

Voices



Members of the Commission for Social Justice Educators Directorate Body

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COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATORS' NEWSLETTER
SUMMER SEMESTER 2012

Edited by Deborah Slosberg and Elizabeth Thompson,
Voices Co-coordinators

Message from Commission Chair Brian Arao

Brian Arao, Associate Director of Student Housing and Residential Education, University of San Francisco
Greetings, commission members!

This past summer, we were pleased to host the Student Social Justice Training Institute at my home institution, the University of San Francisco. A number of our own students attended the institute, where they had an opportunity to learn about the concept of social justice as both a process and a goal (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). As we prepare to welcome them back to campus for another academic year, I look forward to engaging them more around this concept, one that I find to be enormously rich and complex. In particular, I am continually struck by the idea that, in the act of pursuing social justice, our understanding of social justice itself evolves. The experiences of social groups that were previously omitted from equity and inclusion discourse are illuminated. As we attend to these emerging truths, we are able to see if and how they have been honored within social justice movements; if they have not, we are able to wrestle with how our process itself must change in order to align with the expanding scope of our goal of justice for all.

Each of the authors in this edition of *Voices* call our attention to aspects of social justice work in higher education that may otherwise go unexamined. In so doing, they raise provocative, and perhaps even controversial, questions about both the process and the goal of social justice work in student affairs. It is my hope that each piece will represent the starting point for a conversation amongst the members of the Commission for Social Justice Educators. If you are stirred by what you read, we welcome you to share your voice and continue the dialogue. Feel free to chime in via Facebook and Twitter. If you've got more to say than can be communicated via social media, consider posting to the commission listserv or preparing an entry for our upcoming commission blog. And of course, you too can always write for our next edition of *Voices*!

I wish you the very best as you prepare for the start of the academic year, and look forward to engaging with you about the content of this edition of *Voices* very soon.

References

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Reflections from a Past Generation:

Reflections on ACPA's Institute on Social Justice in 2010

From Notes From the Margins, November 2010

Coleen Slosberg, Campus Minister, United Campus Ministry at Western Michigan University

Summer of 2011, the Presbyterian Church (PC), USA gave back to the local presbyteries the responsibility for determining who is to be ordained to ministry. October 2010, the church in Wisconsin ordained its first openly gay man. This action brings PC(USA) in line with other mainstream denominations like the United Church of Christ (UCC), the Episcopal Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). In addition it is consistent with changes in society, law, and the military. However, it is causing much discomfort in many places. Congregations are struggling to figure out how to respond to this change after 30 years of discussion and dialogue over issues of sexual orientation.

All I can think is that they should come and spend some time in my shoes, on the college campus. I have seen the future and I don't know which bathroom to use!

With my daughter, Deborah, I attended the American College Personnel Association's Institute on Social Justice in Fall of 2011 at Loyola University in Chicago. It is a gathering of college professionals working in student life. Like Deborah, most of the professionals are between 25 and 35 years old. I am over 60.

In most gatherings, I am one of the most liberal-leaning people. At this particular gathering I was almost conservative, a throwback to a different time.

In order to make everyone feel comfortable, they explained, there would be no ladies' room or men's room; instead, there was a unisex bathroom.

This left me confused. If both sexes used the room, how did I know whether there were men in the room? Was I supposed to just walk in, nod to the guy at the urinal and pass on to the stall? Do you nod to men standing at a urinal? Or do you just ignore them? There were all these intricacies that I did not understand. Actually, I had never even seen a urinal. Why are we even talking about this?

I walked back to my small group and asked if we were engaged in some kind of sensitivity training? My group members could not believe me. Did I not know? Had I not heard? Was I blind? There were those among us who were transgender, they carefully explained to me, people who were physically one gender but identified as the other gender. By having unisex bathrooms, everyone could feel comfortable, not having to choose one identity over the other one.

I suddenly knew how my mother felt. Born in 1919, she traveled North to attend the first graduate program to train college student affairs professionals. Before she left North Carolina, she was warned by her grandmother "not to marry a Northerner." She did, and since then has watched two daughters marry Jewish men, one daughter marry a German, one grandchild marry a Chinese woman, and most recently, she has greeted a daughter bringing her African-American partner to a family wedding.

