

**AAC&U**  
**Diversity And Learning: A Defining Moment**  
Roundtable Discussion  
October 19-21, 2006  
Philadelphia, PA

**Social Justice and Racial Diversity: A Model for  
Interactive Learning**

This Roundtable presents the Social Justice Learning Community at Columbia College that brings together courses from several disciplines to focus on issues of social justice. Small interdisciplinary groups within the learning community draw on diverse student perspectives, course content, a case study, and community and personal experience to identify injustices, causes, and strategies for change.

**Columbia College, South Carolina**

**Sue Rivell McClam**, Director of Social Justice Learning Community and Senior Lecturer of Spanish

**James C. Lane**, Associate Professor of Education

With a student population that is close to equal parts African American and European American, set in a predominantly African American community, Columbia College offers a unique learning environment in which to address issues of social justice. These demographics are important because “minority students cause others to think about the issue in different ways, introduce novel perspectives to the discussion, and are influential in the group...racial and ethnic compositional diversity can create a rich and complex social and learning environment that subsequently can be engaged as an educational tool to promote all students’ learning and development.”<sup>1</sup> One way our students are prepared to understand issues of social justice is through our Social Justice Learning Community.

The purpose of the Social Justice Learning Community can be summed up with the following statement:

We believe that social justice education is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which individuals are both self-determining (able to develop their full capacities), and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others). Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

In keeping with the college’s mission to develop a commitment to service and social justice, this modified learning community concept brings together faculty and students across a variety of disciplines in order to:

- Identify issues of injustice based on: race, economic class, ethnicity, gender, religion, ability, age, and sexual orientation.
- Identify the privileges received by those who benefit from injustices and the consequences of injustice for those who suffer from it.
- Identify the causes of injustice by focusing on the following levels: individual, cultural, and institutional.
- Develop strategies for resolving injustice within their sphere of influence.

Faculty who choose to teach in the Social Justice Learning Community collaborate to teach course content, select a case study, engage in dialogue with students, and create related extra curricular experiences that support teaching for social justice related to a specific theme.

<sup>1</sup> Chang, Mitchell J., *Reconsidering the Diversity Rationale*, Liberal Education, AAC&U Vol. 91, NO. 1 Winter 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin (eds.). 1997. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge.

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# *Social Justice Learning Community*

**Mission:** The Social Justice Learning Community is an example of Columbia College's long-standing commitment to living out the social principles of the United Methodist Church. Its purpose is to develop students' awareness and responsibility toward service and social justice as stated in our mission. As part of Engaged Learning at Columbia College, this Learning Community brings together faculty and students across a variety of disciplines in order to examine issues of injustice based on ability, age, economic class, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation.

**History:** Since the fall of 2002 eleven different departments have offered courses in the Social Justice Learning Community including the Departments of Art, Communication and Theater, Education, English, History and Political Science, Human Relations, Leadership, Modern Languages and Literatures, Physical Education and Health Promotion, Religion and Philosophy, and Biological and Physical Sciences. To date, nineteen different professors have taught in the Social Justice Learning Community.

**Rationale:** Knowledge of diversity and injustice is necessary for informed and humane democratic citizenship. The Social Justice Learning Community gives students and faculty an opportunity to share their life experiences, their differences, and their diverse perspectives. It encourages them to find their common ground and to learn to respect each other's differences while intentionally expressing the value of this on going process as part of their life long learning.

**Goals:** Within the context of this course students will:

- Identify and discuss specific examples of injustice based on one or more of the following categories: ability, age, economic class, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation in the context of readings, statistics, case studies, and discussions. (At least one third of the course content/time is directly focused on injustice.)
- Identify the privileges received by those who benefit from injustices (e.g., access to all buildings, greater opportunities in education) and the consequences of injustice for those who suffer from it (e.g., lowered self-esteem, hunger, battering).
- Identify in writing the causes of injustice by focusing on at least two of the following levels: (a) individual attitudes and behaviors, (b) cultural ideas, values and images, and (c) organizational/institutional practices.
- Develop strategies for resolving injustice within their sphere of influence. (e.g., developing spheres of influence, identifying allies, understanding risks involved in taking action). We recognize that this course itself is one strategy that contributes to resolving injustice.

**Value to the College:** The SJLC is an attractive program for recruiting and has the potential for retaining students engaged in worthwhile dialogue with each other and with their professors. With minimal cost to the college, we further our identity as an institution committed to issues of social justice that prepares women leaders who

- think critically
- demonstrate intercultural communicative competence,
- demonstrate caring and connecting both locally and globally,
- advocate social responsibility, and
- are intentional agents of change

Beyond the goals listed above the SJLC gives students and professors an opportunity to share their life experiences and their diverse perspectives, allowing them to find their common ground and to learn to respect each other's differences. Within the SJLC we intentionally express the value of this on going process as part of life long learning.

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# *Social Justice Learning Community*

## *Courses Fall 2002-Fall 2006*

### **Fall 2006**

**EDU 346** Issues in Early Childhood Education – Dr. Lynne Noble  
**SOC 221** Family Development – Dr. Joyce Fields  
**EDU 318** Moral and Political Foundations of Teaching - Dr. James Lane  
**SPAN 250** Intermediate Spanish Reading and Writing - Ms. Sue McClam

### **Spring 2006**

**LEAD 201** Leadership Theories and Strategies – Dr. Tamara Burk  
**COMM 100** Honors - Introduction to Oral Communication – Dr. Jason Munsell  
**ENG 340** American Women Writers – Dr. Melissa Heidari

### **Fall 2005**

**EDU 318** Moral and Political Foundations of Teaching - Dr. James Lane  
**SPAN 250** Intermediate Spanish Reading and Writing - Ms. Sue McClam  
**ENG 260** American Multicultural Literature - Dr. Christine Hait

