Critical Consciousness:

A Course on Swarthmore Community

Issues of Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation

Katie Bowman '94
Maika Watanabe '95
Mara Willard '96

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Women and Education Course
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We are concerned with the lack of cohesion in the Swarthmore community. First-year students in particular have expressed a feeling that the 'community' is hidden and fragmented. During the transition to college, first-year students need a supportive community in which each individual feels secure and recognized by fellow community members. Unfortunately, many people on this campus, not only first-year students, feel that their voices are not heard by those outside of their specific racial, sexual, or gender experience.

Students who are already concerned with issues of race, gender, and sexuality address these topics in some academic studies and in their own daily interactions. Yet people who are not aware of these issues often remain outside of the dialogue, not realizing the implications that issues of gender, race, and sexuality have on everyone in the Swarthmore environment. The unaware students often do not confront these issues, thereby they remain ignorant and insensitive to the needs of their fellow students. We are interested in building a tighter community by raising awareness, thus validating the diversity of experiences on this campus.

As our final project for the Women and Education course, we propose a mandatory, semester-long course for first-year students entitled Critical Consciousness. Why "Critical Consciousness?" We want students to critically examine their own consciousness (biases, prejudices) in relation to the Swarthmore community. This course introduces crucial aspects of Swarthmore students' lives by openly discussing issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation. We hope that by raising awareness, we develop a campus community (peer/faculty/administration/staff) sensitive to the needs of all community members.

Discussion groups of 10 - 15 students meet with a faculty member and a few volunteer upperclass students each week. Most weeks, the groups meet independently, but occasionally the entire first-year class gets together in a large lecture hall to watch a film or hear a speaker. Following the full-class gathering, small groups reconvene to discuss the presentation. We recommend one complete week's meeting time not to exceed one and 1/2 hours. We do not want to add to the already heavy Swarthmore workload. Therefore the class requires minimal readings: a few articles and case studies each week. Like the P.E. credit, Critical Consciousness is mandatory for graduation. Students are only allowed one absence.

In order to avoid students' dismissal of these important issues as something that does not exist at Swarthmore, it is essential to connect these issues to life at the college. We believe fully in the Quaker saying, "Let your life speak." So, we have collected a few personal case studies from Swarthmore community members, and have received promises of many more.

We propose a course format as follows:

Week 1 - No class (Allow students to adjust to classes).
Week 2 - Overview
Week 3 - Race
Week 4 - Race

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Week 5 - Gender
Week 6 - Gender
Week 7 - No class (Free up time for midterms)
(October Break)
Week 8 - Sexual Orientation
Week 9 - Sexual Orientation
Week 10 - Class? "Religion"?
Week 11 - Thanksgiving break
Week 12 - Swarthmore/Quaker traditions of toleration, Collection
   Existence and value of identity-specific groups
   Campus Resources
   Integration of material - How to take these issues outside of
   the course?
   Thorough evaluation of the course
Week 13 - No class (Week off so students can prepare for finals).

Each of us has focused on one of the three main topics: race, gender, and
sexual orientation. We independently designed a curriculum for her section. We
proceeded to structure the course based on how each of us designed her individual
curriculum. We selected race as the first issue of discussion since the curriculum on
race is activity-oriented, facilitating discussion in a situation where students do not
know each other well. The gender curriculum, as the second topic, addresses gender
dynamics in the classroom environment, requiring students to have had some
experience in the Swarthmore classroom (which they would have had by Week 5).
Finally, we have placed issues of sexual orientation as the third main topic of this
course. While most first-year students may not have had much experience discussing
this topic in high school, they perhaps have engaged in this type of dialogue by Week
8 at Swarthmore.

Small Group Composition

1.) 10 - 15 students
2.) One faculty member and one upperclass student as facilitators who have gone
    through an intensive facilitation training.
3.) Equal gender representation
4.) Try to place at least two people of color together per small group. Students of color
    have expressed a concern that it is very difficult to talk about issues of race when you
    are the only person of color within that group. We hope that by placing more than one
    student of color in a group, students of color will feel more comfortable/safe discussing
    these topics. We would prefer to have an all-Caucasian group than to have just one
    person of color represented in a group. There is some question as to whether the
    identities of International Students of Color should be recognized as separate from
    identities of American Students of Color. We believe that though international students
    of color have unique cultural experiences different from U.S. students, they are still
    perceived by others as students of color in general. Therefore, we will not differentiate

\(^2\) See discussion of future additions to course at end.
between international students of color and American students of color in the composition of the small groups. Furthermore, we believe that it is not necessarily important that the two students of color who are in the group should share a common racial/ethnic background, but various student groups such as the Swarthmore Asian Organization, Hispanic Organization for Latin American Awareness, and the Swarthmore African-American Student Society should be contacted for input on this matter. These groups were consulted last year in brainstorming for the Race section of this course.

Facilitators

Facilitator training is crucial in order for Critical Consciousness to work. As we have discovered in our discussions in our Women and Education course, some professors have the natural knack to lead discussion and moderate dialogue. Other professors, unfortunately, need more work in this area. The course would be a frustrating experience for all if the facilitators were not trained and skilled in moderating dialogue. Professors who we have spoken to, for example, Abbe Blum, have expressed a concern that it is very difficult to facilitate discussion about these sensitive issues without having some type of a workshop beforehand. It is equally important for upperclass student facilitators to also undergo this training since many have never had any experience leading discussion at all. We have come up with some possible organizations that may agree to hold intensive workshop sessions for facilitators:

1.) The National Coalition Building Institute
    Director and Trainer: Cherie R. Brown
    Leads Prejudice Reduction Leaders Institute
    For information, contact:

    The National Coalition Building Institute
    172 Brattle Street
    Arlington, MA 02174
    (617) 646 - 5802

    * For more information on The National Coalition Building Institute, please contact Dean Bob Gross’s Diversity folder in the Dean’s Office.

2.) ECLIPSE, an organization in Philadelphia

3.) Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith in New York City

4.) Zara Jaffee
    Community Housing and Resource Board
    441 S. Jackson Street
    Media

We believe that it is very important for the facilitators to go through this exact
curriculum so that they get a feel for what it may be like to go through the course as a student. We propose two options for the time frame in facilitator training:

a.) Provide facilitator training during an intensive short period of time such as Orientation Week

b.) Provide option of a course/seminar for students and faculty the semester before the actual course for first year students