which structures would be given priority to rebuild; and (4) the process to obtain a civic works job should be simple, with a streamlined process conducted at county employment service offices or through faith-based and community initiatives connected to the White House.

Interestingly, many of the Social Action students didn’t have a direct connection to the Gulf Coast, but they did understand right from wrong. Eric A., one of the GCCWP members, reflected on why he was motivated to become involved in this social action project, stating:

I was drawn by the horrific reality for such a great amount of people in our community, and the strategic hope for a better future. As time went on, I became totally focused
on the need for action. After learning about what was happening in the Gulf Coast, there was just no way I could do nothing and pretend everything was okay. Someone had to do something—why not me, us? As my first major involvement in community organizing, I learned an immense amount about what it took to work together in realizing real social change.

Thus, Eric and many other students became involved in an issue that was far away from their home because they felt an obligation to right a wrong. Also, note that like many college students in a social action class, this was Eric’s first experience doing social change.

Lastly, in the spring of 2015, a representative from Sacred Heart Community Services, the largest anti-poverty organization in Silicon Valley, came into my Social Action class on the second day of instruction and presented to the class the opportunity to help them organize food vendors who were selling uncut fruits and vegetables. The local food vendors had banded together to demand a change in a city ordinance to allow for: (1) an increase in the number of hours from two to eight that a mobile cart vendor can vend on private property, with the permission of the landlord; (2) a decrease in the buffer from 100 feet to 50 feet between a “Fresh Cart” vendor and residential property; and (3) permission to vend on government sites including post offices and California DMVs. Four students agreed to join the effort to support the “Fresh Cart” vendors, with the students naming their group STRONG or Society for Teaching Responsible Options in Nutrition and Growth. Students from three successive Social Action classes worked on this issue with the food vendors, and all three demands were won.

As with the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project, the STRONG students were not directly affected by this issue. They were not
food vendors, nor did they live in the areas where there were food deserts. However, they were motivated by a sense of justice and were excited about supporting the food vendors in the efforts to change city policy. In this campaign, the students played a supportive role. Sacred Heart provided an organizer for the campaign, and the students went to many meetings with the food vendors. At the food vendor meetings, the students listened carefully and provided insights into strategy and tactics when appropriate, helped with the publicity for a public event, helped organize a letter-writing campaign to city council members, and mobilized students and community members to attend the city council meeting when the issue came before it. Interestingly, the students obtained a meeting with a city council member who was not interested in meeting with the food vendors, but when the students asked him for the meeting, he readily agreed. The Sacred Heart organizer commented that the meeting would not have happened without the students’ involvement. The students were glad that they could get this meeting with the city council member, but they were also aware that it was due to their privilege as students. Ultimately, the students were okay with it, since they saw themselves working with the food vendors and were not doing things for them.

**Assignment**

After learning about issue development, spend some time reflecting on a policy you would like to work on. At the next class or meeting, you will have three to five minutes to present your policy change idea. The policy change should have one to three specific demands or asks. In addition, students from the previous semester’s Social Action campaigns, other student groups, faculty and staff, and community groups may be invited to this meeting to present their policy change ideas. If an idea is presented as a problem
(e.g., there are too many homeless people in our community), or as a slogan (e.g., we need more living-wage jobs), brainstorm together to make it an issue (i.e., a solution with a specific demand and a target, etc.).

Following the presentations, you should break into the group that you would like to join to discuss further the policy change, as well as to do introductions, provide contact information to each other, and discuss why this issue is of interest. Remember, you need a total of three students to make a group. Please know that these are not the final groups, and you may want to move to another group in the next few weeks, or even in the middle of the semester if for some reason your group is not working out. If you did not find two other students to join in a group, and there are other students in the same situation, work with the professor or staff member over the next week and work to find an issue you can agree upon. If there are not two other students in the same situation, you will need to join one of the other groups.

