

Exploring the Crossroads of Diversity Education and Peer Theatre

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Course Description

This is a graded course that explores issues of diversity and social justice in the United States and develops skills in cross-cultural communication and peer education. The course provides students with a framework for understanding the dynamics of diversity and oppression, an opportunity to expand their knowledge and awareness of a variety of cultural values, and reflective and critical experiences to explore how forms of oppression affect their personal lives. We focus on sexism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, ableism, classism, and racism during the semester.

A related purpose of this course is to provide a structure for undergraduate students to explore theatre as an approach to peer education on diversity, multiculturalism, and oppression. Emphasis will be placed on being a peer educator while simultaneously actively developing the necessary skills to write scripts, act in scenes, and facilitated discussions around the various “isms”.

The course will challenge students to explore oppression on a deeper level on a range of issues. This class will meet for 3 hours once a week, with occasional out of class events, activities, and course requirements. Students enrolling for this course are expected to continue with a Fall-semester course in which students form a theatre troupe and learn to perform and facilitate skits and workshops for the campus community.

Shaha: The Storytellers, a diversity peer education troupe at the University of Massachusetts Amherst is a theatre-based program that is educational, entertaining and thought-provoking. ***Shaha*** members perform short scenarios touching on issues of social justice and oppression that

many of us are faced with in our day-to-day lives. This course is part one of a yearlong commitment involving two components: a training course in the Spring and a performance course in the Fall. The Spring course will be 3 credits, educating students on issues of diversity, oppression, basic facilitation, scenario writing, and acting skills.

Course Objectives

- To engage students in a process of examining and understanding their own identity and the identities of others in the areas of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religious oppression, and socioeconomic class, and to facilitate their exploration of how these identities shape an individual's attitude and perspective.
- To develop a greater understanding of institutional oppression and examine our individual roles as both oppressors and oppressed.
- To develop skills in reflection, critical thinking, self-examination and self development
- To provide opportunities to self-reflect on issues of oppression through experiential learning.
- To help students ask appropriate questions, share relevant information and engage in meaningful dialogue when facilitating a discussion about cross-cultural issues.
- To prepare students as educators on issues of diversity.
- To prepare students in acting and facilitating social diversity and social justice based issues to their peers.
- To train a group of students who will become an on going peer theatre troupe.
- To participate in the campus process of creating inclusive communities at UMass.

Seminar Expectations and Evaluation

In order to receive academic credit for this seminar, students will be required to adhere to all the standards and commitments that have been outlined by the instructors. These commitments include:

- Attendance at all class sessions. **Five (5) points will be deducted for all non-approved absences.**
- **Active participation** in class discussions, assignments, WebCT online discussions and experiences with the infusion of points from class readings and examples from own experiences.
- Completing all reading and writing assignments on time
- Courtesy and respect for class members at all times.
- Commitment to participate in the fall practicum (subject to instructor invitation.)
- Maintenance of an in class journal of everyday experiences/ and feelings and thoughts that students observe/experience that can be turned into educational scenarios.
- All assigned papers must be typed and doubled spaced using APA format, 12-point Times-Roman only, with ½ half-inch margin.

Accommodation

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning

environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation please contact the instructor(s) and they will work with you and the Office of Disability Services to provide the necessary accommodations.

Textbook

The required textbook for the course is:

Adams, M., Blumenfeld, W.J., Castaneda, R., Hackman, H.W., Peters, M.L., and Zuniga, X. (eds.) (2000), Readings for Diversity and Social Justice. New York, Routledge.

The textbook will be available from Food For Thought Bookstore in the Amherst Town Center. Additional copies of the text are available on reserve in the Center for Diversity and Development in Moore Hall. Additionally, additional articles will be distributed to supplement the reading in the textbook.

Attendance and Lateness Policy

This class meets on Thursdays from 1 – 3:30 p.m. Should an emergency arise (illness, accidents, etc.) that prevents you from attending a specific session it is your responsibility to contact one of the instructors a few hours before class time, or if you are unable to do so before, please contact us as soon as possible.

All missed classes must be made up (e.g. writing a 2-page reaction paper about an event or a video on the topic addressed.) You will need to negotiate with your instructors the specific make up assignment. Make up work is due a week after a missed class.

