Addendum to Critical Consciousness:  
A Course on Swarthmore Community

During the month of October, organization members from HOLA, SAO, SASS, LBGA, 
and the Sager Committee reviewed the proposal and sent in feedback. Sections of 
their feedback are reprinted here with the writers’ permission.

From Ivan Perez, President of HOLA

My one true suggestion is that you spend some time on class. The class issue is very 
important in this country and I think that to truly understand many things about the 
other topics the differences that class makes is important. So I would study the three 
topics and then get into class. I know I have wondered how class can make people 
who supposedly are of the same background so different. Or even why class lines 
sometimes affect the way we view the other divisions of society. I think that discussion 
on this issue would be great in your course, especially for students who may for the 
first time spend a lot of time with people of different class standings.

Each of the units seem well designed. I think the best ways to improve on them would 
come not from my suggestions but from feedback after an attempt at the class had 
been made.

I do think that there should be some attempt to integrate some of the ideas. So race 
and sexual orientation need not be entirely different. There are people of color that 
deal with having to come out, and gay-bashing, etc. I think that looking at these things 
may be an important part of accomplishing the goals.

From Ellen Chen, SAO IC Intern

-I would argue that it is imperative that issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, and 
class be linked together. I would like to see these issues, addressed as interlocking 
forms of power in our society, be linked by the overall framework of the course.

-I fully agree with Ivan that class should be discussed in this course. It’s an issue often 
ignored on this campus- an issue fully linked to issues of race and ethnic sub-groups 
within race. What kind of assumptions are made here in terms of class- money, 
educational background, lifestyle, and status?

-I believe that such a course should concentrate mostly on interactive educational 
formats, perhaps based on less reading and more workshop exercises, videos, 
speakers. (This is where same group discussions, forced choice exercises, 
predicament games, roleplays, concentration of personal experiences, images from 
popular culture come in...) Such a concentration would allow students 
1)to be exposed to different styles and resources for learning often not available in 
Swarthmore’s "academically-oriented" environment
2) to bring these issues into their own lives- Not to see them as PC jargon placed upon them or as issues affecting "those people, not me"
3) to notice how everyday interactions, events, images involve these issues.

These interactive educational formats would only be useful if there was proper facilitation. There would be so many benefits to student's playing an active role in designing and facilitating the course. I cannot stress how much I learned at Asian Americans United (AAU) this summer by designing and running workshops. I learned and applied skills that have affected my view of my academic work, classroom dynamics, individual dialogue, organizational structure, activism... Undoubtedly, my experience has aided my work with the IC and with SAO, rejuvenating energy and preventing total burnout.

In speaking to Ellen by phone, she also mentioned the importance of including students in the facilitation process. Perhaps student facilitators could take a preparation course with credit (sponsored by perhaps the Program in Education) and work on revising the curriculum each year. In this fashion, the course would continually be reevaluated and rewritten so that topics would be pertinent and up-to-date. Besides learning the skill of curriculum writing, students would practice organization skills, working with various resource organizations, and learn to handle diverse group dynamics.

From Keelyn Bradley, SASS President

Thank you for your patience in waiting for a response to the curriculum you asked the leadership of SASS to review. I would also like to thank you for your efforts in trying to come up with a concrete and long-term solution to the issue of dialogue and education in a Multicultural Community. This letter is to discuss the position of the SASS Executive Board about the Critical Consciousness curriculum and to share with you some of the responses of the larger Black Community.

I made another copy of your curriculum and submitted it to the Executive Board to be reviewed. The responses to the course varied. Everyone agreed that the proposed text was an important resource to begin effectively studying the possible ways of implementing responsible and thorough Multicultural curriculum into the Swarthmore Community. But how a course would be structured to do that or instituted into the daily life of students was not agreed upon as easily. We feel that it is important that the students, faculty, and administrators go beyond a particular course and move towards establishing educational, cultural, and social support systems that are necessary when dealing with the "uncomfortable" topics of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and religious preferences. Ideally, we would like to see these topics illuminated in all academic areas of this college community—in an effective and healthy manner and form. Beyond the classroom, there needs to be a clear understanding of the ways in which issues of power pervade throughout the social and personal interactions of different cultural, ethnic, and sexual groups on campus. There is also the fact that one course, because we are dealing with students from so many
various backgrounds, who have been socialized by a system that is still in effect and held up as legitimate, is not going to be enough to lessen some of the societal strains that we feel working throughout the Swarthmore Community.

