

Instructor

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Office Hours

Wednesday, 12 – 1 PM
One Bow St. #235

Expos 20: Student Activism and Social Change

Spring 2024

Mondays & Wednesdays

1:30 PM – 2:45 PM (209)

3:00 PM – 4:15 PM (210)



I. Course Description

In 1969, five hundred Harvard students occupied University Hall to protest Harvard's involvement with the Vietnam War and advocate a more racially inclusive campus and curriculum. A day later, Harvard President Nathan Pusey summoned four hundred state police officers to break the occupation, leading to a bloody clash in which dozens of students were injured and hundreds were arrested. In the aftermath, Harvard students went on strike for eight days, effectively shutting down the university until the administration agreed to reforms.

This turbulent chapter in Harvard's history was just one flashpoint in the broader student movement of the 1960s, when young people across the nation were radicalized by the Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War movements and when American universities became epicenters for activism. It's also just one chapter in the story of student activism at Harvard. Since the 1960s, Harvard students have campaigned on issues ranging from apartheid in South Africa to

living wages for university staff. In recent years, a visitor to the Yard might have encountered demonstrations reflecting national movements like Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo, as well as local campaigns like Fossil Fuel Divest and Justice for Faisal.

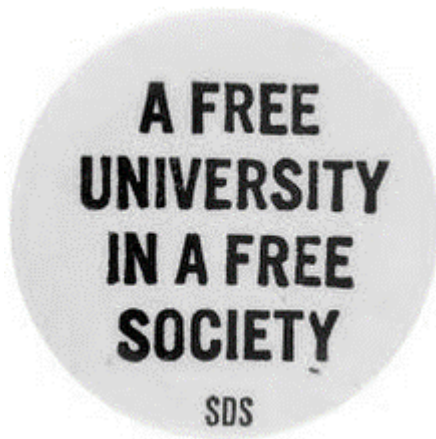
In this course, we'll work to uncover the story of student activism at Harvard and beyond. Together, we'll connect the dots between the 1960s and today, and explore the role of student activists in local, national, and global campaigns for social change. In the first unit, we'll examine the ideas and actions of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the most influential student activist organization of the 1960s, and investigate the broader milieu of student activism they contributed to both nationally and at Harvard. In the second unit, we'll develop skills for qualitative research that will help us connect past and present as we seek out historical documents in Harvard's archives, conduct interviews with student activists, and observe ongoing campaigns and demonstrations. That work will prepare us for our third unit, where we'll conduct original research comparing historical and contemporary instances of student activism. We'll also collaborate on a public-facing project to share our findings with the campus community.

***Note:** This is an Engaged Scholarship Expository Writing Course, and some assignments will require participation outside of normal class hours.

II. Course Objectives, Format, and Assignments

Unit 1: "From Silence to Activism": The Student Movement in the Sixties

In Unit 1, we launch the course by exploring the groundswell in student activism that took place during the 1960s. Today, we might take for granted that protests, demonstrations, teach-ins, even more disruptive tactics like strikes, walk-outs, and occupations, are part of the routine of university life. But this wasn't always the case. During this pivotal decade, American students brought the causes of the Civil Rights, Free Speech, Anti-Vietnam War, and Black Power movements to their colleges and universities, challenging the conformism and complacency of



the preceding generation. Why did students become activists during the 1960s? What were they trying to accomplish? How did they seek to change their universities and America more broadly, and to what extent did they succeed?

To answer these questions, we'll consider the work of student activists at Harvard as well as hotbeds of student protest like Berkeley and Michigan, with a particular focus on Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). We'll take a close look at the "Port Huron Statement," SDS' classic 1962 manifesto, as well as other primary and secondary sources that will help us interpret the document in context. To

understand the broader milieu of student activism that SDS participated in, we'll also consider the work of prominent national organizations groups like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Northern Student Movement (NSM), as well as campus-specific organizations like Berkeley's Free Speech Movement (FSM), Michigan's Environmental Action

for Survival (ENACT), and the Harvard-Radcliffe Association of African and Afro-American Students (HRAAAAS).