After you have broken into groups, please respond to the following questions, as they will help create an issue that has a specific demand that can be directed at a target. Remember, good issues are specific, simple, winnable, and deliver concrete, positive change.

1.1 What is the social problem that your group will work on?
1.2 What is the policy your group wants to change? Please provide one to three demands.
1.3 Who is the target?
1.4 Do you feel strongly about your issue? Are you willing to fight for it?
1.5 How will your group’s solution provide positive change in people’s lives?
1.6 What is the best “frame” for your issue?

1.7 Testing your demands/issue: As part of your issue identification, go out and interview two to three students and ask them the following: How concerned are you about your issue? How does the issue impact you (or not)? Do you agree with the demands? Would you be willing to work on this issue, and fight for it? Please record their answers and include a description of the people you interviewed (e.g., age, year in school, lives on/off campus, gender, ethnicity/race). Importantly, analyze their responses, and explain what are the implications of their responses for your campaign. For example, if the interviewees are unconcerned about the issue or unwilling to fight for it, your group may need to change the message, the demand, or perhaps even the issue itself. In your responses, integrate course readings and ideas discussed in the text with your answers.

1.8 Testing your demands/issue: In teams of two or three, go out and talk to various stakeholders (e.g., the student body president, a rabbi or minister, the director of a non-profit, a union leader, etc.) that focus on your issue. Ask her/him: Are you addressing your social problem? If so, how? Then tell them how your group is conceptualizing the issue and ask them if they think this approach makes sense. Do they agree with your approach? If so, why, and if not, why not? Also, ask whether, if your group moves forward, they would support you or become involved as an ally. If so, what would they be willing to do? In addition, ask them who else is working on solving this social problem, and whether they can connect you to them. Who else should you talk to? Lastly, ask them if they have any questions for you. In your responses, integrate the text with your answers.
1.9 Begin keeping track of the hours you work in the community. At SJSU, students do a minimum of 25 hours of community work for the semester.

Notes
6 Sen, *Stir It Up*. 
In this opening week of the academic term, it is extremely important to set the right tone for the journey ahead. To set the right tone for your campaign, the first topic that must be addressed is whether you believe that social change is even possible. I have come to learn that many of my students, deep down, don't believe that social change is possible. They might give lip service to it, and they might even cite the suffragette movement or the civil rights movement as an example that change is possible. However, many students don't believe that they can bring about social change. This is not surprising to me since most major decisions in the public sphere seem to be in the hands of others, and they are given little opportunity to help make decisions that affect society. Furthermore, their high school and college experience, and perhaps your experience, have led them (and maybe you) to believe that your voice doesn't matter, since many classrooms are filled with “teacher talk”, with the teacher or professor up front and the students in rows, taking notes silently. However, social action is about democracy, so you will be expected to engage and participate actively. In order to set the right tone, be aware that from the very beginning of this social action experience you will be expected to participate actively.
Redefining Leadership: Seeing Yourself as a Leader

You will be called upon to be a leader in this social action project. However, the problem is that you might not see yourself as a leader. This is the result of a narrow definition of leadership, which assumes that leaders are people who are charismatic, dynamic, visionary, and powerful. In this definition, leaders are people who stand up and give an inspirational speech or take control in a situation, and they make something happen. These leaders are always out in front, leading the pack. Unfortunately, this type of leadership excludes many people who are more quiet and reserved or don’t see themselves as public speakers or visionary, and it oftentimes disempowers people in the group, since if they don’t fit this description of a leader, they conclude that they must be followers.

A more inclusive and empowering definition of leadership is needed if we are to get more people engaged in solving social problems. I believe that leadership should be defined as someone who thinks about the group and helps it function effectively. This definition of leadership allows for all of us to become leaders and is not based in having more influence or power in the group. To become a leader, what we need to do is to spend time thinking about what are the needs of the group and to put forward creative solutions to the problems that the group is facing. In other words, the person is a leader if she takes responsibility for the group.1

In your social action campaign, you will have many opportunities to take leadership in this non-oppressive fashion. In your group, there will be many problems to solve: everything from how the group functions, to how your group recruits new members, to how the group works with the media. All these problems will take the best thinking of the group members. The goal is to get as many people involved in coming up with solutions to these group problems as possible. In a campaign,
there are hundreds of details to consider and to do, so it needs all group members to contribute in order to be successful. Of course, there is an action component to this definition of leadership, but with more people involved in the group process, it opens up the possibility for more people to engage in the more traditional leadership activities, like giving a speech or leading a march.

