

The Theater of Change: Reimagining Justice through Abolition

This course and practicum, the first of its kind, will enable participants to blend artistry, law, policy, and community engagement, and in this way produce narratives with powerful impact in policy spaces where change can happen. Amidst resounding calls to abolish the current state of the country's criminal legal system, notably prisons and the police, the arts provides a critical space to imagine alternatives to the criminal legal system and to promote those envisionings as achievable realities. The course will equip law students to tell powerful stories--themselves and in collaboration with artists and community members--and use legal knowledge and skills to amplify artists' and community activists' impact in venues where laws are made and power is exercised. In the process all the participants will work with community members to amplify the power of their stories informed by legal and policy research. With criminal justice as the policy focal point, the workshop will enable participants to craft and enact compelling stories about justice and injustice in "theaters for change" where they can shift hearts and minds of thought leaders and policy makers. A background and/or interest in theater is not necessary to participate, though certainly welcome.

The course grows out of a collaboration between the [Broadway Advocacy Coalition](#) (BAC) and the [Center for Institutional and Social Change](#) at Columbia Law School. BAC is an arts based organization dedicated to bridging the worlds of arts, justice and education for the purpose of building new collaborative methods for solving today's most pressing social justice issues. The course and practicum will be offered to a strategically selected group of law students, professional artists, and directly affected activists on the front lines of change work in the areas of public safety, defunding the police, violence prevention, prison abolition, reentry, and restorative and criminal justice. It will create a space in which its participants can cross-train; to learn from each others' toolkits, build collaborative capacity, and advance concrete policy change.

Participants will emerge from the course with the ability to practice ARTIVISM: art-making linked with community mobilization, activism, and substantive change around issues of equity and justice. The course will enable participants to link the theory and practice of activism by: (1) building the capacity to communicate effectively through high-impact storytelling, (2) creating original pieces of work, informed by policy research and narratives gathered using the methodologies of both theater and law, (3) developing and applying theories of change that will integrate storytelling and performance with policy research and a survey of the political and bureaucratic landscape, with an eye towards how best to employ performance to achieve maximum impact towards achieving educational equity and transforming our justice system, (4) arranging a new "theater for change" located in a policy venue, designed to maximize the broader impact of the performance, and (5) fostering relationships amongst individuals with varying stakes in and perspectives on reimagining justice.

The course begins the week of January 18 and ends the week of April 5. There will be five two hour class sessions (Thursdays from 7:10-9:00pm), a week-end retreat (Friday afternoon and one day over the weekend of February 5-7), four three hour small group sessions, a share-out

(to be scheduled). If you have questions about the course, please email ssturm@law.columbia.edu. Admission to the course is by application. To apply, please complete the 2021 application form linked [here](#) or paste the following link into your browser: <https://forms.gle/YQCrK5MKwhFY2Avp7>.