Your writing assignment for Unit 1 is to write a 4-6 page analysis of the “Port Huron Statement” using close analysis of the document itself as well as one or more contextual or supporting sources from the unit. The essay will count for 25% of the final grade in the course.

Unit 2: Documenting Dissent: A People’s History of Harvard

In Unit 2, we’ll continue exploring the history of student activism at Harvard, while also working to connect the dots between the 1960s and today. Between the heyday of SDS and the current campus climate we find a wide range of student activist campaigns, organizations, and events, touching on a variety of local, national, and global concerns. From the late seventies to the early nineties, The Harvard-Radcliffe Southern Africa Solidarity Committee (SASC) campaigned against Apartheid and pushed for divestment. In the late nineties and early aughts, The Progressive Student Labor Movement (PSLM) campaigned to ensure living wages for Harvard’s staff. More recently, national movements like Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo have left their mark on campus. And that’s just to name a few of the better-known examples.

As you investigate these and other episodes of student activism, you’ll have opportunities to try out two different kinds of qualitative research: *archival research* and either *interview research* or *participant-observation research*. First, we’ll work with Harvard’s librarians to explore the archives for primary sources that can provide a window into the activist campaigns of the past, rendering the episodes we know about in more detail, and possibly uncovering new ones along the way. Following that, you’ll either conduct a short interview with a Harvard community member or take field notes on an ongoing campaign or demonstration. This latter part may not seem like “historical” research, but in an important sense it is: your work will extend the historical narrative we began in the sixties, and establish a historical record for the future.



As the unit progresses, we’ll compile our findings into a shared class database, which can then be used for your individual Unit 3 research projects as well as our collaborative capstone project. You won’t have a formal essay assignment for Unit 2, but you’ll complete two short-form pieces commenting on the evidence you’ve gathered from the archives and from your interviews and/or

observations. The two pieces will together count for 20% of the final grade in the course.

Unit 3: Power and Protest, Past and Present

In Unit 3, you'll work on an independent research project comparing one historical (twentieth century) and one contemporary (twenty-first century) instance of student activism. For this project, you'll draw on materials from our Unit 2 research as well as your own individually assembled primary and secondary sources. You will have the freedom to select your topic and the specific movements, campaigns, organizations, or events you want to compare. For example, you might compare student civil rights activism from the sixties with Black Lives Matter, early environmentalist campaigns with recent climate activism, or anti-war organizing in response to the Vietnam and Iraq wars. Whatever angle you choose, your essay should help us to understand the changes and continuities in student activism, whether that has to do with participants, goals, tactics, strategies, outcomes, responses, or some other dimension of student activism.

Your 8-10 page essay will synthesize multiple sources to frame and analyze the two cases before drawing conclusions. The essay will count for 30% of the final grade.



Capstone Project

During Units 2 and 3, we will work together on a public facing project to share our research findings with the campus community. The exact format of the project will be developed with input from the class, but we will seek to create an online resource publicizing the history of student activism at Harvard and to host an in-person event launching the resource and opening up discussion from students, faculty, staff, and other members of the community. All students will be expected to contribute to the project, and we will work together to divide the work so that each student takes on a fair and manageable portion of the work.

As an example of a capstone project outcome, consider the Brown University Library's "[Protest & Perspectives: Students at Brown 1960s – 1990s](#)" resource. For such a project, we would work as a class to draft a timeline and storyboard reflecting materials discovered through archival, interview, and observational research in Unit 2 (and perhaps additional sources uncovered during Unit 3). Small groups of students might then take on a specific chapter – a campaign, an organization, a significant event – with individual students curating images and documents and/or writing copy. Contributions to the capstone project will be assessed based on participation throughout the process and completion of delegated tasks and will count for 15% of the final grade in the course.