Below are some qualities and skills that you may want to consider developing so that you can effectively contribute to your group. You may have been born with them, or you may have developed them as a result of your family life or through sports. Whatever the case, you should be aware that these leadership qualities exist, and they can help you and your group to be effective. These qualities include:

• **Becoming a good listener**
  Earlier models of leadership focus on the great communicator, whether that be President Ronald Reagan or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. However, Cesar Chavez, the co-founder and organizer for the United Farm Workers (UFW), reminds us that it is necessary to be a good listener. Cesar spent a great deal of time listening to his fellow farmworkers, realizing that it was important to hear their ideas and stories if they were to achieve the UFW goal to negotiate with businesses through collective bargaining. At one meeting, when it was unclear how to move forward, and Cesar admitted he had no good response, it was the voice of an elderly female farmworker who provided the answer on what the next step of the campaign should be. She started by saying, “Well, I know I am not qualified, but there was something. I had an idea, maybe just a small idea, but maybe it can help,” and she went on to describe that since the UFW had been barred from
organizing at the farmworker camps where the workers lived, they should create a small church on the public roadway across from the camps to attract the workers to come and visit. Cesar and the UFW listened, and they decided to do exactly as this “unqualified” elderly farmworker suggested. Thus, it is critical that we listen to all in the group. It is also important to ask good questions, such as: “What are your thoughts?”, “How does it make you feel?”, and “What if . . . ?” These open-ended questions will allow you to hear from people what they are thinking and feeling.\(^2\)

- **Becoming comfortable talking in a small group and in public**
  Learning to speak in a small group and in public doesn’t mean you have to be the person to deliver the major address at an event or speak all the time in the group. However, it does mean that when the opportunity presents itself, you are able to communicate to others effectively. Thus, if someone asks you about the campaign, whether it be a fellow student in a class, the president of the university, or the press, you must learn to articulate clearly what the campaign is about. It is not necessary for all group members to be dynamic speakers, but everyone should be able to explain what is the demand, who is the target, how will the solution make our community better, and what motivated them to be involved in the campaign. In addition, all people should be comfortable speaking to the group about their concerns and issues.

- **Becoming aware of how the group is “feeling”**
  A major part of whether your group is successful is how the group works together. If members feel good about the working relationships in the group, there is a much higher chance of being successful. Thus, it is very important to become aware of the group dynamics. Is the group feeling good about
how they are working together, or is there discontentment? Do members have negative feelings about the group that are not being talked about? Are people frustrated that some people are doing more work than others or that some people are dominating the discussion? Are people sharing power? If you see that the group is not working well together, you need to take responsibility to talk to the people that have these feelings, and see if it can be worked out individually, or perhaps in the larger group.  

- **Having integrity**
  Be honest in all of your dealings with the group. In addition, don't say anything about group members that you would not say to their face. Lastly, if you say you are going to do something, make sure it gets done. This ability to accomplish what you say you are going to do helps the group immensely. So if you tell people you are going to do something, do it. If for some reason you can't get it done, tell the group, and ask for help to get it done.

- **Understanding how privilege operates and learning to work with groups who are “different” than you**
  Society provides more or less status and privilege to people based on race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, educational attainment, immigration status, and religious affiliation. The more you learn about yourself and your own identity and privileges (or lack thereof), as well as the identity and privileges of others, the better. This understanding of privilege, and its intersectionality, will help you to better understand the dynamics of the group, as well as the relationships between the group and your allies.