I had actually said to her that before she died we would probably acknowledge gay family members. And now I could not figure out the etiquette around a unisex bathroom! I was feeling old.

I have seen the future, and the circle keeps expanding. I have become part of the "conservative" generation: the ones to conserve the traditions. We need a ladies' room and a men's room. But the circle is expanding. As our family intermingles religious traditions and ethnic background, we expand the circle of who "we" are.

As my mother's generation expanded our circle to include a Northerner, as my generation expanded it to include Jewish, German, and African-American, my daughter's generation is expanding the circle to consider and confront issues of sexual identity.

Hanging out on campus keeps me relatively young and in tune with the changes in culture. Through service learning, I have a chance to impact college students as they claim a vocation and an identity. I even text, though not while driving!

But at the conference I saw a whole new edge to this cultural change. Our work around the previous issues is not finished but I am confident, with the college professionals I saw at ACPA's Institute on Social Justice, with them inhabiting the campus, we will continue to confront the "old" issues of racism and sexism, while taking on this new and sometimes uncomfortable layer of inclusiveness: gender identity.

I feel good about the future. Now I just need to figure it out. What do you do with a unisex bathroom? And that may be the next question to unsettle the church.

The Limits of Production in Social Justice Education

Stephanie Bondi, Student Conduct Officer, University of West Georgia

Focused on Action

After gaining awareness of social inequities students often bombard me with questions like, "What am I supposed to do?" Students are most interested in knowing specific things they can do to fix the unfairness, discrimination, and oppression we discuss in class. They often ask, "How do we fix it?" Commonly I respond (a) increase your awareness of the issues; (b) evaluate yourself to understand where you are complicit with oppressive systems; (c) talk with and listen to others about their experiences; (d) confront stereotypes and oppressive statements; and finally, (e) educate others (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 2002).

I write this piece to address the common feeling that in social justice work we need to focus primarily on doing something. I want student affairs professionals to expand these commonly held notions of what it means to be involved in social justice. I ask us to move beyond doing workshops, confronting oppressive statements, and participating in dialogues. These practices have their benefits but limiting ourselves to them limits our ability to work for equity.

Before I explain the benefits of broadening our approach to social justice, let me acknowledge some of the origins of our focus on action. First and most directly, many of our social justice education and literature urges us to move to action. For example, Kivel (2002) explains numerous oppressive practices and policies. For each practice or policy he offers a number of things one can do including write a letter, organize a group in your community to monitor police presence, ask questions, and work with others to establish alternative funding mechanisms for schools.

Similar to what Kivel did by organizing a portion of the book around what we can do, action is often described as primary to social justice work. This philosophy holds that professionals concerned about social justice should spend their time and energy confronting discriminatory statements, practices, and policies complicit with oppressive systems. I believe action is important in social justice work. Yet, I still wish to examine the centrality of action in the pursuit of social justice. I also want to highlight its ideological underpinnings. I will next explore how the notion of doing action became central in our western society and how this limits social justice education and social change.

Messages Related to Eurocentrism and Capitalism

As I explained, student affairs professionals get the message from many of our trainings, workshops, and literature on social justice that we should be backing up our values with action. I submit these messages

in Western societies stem from our preferences for production and development driven by Eurocentrism and capitalism. I will next define these elements briefly for the sake of discussion in this article. Production is the creation of something, and development is the notion new things informed by science should replace traditional things. The privileging of values and practices of Europeans is Eurocentrism. Eurocentric values and practices such as production, development, and capitalism were spread by brute force (e.g., killing native peoples who would not conform) (Bush, 2006) and economic dominance (e.g., controlling access to affordable food, water, policy making) (Amin, 1997). Capitalism is the market system driven by generating profits for capitalists through the sales of items. In the next section, I link these concepts with elements of social justice work and more specifically the centrality of action in our social justice approaches.

I assert the ways we decide what counts as good work are directly linked to ideals of capitalism (i.e., efficient production). For instance, we are rewarded when we answer a question or complete an assignment; these are moments of production. Also, faculty are rewarded for research they produce; the more they produce the more they are rewarded.