Many of the concerns of this course are about its ability to effect the attitudes of people on campus, and how it would demand a real effort by its participants. While it would be easier for administrators and faculty members to deal with this course as a graduation requirement without a grade, like the P.E. requirement, there is the strong possibility that this would only work against the level of seriousness at which the course would be taken. The academy needs to change its esoteric ideas of what is rigorous, enlightening, and socially valuable. If this course is going to have any real possibility of changing attitudes and provoking serious discussion, it must also challenge the intellectual discrimination that exists. This can only be achieved if this course has a strong academic presence in this “intellectual community,” as well as a strong content and structure. Also, the issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation can not be examined in static instances. If we are going to examine the way “minority” or “marginalized” peoples exist within a white, heterosexual, male social construct, as we should be doing, we have to examine the ways in which those aforementioned issues work within the various, individual communities on campus. None of these biases (“isms”) are going to be cured unless we begin to look at each other in many, individual instances. It is important that the information proposed in your course be examined cross-culturally. All of these concerns come up with the realization that this course is only the beginning of much needed work in these areas.

The Executive Board of SASS is committed to working with you on these issues.

After the Executive Board had discussed the course, it was then presented to the larger Black Community. The following were some of the questions and suggestions they had to offer:

Suggestions/Concerns

--the course could be an interdisciplinary requirement (humanities, social sciences, etc.); the requirement would be to fill the requirement in whatever department the student chose; this would eliminate any extra requirements that could possibly prevent a student from graduating

--the course should be more rigorous than a 1hr. session; it might be offered at 3hrs. a week with a grade

--the course is very one-sided; “minorities” and people of color are put under a microscope

QUESTIONS

--How are you going to find the number of trained faculty or faculty willing to be trained, when they have there own things to work out?
--Is this going to be a course that is developed to aid in the multicultural studies push (trend) or is it going to be just another course (with its own specific intentions--unrelated to outside forces)?

From the Sager Committee (via Professor George Moskos):

Comments made by the committee in yesterday's meeting (October, 1993) were

1) The organizers should strive for parity (in readings and presentations) between lesbians and gay men. The sessions seem presently to be heavily weighted towards the male
2) There should be both faculty, students and staff present at those sessions, not just a half-hour speech by a faculty member
3) You might look to LBGA and students who have done Topics in Sexuality for help in organizing.

I hope these comments will be of some help to you. Thanks for your consideration.

From Mary Helen Dupree, LBGA Co-Coordinator

I was very impressed by the organization and the content of the course- good job! It shows a lot of sensitivity and attention to detail on the part of the authors. I'm afraid my comments may sound vague and general...

I would like to reiterate the comment someone in SAGER made about the need for more of a student voice in the homosexuality section, although I think it's great that George Moskos is going to participate. Also, I think you come dangerously close to indoctrination in some places... I think it's great to try to get people to be more open-minded. However, you will have to deal with people who disagree with the import of the course to begin with, and who will feel alienated and marginalized by the whole thing. Perhaps by adding a section on diversity of opinion...? Anyway, if this course is implemented, it will inevitably appear to students as expressing the views of the school, so I think we should be very careful not to force dogma on students. Also, I wonder whether having the course the first semester of freshman year is such a good idea, what with the sort of adjustments the frosh are having to make during this time. Basically, I think we should make people feel as comfortable as possible.

--November 11, 1993

Compiled by Maika Watanabe '95. Comments can be addressed to mwatana1 through e-mail or through campus mail.