### **Spring 2005**

**EDU 318** Moral and Political Foundations of Teaching - Dr. James Lane  
**SPAN 250** Intermediate Spanish Reading and Writing - Ms. Sue McClam  
**SOC/SWK 255** Introduction to Social Welfare - Ms. Katrina Spigner

### **Fall 2004**

**ENG 260** American Multicultural Literature - Dr. William Schreck  
**HIST/POSC 260** African American Culture and Politics - Dr. Sheila Elliott  
**REL 237** The African American Religious Experience - Rev. Latta Thomas  
**SPAN 250** Intermediate Spanish Reading and Writing - Ms. Sue McClam

### **Spring 2004**

**EDU 318** Moral and Political Foundations of Teaching - Dr. James Lane  
**REL 237** The African American Religious Experience - Rev. Latta Thomas  
**SOC/SWK 255** Introduction to Social Welfare - Dr. Duncan Whyte  
**SPAN 250** Intermediate Spanish Reading and Writing - Ms. Sue McClam

### **Fall 2003**

**ART 364** History of Art: Women Artists - Dr. Ute Wachsmann-Linnan  
**ENG 265** African American Literature - Dr. Christine Hait  
**FRE 202** Intermediate French - Dr. Beth Droppleman  
**PEHP 100** Women's Health Seminar - Ms. Peggy Ondrea  
**REL 237** The African American Religious Experience - Rev. Latta Thomas

### **Spring 2003**

**BIO 100** Biological Science - Ms. Sue Carstensen  
**ENG 260** American Multicultural Literature - Dr. William Schreck  
**PEHP 100** Women's Health Seminar - Ms. Peggy Ondrea  
**REL 237** The African American Religious Experience - Rev. Latta Thomas  
**SOC/SWK 255** Intro to Social Welfare - Dr. Diane Thompson  
**SPAN 250** Intermediate Spanish Reading and Writing - Ms. Sue McClam

### **Fall 2002**

**POSC 225** International Politics - Dr. Sheila Elliott  
**REL 250** Women in Religion - Dr. Vivian Fowler  
**SPAN 250** Intermediate Spanish Reading and Writing - Ms. Sue McClam

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# *Social Justice Learning Community Syllabus*

**Goals:** Within the context of this course students will:

- Identify and discuss specific examples of injustice based on one or more of the following categories: ability, age, economic class, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation in the context of readings, statistics, case studies, and discussions. (At least one third of the course content/time is directly focused on injustice.)
- Identify the privileges received by those who benefit from injustices (e.g., access to all buildings, greater opportunities in education) and the consequences of injustice for those who suffer from it (e.g., lowered self-esteem, hunger, battering).
- Identify in writing the causes of injustice by focusing on at least two of the following levels: (a) individual attitudes and behaviors, (b) cultural ideas, values and images, and (c) organizational/institutional practices.
- Develop strategies for resolving injustice within their sphere of influence. (e.g., developing spheres of influence, identifying allies, understanding risks involved in taking action). We recognize that this course itself is one strategy that contributes to resolving injustice.

**Requirements:** Students participating in the Social Justice Learning Community will be exposed to and will engage in dialogues in small discussion groups made up of students in the interdisciplinary learning community through specially designed seminars and related experiences. **The three seminars are mandatory** (10% of the course grade) and will take place during three class sessions during the semester.

- **Seminar One** – Student will explore social justice through interactive learning activities and discussions supporting courses taught in the learning community. (Multiple Social Group Membership, Advantages and Disadvantages, Comfort Zone)
- **Seminar Two** – Students will reflect on the case study, class discussions, individual experiences, and will participate in interactive activities that focus on issues presented in the case study.
- **Seminar Three** – Students will work together on identifying spheres of influence, advocacy, and action planning that address the issues described in the case study at the individual, cultural and institutional level based on varied perspectives of social justice gained in classes and related experiences.

## ***Related experiences:***

- **First Related Experience:** Visit to an agency or religious organization in the community followed by sharing experiences at the second seminar. The purpose of the visit is to ask the following questions and to observe: What is the purpose of the agency or organization? Whom does it serve? Why does it exist?
- **Second Related Experience:** Small group discussion of and individual written responses to a case study dealing with an issue of social justice. Individual responses due during second seminar count as part of the 10% SJLC course grade.

\*Grading policies are listed in the course syllabus for seminars and related experiences. Students are encouraged to attend events related to issues of social justice. These include; events posted by the Diversity Committee, service opportunities, CLC sessions, films, discussions, etc.

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## *Social Justice References*

All faculty participating in the Learning Community receive a copy of:

Adams, Marianne, et. al. *Teaching For Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

*Case Studies for Learning Communities include the following sources:*

### **Fall 2006**

Film *Waging a Living* produced by Roger Weisberg, a production of Public Policy Productions, Inc. in association with Thirteen/WNET New York <http://filmmakers.com/indivs/wagingliving.htm>

### **Spring 2006**

Faculty in the learning community developed two case studies based on first hand accounts from the community. The first focused on women and poverty. The second focused on immigration and injustices based on gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic class

### **Fall 2005**

Film *Corridor of Shame* produced by Ferillo & Associates, Inc. [www.corridorofshame.com](http://www.corridorofshame.com)

### **Spring 2005**

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.

### **Fall 2004**

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, Incorporated, 2001

### **Spring 2004**

Kozol, Jonathan. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. New York: Harper Collins, 1992.

### **Fall 2003**

Kozol, Jonathan. *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation*. New York: Harper Collins, 1996.

### **Spring 2003**

Michie, Gregory. *Holler If You Hear Me: The Education of a Teacher and His Students*. New York: Teachers College, 1999.