Educators and other individuals take the privileging of production for granted. When we as people and social justice educators do not question the privileging of production we continue to perpetuate this as the status quo and devalue that which is deemed not productive. The issue I want to bring to the attention of student affairs professionals is how we limit ourselves as social justice educators and as people by focusing primarily on production or action oriented work.

I want to give another example of how action is centered in our western perspective. Recently I was with a group of social justice educators. We had gathered for several days to renew ourselves in the work. After the first day I started to hear people talking about how they were disappointed the leaders had not created specific activities for us. Some felt the gathering was a going to be a waste of time without them. At some point after I had heard these concerns voiced by several people, I challenged the group to look beyond activities or action. I offered the following points. Sharing the space contributed to our experience. Having
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moments to reflect and connect with ourselves and others builds community and strength within us individually.

Engaging in ritual enriches our lives. Noticing the interdependence of humans and the Earth deepens our ability to live social justice. These elements can strengthen our support network and/or nurture us to keep at our work. Within the group some folks appreciated the nudge to forego planned educational activities (production) for other benefits.

In education and social justice work more specifically, we focus primarily on production and not on being. Examples of being are (a) being in relation with, (b) being in community, (c) being present, and (d) being connected to the natural world. I chose to write about the privileging of production in social justice education because if someone had not shared these ideas with me, I would still believe that production is the most important thing. I would not see its roots in an oppressive ideology related to Eurocentrism and capitalism. I would still be focused primarily on getting things done and making things better, which would limit my potential as a social justice advocate and educator. When I continue to privilege production, I miss out on connecting with the Earth, relating with others, and rejuvenating my spirit—all things that contribute to my ability to be a social justice advocate and educator.

Students will continue to ask me what can be done for social justice and I will probably still respond with the common responses to read books to better understand issues and speak up when issues are not being addressed. I will also encourage students and professionals alike to participate in some practices that may seem not to fit the mold of action per se. I submit if we also place value on and turn our educational efforts toward promoting the values of being, connection, ritual, and rejuvenation we will have a much more robust social justice understanding and education.

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Is invisible diversity of any value to the academy?

Amanda Espenschied-Reilly,

Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education Administration and Student Personnel, Kent State

While trying to choose a dissertation topic, I kept remembering an experience I had as a service-learning director while observing in an education course. The instructor was preparing teacher candidates for their service-learning in a low income school. The instructor was going over the differences the teacher candidates were going to see in the school and explaining how the teacher candidates should “be prepared to be shocked” by behaviors, dress, and lack of preparedness and skills. The instructor was speaking as if everyone in the room were middle to upper class and that the school at which they were going to volunteer was going to be unlike anything they would have previously experienced. I was aggravated with the deficit based language being used; he only spoke of negatives, deficiencies or what these low-income students lacked (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009). I was also angry about the assumptions being made by this instructor. I knew that at least one of these teacher candidates was a working class student because she had been to see me about a local clothing closet because she needed clothing appropriate for pre-service teaching. I fumed thinking of her, listening to these negative descriptions of a school and students, which was likely similar to her experiences growing up. I was angry thinking that if the instructor had been using similar language to describe students of a different race or ethnicity, like he was using to describe low SES students, it would not be tolerated by the teacher candidates or the university. In fact, I doubted that even the instructor would have tolerated it, denouncing such language as racist and bigoted. I was angry, but the young woman said nothing to counter or correct the words of the instructor. She did not seem outwardly upset or uncomfortable. She was covering, hiding or negotiating part of her identity in order to “fit in” with the presumed majority (Tooms, 2007). Her social class status was not visible. She looked just like all of the other teacher candidates in class that day, a traditionally aged, White, casually dressed woman. She fit the image of what most people think of when they picture a student from a small, selective, private and expensive institution. Because her social class status was something she could cover from others in order to fit in, she did. This gave her a certain privilege that other diverse students, such as many students of color, don’t have. She could hide her differences, so she did. While this allowed her to fit in with her peers, it also allowed people to freely disrespect her differences. Both teacher candidates and the instructor felt free to discuss the topic of poverty as if it occurred elsewhere,

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“out in the field”, to other people. Not as if poverty was present there in the classroom, hearing their words and often hurtful and ignorant opinions. This was a powerful moment for me; one that drives me in my research. I wanted to be able to give students like this young woman a voice; to listen to their academic and social experiences in service-learning classrooms where poverty is a heavy focus of course readings and dialogues.