This class will begin on time and one (1) point will be deducted from your grade for each class to which you arrive late. **Lateness is defined as arrival to the class after the class begins.**

Because this class is a group endeavor that requires cohesiveness and commitment, lateness can be disruptive for those already in the room as well as for the person (s) who arrive late. Such disruptiveness is something that we would like to avoid. (If you have difficulty getting here on time, you need to discuss that with the instructors as soon as possible.) If you are late 15 minutes or more three times, it will be equated to one unexcused absence.

Excused absences: Three points (3) will be deducted from your final grade for each excused absence (e.g. – religious observance, illness supported by medical documentation.) However, if you complete the make up assignment agreed upon with the instructors, these three points will be added back to your grade.

Unexcused absences: Five points (5) will be deducted for each unexcused absence. If you complete a make up assignment agreed upon with the instructors, three points (3) will be added back to your grade.

Please note that this is a once a week course. If you have three absences (excused or unexcused) you will have missed large portions of the class and will be in danger of failing the course. Absences due to Religious Observance do not exonerate you from assignments.

Grading

This is a graded course. **To receive passing grade, students must attend all class sessions, complete reading assignments prior to the class period that they are due, and complete the following assignments (on the day that they are due) listed in the “Evaluation of Students” section with a passing grade.**

Students may not miss more than 3 classes for any reason.

Evaluation of Students

- Critical Response Papers (2) at 10% each – 20%
- Outside Event Attendance (with approval from instructor) – 20%
- Weekly reflection papers about readings and weekly involvement in online discussion – 15%
- Personal Socialization Paper – 15%
- Final Assignment (Final Theatre Project and Individual Group Evaluation) – 20%
- Personal Visioning/Reflection Paper – 10%

Descriptions of these assignments are included below:

Critical Response Papers (2)

In a typed, double-spaced, three-page or more paper, write a critical response to the assigned readings. This paper is an attempt to encourage students to think critically about the topics that we cover in class by asking probing questions, considering their intersections and reflecting on how the topics have or will affect your own life and the lives of those around you. Please adhere to the style guidelines and text format of the APA Handbook. Each response paper should:

1. Talk about and explain two or more major concepts that are discussed in the readings.
2. Evaluate concepts using various sources of knowledge, including personal experience and observation.
3. Include three or more citations from the readings in your analysis.

The Critical Response Papers will be graded on the following rubric:

Organized and clear to read	10 points
Free of grammar and spelling errors	10 points
Clearly explained major concepts discussed in the readings	30 points
Thoughtful analysis of the issue, reflecting on personal experience	30 points
Inclusion of citations from the readings	10 points
Insightful conclusion	10 points

One critical response paper will be written and due by Week 7 and another will be due by Week 12. You can choose to focus on any of the isms that we will have covered by Week 7 (Racism, Classism, Sexism, Gender Oppression) and write your first critical response on one of those, then for the second response paper you can choose any of the isms we cover in the second part of the semester (Heterosexism, Anti-Semitism, Religious Oppression, Ableism) and turn that in by Week 12.

Active, informed daily discussions of readings and videos and a written one page reaction to the day's readings

Everyone in the class must actively participate in class discussion every class meeting. **To facilitate discussion, each student is responsible for bringing, and turning in, a one-page reaction paper to the day's required readings.** No handwritten papers will be accepted – they must either be sent to the instructor the night before class, or brought to class neatly typed. As a class elicit discussion on the central issues in the readings, so please develop well-crafted and well thought out reactions to submit.

Outside Event Attendance

Throughout the semester, students will be challenged to walk outside of their comfort zones literally and figuratively. In the Outside Event Attendance assignment, students are expected to choose an experiential activity or performance that places them in the social identity minority or exposes them to a culture different than the one they identify with. Students should choose a cultural event that is relevant to one of the manifestations of oppression, which include racism, sexism, heterosexism, Anti-Semitism and religious oppression, classism, and ableism. Ideally, students will attend something they might not ordinarily attend. It is highly suggested that students pick groups that they feel they know the least about. Selected activities must be approved by instructor. The instructor will provide approved, selected events by email throughout the semester. Students are only expected to do one outside event, but understanding of these issues will only be enhanced if students choose to do more.

