Leaders Lab

SESP 218, Fall 2021
SESP Leadership Institute
Annenberg Hall 345
Fridays, 2-4:50p CT

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Office hours: by appointment

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Office hours: by appointment

Sasha Benson
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Office hours: by appointment

Professor: Mesmin Destin
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Office hours: by appointment

TA: Josiah Rosario
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Office hours: by appointment
Course Description & Goals:

First of all, since this experience is at least in part about equipping each of us to be agents of meaningful change in our communities, this is a living, collective document. We will always keep things open to discussion and create as we go with a framework that we will provide. This program is likely one that you have never experienced or been a part of, and our hope is that it will be one that is empowering and truly transformative, as the title suggests. Here’s the official program description:

Leaders Lab is an interactive, engaging and dynamic fall quarter course that was created and designed for incoming first- and second-year students in SESP to reflect, experience and engage in dialogue about the “big” questions in life such as: who am I? What is my purpose in life? How can I be me? What are my responsibilities to the communities I’m a part of? Why do I serve? What is leadership? How can I lead?

The basis of this program is that we are all leaders and how we lead is very unique to who we are and the identities we hold. With that said, this program will be a journey of continuous self-discovery, empowerment and intentional leadership. This program will provide space and time to reflect and create meaning for the experiences in our life. It will also be a space for us to breathe, to be still, to learn from silence, to notice. Again, if this is new for you, don’t worry!

Finally, you should know that we look at ourselves as facilitators and fellow learners—maybe a “coach” and not a “lecturer.” We want you to succeed, so even when we challenge and push you to work hard, we are doing so because we are on your side. We promote collaborative, self-directed learning, which means we’ll learn together as we go, employing different learning methods and making necessary adjustments along the way.

As “facilitators” one of our main goals in all of this is to be as helpful and accessible to you as we possibly can. This means, among other things, that we will challenge you to do well, with both the sessions and the field visits. It also means that you will need to help us get to know you, seek us out for help, talk with us about the sessions, problems, confusion...anything at all. We are in this together, so we expect serious commitment and hard work from each of you. We all need to expect these things of each other if this is to be a worthwhile—empowering, transformative, revolutionary—experience.

To create a safe space and also make the most out of our group discussions + conversations we will practice these six behaviors for one another:

1. **We try to stay curious about each other.** Curiosity is a great help to good dialogue. It’s easier for us to tell our story, to share our dreams and fears when we feel others...
are genuinely curious about us. Curiosity helps us discard our mask and let down our guard. It creates a spaciousness that is rare in other interactions. It takes time to create this space, but as we feel it growing, we speak more truthfully and the dialogue moves into what’s real.

2. **We recognize that we need each other’s help to become better listeners.** The greatest barrier to good dialogue is that we’ve lost the capacity to listen. We’re too busy, too certain, too stressed. We don’t have time to listen. This is true almost everywhere these days. One gift of dialogue is that it helps us become good listeners.

3. **We slow down so we have time to think and reflect.** Listening is one of the skills required for good dialogue. Slowing down is a second.

4. **For us all to learn, we need to actively participate and be present**

5. **We expect it to get messy at times.**

6. **Step into your learning zone.**

   
   ![Diagram](image)

   The practice of conversation takes courage, faith, and time. We don’t get it right the first time, and we don’t have to. We settle into conversation, we don’t just do it. As we risk talking to each other about something we care about, as we become curious about each other, as we slow things down, gradually we remember this timeless way of being together.*

   *Adapted from *Turning to One Another*, book by Margaret Wheatley
Course Readings:

All course readings are available on Canvas. Please have the texts close at hand for every class period. No textbooks will be needed for this course.

Required Activities:

1. *Class Participation:* Attendance and active participation, including discussions of the readings, are important to the establishment of a shared intellectual community. **Please be on time and prepared for discussion.**

   - If you have to miss class, please communicate with us and with your classmates so that you are caught up on what you missed and prepare for the next course session. **We recognize that the current circumstances will not always be conducive to full participation and attendance in class. Please take steps to communicate your circumstances/needs with us.** We will do our best to accommodate.

2. *Reading Reflections:* We invite you to share reflections on the readings weekly. Reflections can take the form of prose, poetry, voice recordings, art, anything at all. We want this to be an opportunity for you to deeply engage with the texts in the ways you need.

   - You should post a reflection **at least four out of the seven weeks, and at least one post in each of the three curriculum modules:** *Foundations of Organizing, Characteristics of Organizing, and Imagining New Worlds*
   - Your responses are due **no later than 11:59pm on Wednesdays before class.** This allows us time to look over your interpretations, thoughts & questions before class. During class you will have the opportunity to discuss questions and ideas pertaining to the readings.

3. *Mid Quarter Reflection Meetings:* Schedule a time to meet with either Mesmin or Josiah for 15 minutes during their week 4 or 5 office hours to reflect on your experience in undergrad thus far, your comprehension of course themes and materials, and any questions you may have about the course or Northwestern broadly.

4. *Community Skillshare:* As a culminating project, we invite you to reflect throughout the quarter on intentional practices and activities you look towards to ground yourselves as you seek social change and navigate interlocking systems of oppression.