In retrospect, I don't blame this instructor. Much of the service-learning literature is still written from the perspective of White, middle to upper class college students. During my dissertation literature review, it was easy to find service-learning work, but much harder to find work that focused on the perspectives of minority students and even harder to find work focusing on low SES students. Since more low income students are attending college (and with that number expected to continue to increase) I found myself asking why they would not garner more research attention. There are some logistical challenges to working with low SES students. You need students to self-identify, which they may be reluctant to do as most Americans are reluctant to speak about class (hooks, 1994). Additionally, because of this reluctance, most Americans will identify as middle class. Also, unlike some other types of diversity, SES can change over the course of a person's lifetime; it is not static. But, I would also assert that in the academy there are types of diversity that are more valued and therefore more focused upon for research, funding, services, and even celebration. My having been involved with several search committees, diversity initiatives and events on several campuses has prompted this idea. It is not uncommon to hear discussions of increasing the number of women, various nationalities or ethnicities or people of color on campuses. I have even seen ads encouraging professionals of various sexual orientations to apply for positions. It is not uncommon for even small campuses to have offices dealing with diversity, disability, and international student services. Additionally, there are frequently student organizations for women students, Black students, Hispanic students, LGBT students, international students and many others. I know that this was not always true and that many of these offices and organizations were hard won. Even when they do exist they are often understaffed, under budgeted and challenged to justify their existence. However, I find myself asking why some types of diversity are supported and celebrated and others are not. When was the last time you were on a campus with a support

office specifically for low SES students or a student organization for students with mental illness? When was the last time you were involved in a discussion concerned about increasing the number of faculty members from poor backgrounds or saw a position announcement encouraging recovering addicts to apply? Are these not types of diversity? Why do we concern ourselves with some types of diversity and not others?

This is a complicated question. There certainly are historical, political and legal answers to that question. But I don't think it stops there and as professionals concerned with social justice we need to challenge ourselves and our colleagues with this question. What makes some types of diversity more valuable to the academy? Why do certain diversity groups have more emphasis placed on them for hiring, enrollment, services, funding and research? I think much of it has to do with visibility, value, and blame. I think many individuals with “invisible diversity”, such as low SES, tend to cover their identities, like that young woman in the education course. They cover because they can; these identities are not visible like many others such as race. That invisibility gives them the privilege to cover, but also makes them less valuable to the university because if your diversity can not be seen, the university can also not promote or leverage it. But these individuals may also cover because they feel they have to in order to avoid discrimination and retribution. People such as low income individuals, people with mental disabilities, and recovering addicts are still considered at fault for their differences. They are still what I think of as “Irish Need Not Apply” diversity groups. If you're poor or bi-polar or an alcoholic many think this is your fault; that if you tried harder or were a better person you could simply fix yourself and not be a burden on others. So there is a certain ugliness or deficient status carried by these individuals that a university would not want to leverage, promote and advertise. But also, you cannot readily see a person's income, mental health or addiction status. Therefore, the university cannot use images of these types of diversity on promotional materials, lecture announcements, websites, etc. This lessens the value of these individuals, as universities cannot then display them in order to show their commitment to diversity. I think back to a comment a Black colleague made to me at one point. She said that she

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felt exploited after her hire because her image was so over-used by the institution, particularly after she dreaded her hair. But once a Black male faculty member was hired, she felt that attention switched to him as he was far more "rare" in the institution.

My point with this piece is not to disparage the great strides in diversity we have made on campuses. Nor is it meant to belittle the challenges faced by any faculty, staff or students on campuses today interested in advancing the cause of diversity. My point is to complicate the topic and to challenge ourselves, so that we do not rest too lightly on our laurels. We must continue to widen our definitions of diversity less then become institutionalized and static. Diversity goes beyond observable differences and these "invisible" differences need to be protected, respected and celebrated as well. We need to become aware of the mosaic of students in our classrooms and colleagues on our floors and realize that there are still individuals that feel that they must cover who they really are in order to exist safely in the ivory tower. This is not something that those of us truly dedicated to social justice should be willing to tolerate.