- **Being persistent**
  Persistence is perhaps one of the most important qualities of being a leader. The most effective leaders are the ones who, when they wake up in the morning, think about what they
can do today to move the campaign forward, and when they
go to bed at night, think about what they can do tomorrow.
To be a leader, there is a certain level of stick-to-it-iveness
that is absolutely critical.

- **Learning to say “no”**
If you have the above qualities and skills, or are develop-
ing them, people from other groups will see that you are a
“leader” and will ask you to become involved in their issues.
While this may be flattering, learn to say “no” with a smile.
You do not want to get into a situation where you take on
too many things and become burned out. Learn to say, with
a smile, “Thank you so much for that invitation to work on
this project, but I am focused on this campaign right now.”

In addition, this book provides the opportunity to develop some
specific skills. These skills are highly valued in society, and they
will help you get a job in the non-profit, public, or private sec-
tors. These skills include how to:

- Facilitate a meeting
- Conduct research
- Recruit members
- Work with the media
- Work in a group effectively
- Plan events for an entire campaign
- Fundraise
- Confront and negotiate with a target
- Evaluate your project

In your social action campaign, you will have the opportunity
to practice and develop these skills. Some of these skills may be
more appealing to you than others, and it will be up to you to
decide which skills you may want to develop.
Plato’s Cave
Twenty-three hundred years ago, Plato, the Greek philosopher, wrote the Allegory of the Cave (see: http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/platoscave.html). In Plato’s Cave, he imagines that a group of people have been chained down from birth and are unable to move their heads to see behind them, where there is a fire throwing up images of objects on the cave’s wall in front of the prisoners. The chained-down people think these objects are real and alive, as they are not aware that they are shadows of objects. However, a person breaks free, turns around, and becomes aware of the reality of the situation. At the top of the cave there is an opening, and the person ascends out of it. Upon exiting the cave, the person is bathed in the light of the sun (i.e., wisdom) and is able to see reality clearly. Soon after, the person returns to the cave to inform the people about what was observed.

Plato’s Cave provides insight into whether humans are truly free, who is controlling society (and its images) and for what purpose, what is the process to liberate our minds, and what will happen to us once our minds are liberated and we engage with others in society. As you begin your social action project, reflecting on these insights will be extremely helpful as you set the right tone for you and your group.

Assignment
The below questions start the process of moving you away from being a receptor of knowledge to being an active creator, and moving the professor or staff away from being a sage on the stage to being a guide on the side that facilitates your learning process. The first set of questions focuses on your thoughts about social change. In your responses, please integrate the text with your answers:

2.1 What do you know about social change?
2.2 How does social change take place?
2.3 Why would someone become involved in social change?
2.4 Do you believe that social change is possible?

Please analyze the following questions about Plato’s Allegory of the Cave:
2.5 What do the fire, shadows, and cave represent?
2.6 What does the ascent out of the cave represent?
2.7 What happens to people who decide to go back into the cave?
2.8 How might service-learning, which is the integration of civic action and academic concepts, help us to get out of the cave?
2.9 How does Plato’s Cave apply to us today?

In your group, please reflect on the following questions about leadership:
2.10 What are your thoughts about the traditional and the new definition of leadership described above? When you think of traditional leadership, what are the images that come to mind?
2.11 In previous group experiences, how has “leadership” played out? Has leadership been shared and has everyone had the opportunity to exercise leadership? How have you had to deal with people not taking responsibility for the group and relying on others, or the opposite, where a person has been too dominant?
2.12 Which are your strongest and weakest leadership qualities and skills, as described above? What quality and skill would you like to develop in this campaign?
2.13 How will your group make sure that you have shared leadership and that all are contributing their ideas and actions?
Notes

1 Rocky Mountain Peace Center, Communities of Conversation and Action, a Manual for Building Community (Boulder, CO: Rocky Mountain Peace Center, 1988).


3 Rocky Mountain Peace Center, Communities of Conversation and Action.