   - In the spirit of building communal and accessible knowledge, you will **contribute a meaningful one-page reflection accompanying your multimedia creation sharing their practice, skill, or exercise through any medium that is exciting and interesting to you.** Students will **present their skill during our community skill share (week 8)** and submit their contribution to our collective skillshare workbook, to be shared with future SLI cohorts. You will be provided with more in-depth instructions and several student examples.
Summary of Assignments and Grading:

There are 100 possible points available in the course. The details of each assignment will be available on the Canvas site.

Points per assignment and due dates are as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
<th>Due Dates</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20 Points</td>
<td><em>We are in this together, so we expect serious commitment and hard work from each of you!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Reflections</td>
<td>40 Points</td>
<td>Wednesday before Class by 11:59pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid Quarter Check In Meeting with Prof Mesmin or Josiah</td>
<td>10 Points</td>
<td>Week 4 or 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Skillshare</td>
<td>30 Points</td>
<td>Fri. Nov 12th in class</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Points Possible</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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Grading Scale:

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<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
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<tr>
<td>A/A-</td>
<td>You completed every assignment with intention and care to the best of your ability. If you were not able to submit an assignment on time, you communicated with the teaching team about your needs and made a plan to submit your work accordingly. You incorporated feedback from the teaching team into your work. You participated thoughtfully and frequently in our class sessions and communicated with the teaching team prior to missing or coming late to class. If you needed accommodations or alternative ways to participate in class discussions, you communicated with the teaching team and devised an appropriate plan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+/B</td>
<td>You completed almost every assignment with intention and care to the best of your ability. You submitted one or two assignments late without communicating with the teaching team to get an extension. You sometimes attempted to incorporate feedback from the teaching team into your work. You participated thoughtfully sometimes in our class sections. You may have missed one or two classes without communicating with the teaching team prior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>B- / C+</td>
<td>You completed some assignments with intention and care. You have one or two missing assignments that you did not communicate with the teaching team about. You rarely incorporated feedback from the teaching team into your work. You did not participate thoughtfully that often and you missed several classes without communicating with the teaching team prior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C- / C-</td>
<td>You rarely completed assignments with intention and care, but you attempted some. You have more than two missing assignments that you did not communicate with the teaching team about. You did not incorporate feedback from the teaching team into your work. You did not participate thoughtfully often and you missed several classes without communicating with the teaching team prior.</td>
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Land Acknowledgement:

The Northwestern sits on the traditional homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires, the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa. Northwestern is also home to the Menominee, Miami and Ho-Chunk nations. It is home to over 100,000 tribal members and a site of trade and gathering. It is important that we honor who's land we are on and engage in decolonial work.

Writing Support:

As reflected in the various assignment assessment criteria, you will be assessed on quality of writing. The construction of an effective argument is predicated on the ability to communicate compellingly. If you feel that you need additional assistance or support with your writing, we encourage you to contact the Northwestern University Writing Center (www.writing.northwestern.edu).

School of Education and Social Policy Academic Integrity Statement:

Students in this course are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic guide". All papers submitted for credit in this course must be submitted electronically unless otherwise instructed by the professor. Your written work may be tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern or to download the guide, visit: http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:
Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

Course Calendar:

Changes to the timetable and/or assignments may occur to accommodate the needs of the students and the flow of the class. Any changes to assigned readings or the course schedule will be announced in class and posted on Canvas. All readings and assignments are due on the dates on which they are written unless otherwise noted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>READINGS</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS</th>
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| Week 1  
Foundations of Organizing: Leadership | Fri, Sept 24<sup>th</sup> | Syllabus                                       | Reading Reflection                               |
| Week 2  
Foundations of Organizing: Values | Fri, Oct 1<sup>st</sup> | Theory as a liberatory practice, bell hooks | Reading Reflection                               |
| Week 3  
Foundations of Organizing: Identities | Fri, Oct 8<sup>th</sup> | Decolonization is not a metaphor | Reading Reflection                               |
| Week 4  
Foundations of Organizing: Chicago Freedom School [Tentative] | Fri, Oct 15<sup>th</sup> | TBD                                           | Mid Quarter Reflection Meeting with Mesmin or Josiah |
| Week 5  
Characteristics of Organizing: Community Organizing | Fri, Oct 22<sup>nd</sup> | How We Liberate Ourselves by Adrienne Maree Brown | Mid Quarter Reflection Meeting with Mesmin or Josiah |

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<th>Week 6</th>
<th>Characteristics of Organizing: Deep Listening</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fri, Oct 29&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Listening is a Revolutionary Act, <a href="https://medium.com/local-voices-global-change/listening-is-a-revolutionary-act-part-1-d48151d8ef08">https://medium.com/local-voices-global-change/listening-is-a-revolutionary-act-part-1-d48151d8ef08</a></td>
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<th>Week 7</th>
<th>Characteristics of Organizing: What is Community?</th>
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<td>Fri, Nov 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories From the Transformative Justice Movement pages 10-13, 52-54, 60-67, 136-137</td>
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<th>Week 8</th>
<th>Imaging New Worlds: Community Skillshare</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fri, Nov 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Student Skillshare Examples</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 9</th>
<th>Imaging New Worlds: Culmination</th>
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<tr>
<th>FINALS WEEK</th>
<th>Fri, Dec 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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