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The Social Media Corner: Blogging for Justice

We are pleased to announce that the ACPA Commission for Social Justice Educators will soon be joining the blogging world. We sought out a few folks whom we admire for their contributions to the field and know that others will enjoy reading the musings, thoughts, concerns, and even ramblings about the field of social justice and its interactions with higher education, student affairs, college student development, and more.

The blog is hosted on tumblr at <http://acpacsje.tumblr.com/>. You'll notice that it's blank right now because our debut isn't until September 4th! At that point, we'll post one contributor's blog weekly. We'll send the word out on the CSJE Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/ACPA.CSJE>), from our Twitter account (@ACPA_CSJE), and from our personal Facebook and Twitter accounts. This blog will only be successful if you help us spread the word! Please "like," "share," and re-tweet us!

Wondering when you can contribute? We would LOVE to have our very own CSJE members write for the blog! If you're interested, please contact Brian Reece (reece@uoregon.edu) and Erica Thompson (ekgeers@gmail.com). Currently, we'll be scheduling posts for after October 23rd. Please also feel free to suggest authors to us!

Want to contribute to future issues of Voices?

Articles must provide information that is useful, relevant, and of interest to social justice educators who work within higher education. Ideas for topics might include new, innovative training techniques, summary of new research, case studies, book reviews, or information on how social justice educators might address prominent social issues, such as supporting students from historically marginalized groups on predominantly white, heterosexual, middle class campuses. Creative, evocative, personal, and humorous yet thought-provoking content is appreciated.

Our members often have constraints on their time and therefore, we ask that submitted articles provide comprehensive information succinctly. This should include brief vibrant paragraphs, the avoidance of jargon and overly complicated terminology, clear and concise sentences, and when necessary, bulleted or listed items.

Article length should be 300 to 1500 words. All articles must be submitted in 12-point type, Times New Roman font, double-spaced, in Microsoft Word (.doc) or rich text format (.rtf). Authors are responsible for the accuracy of references, quotations, tables, and figures.

Please contact Elizabeth Thompson (elizabethrthompson@gmail.com) and Deborah Slosberg (slosberg@gmail.com) with questions and for more information.



Call for Papers for Spring 2013 Issue of Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis (JCTP)

Examining Policy Formation & Practice: Who Really Benefits?

Submission Deadline: October 1, 2012

The editorial board of the Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis (JCTP) currently welcomes submissions that address topics highlighting the theme - *Examining Policy Formation & Practice: Who Really Benefits?* Manuscripts submitted to JCTP for this call should contribute to the knowledge base within the field of social justice as it pertains to policy and practice. All manuscripts should contribute to new or redefined conceptual understandings of policy impacting inequities in education, sustainability, the environment, health, and international, federal, and state politics.

We are seeking original, innovative, and applicable work relevant to the study and practice of social justice issues related to policy. Special consideration will be given to:

- Policy analysis
- Arts-based research
- Theoretical essays
- Critical inquiry and methodology
- Social justice practitioner reflections
- Accounts from activists
- Book reviews

JCTP is a peer reviewed online journal whose primary purpose is to provide a space for critical and progressive scholarship, practice, and activism. Our mission is to disseminate an accessible and inter/transdisciplinary journal that supports awareness and challenges individuals to move towards advocacy. The journal brings together emerging scholars, educators, and activists with the intention of providing recognition to the work of the social justice community. JCTP explores, challenges, and pushes the boundaries within the intersections of identity in a multicultural society, while providing all authors with developmental feedback.

Specific Guidelines:

- Deadline: October 1, 2012 (with expectations of revisions following peer review).
- Submissions must include an abstract and should be no more than 30 pages double-spaced (not including abstract, figures, photos, tables, appendices, notes, and references). Manuscripts should follow APA 6th Edition guidelines (if applicable to manuscript). Please include a cover letter with your submission explaining how your work contributes to the issue's theme as well as to the mission and scope of JCTP.
- For more detailed author guidelines and submission procedures, please see the journal's website <http://www.elps.hs.iastate.edu/sjournal.php>
- For further information or inquiry about the Spring 2013 issue, please contact JCTP editors, Lisette Torres and Cameron Beatty, at jctp@iastate.edu.

The Commission of Social Justice

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|-------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
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