The in-class discussion should answer these questions:

1. Describe the event you attended. What made you choose this event? What were your ideas about the topic before you attended this event?
2. Describe your feelings while at the event. How did your identities compare with most people at the event?
3. Make some connections between ideas or themes that you see at the event, or that are implied by the event, to some of the concepts we have discussed in class. Possibilities can include the cycle of socialization, the levels of oppression, internalized oppression, and any other concepts that have come up in class.

Final Theatre Project

During the last class period, everyone will be expected to participate in a group written, directed, performed, and facilitated short piece that will possibly be worked into parts of our performances next semester. Performances are expected to be thoughtful, well written scenarios that confront issues of diversity and social justice. As a group you will be required to complete a written scenario, character analysis of each character in the scenario, and preliminary questions for facilitation of your scenario. Lastly, each individual in the team will do a 1-2 page group evaluation analyzing how each member of the group participated and contributed to the group's work. Please include an evaluation of your own contribution, as well. Groups will be selected shortly after the semester begins.

Personal Socialization Paper and Visioning/Reflection Paper

Students will complete two papers for the class, one at the beginning of the semester and the other at the end of the semester. The personal socialization paper is an opportunity for students to reflect on their development and identities up to this point in their lives. The visioning/reflection paper, to be turned in at the end of the semester, is an opportunity for students to think about how the course, their experiences, and opportunities have further developed their thinking concerning issues of social justice. Approximate length of the papers should be 4-6 pages long. **Papers will be graded on the same criteria specified for the Critical Response Papers.**

Personal Socialization Paper

This reflection process and paper require you to select gender or race or some other socialization category covered in class this semester. This paper is designed to help students reflect on the Cycle of Socialization Model that will be covered in class. This model will help students reflect on how in different identity groups they have been socialized into particular beliefs, roles, and actions according to societal, familial, and cultural influences. Students are to write a paper about specific incidents in their life relevant to their socialization around gender (or race, sexual orientation, etc.) and reflect back upon how these incidents made you feel at the time. Include in your paper reflections upon the process of socialization and explanations of any long-term impacts related to these gender (race, sexual orientation, or other) messages. References to the Cycle of Socialization should be included in the paper. **The assignment is due February 17.**

Visioning/Reflection Paper

The purpose of this paper is to get you to consider how you can take the information from this class and use it to be more active as an ally for social change. This is an opportunity for students to reflect on their personal development in the course as well as how they will be able to use the information they have learned. This assignment is due

Introduction:

Describe two major things you learned in class this semester (new insights, skills, awareness). Be as specific as you can in your description of what you learned as well as the source of this new learning. (i.e. - readings, films, class discussions, panels, etc.)

Part One: Select an Issue

Select an ism that you are open to doing more work on. It must be one of the isms we have discussed in class and should be something that you are committed to. Discuss thoroughly why you have chosen this ism. Explain its connection to your life (or people in your life/that you care about).

Describe where you think you are at in terms of your understanding and awareness about this issue.

Part Two: Action Steps

Describe what next steps you will be taking in terms of addressing/creating change around this ism. In class we have discussed the various levels that oppression occurs on (personal, cultural, and institutional), as well as concepts such as Cost/Benefits, Internalized Oppression, Privilege, Action Continuum, and Spheres of Influence. I expect that you will include a number of concepts from the course when describing what you are going to be doing. I have found it most useful to break action steps into time periods (i.e. - 3 months, 6 months, 12 months) to help you do what you say you are going to do.

Part Three: Obstacles and Strategies

Consider what might get in the way of you being able to carry out the action steps listed above and describe how you might address/overcome these obstacles. For example, one obstacle might be your own fear, and so in this section you would describe what the fear is and what you can do to overcome it/ move through it.

Proposed Class Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment Due
1		Introductions and Overview	
2		Identity Exploration/Intro to Social Justice/ Socialization	Cultural Chest Assessment Form
3		Racism	Socialization Paper
4		Privilege/ Racism	
5		Classism	
6			
7		Sexism/Gender Oppression	Critical Response #1 Due
8		Heterosexism	Outside Event Paper
9		Theatre Training / Movement	
10		Anti-Semitism / Religious Oppression	
11		Ableism	
12			
13		Liberation / Ally Development	Critical Response #2 Due
14		Final Class Performance	Final Theatre Project Visioning Reflection Paper

*NOTE: Critical response papers can be completed at anytime during the semester when there are readings to be completed on a particular “ism.” Each class period, students should arrive with a one-page reaction paper as your “ticket” to get into class.