



ACPA
COMMISSION FOR
Social Justice
Educators

convention 2011 edition



Message from Chair: Kristi Lonardo Clemens

Convention 2011 is nearly here, and it is shaping up to be an exciting one!

Convention 2011 is nearly here, and it is shaping up to be an exciting one! Not only are we in Baltimore-home of crab cakes and John Waters- but there are many exciting initiatives that CSJE is a part of, as well as a number of association-wide programs that should make this year's convention one of the best in several years!

Hopefully you've had a chance to read the Be More emails that have been coming from the International office. I particularly want to highlight the information on "Give More" that came to your inbox on

March 6th. We have often talked about seeking opportunities to do some outreach and volunteerism while at convention, and this initiative cosponsored by the Commissions for Student Involvement and Admissions, Orientation, and the First Year Experience. More information on projects here: <http://convention.myacpa.org/baltimore/volunteer.php>

In terms of the commission, we are happy to report that we've sponsored or co-sponsored six fantastic programs this year. Check out the list on page 3 of this newsletter! Additionally, we were one of a handful of constituent

groups invited to create and present a Convention Institute. An institute is a series of programs that are linked through a shared curriculum, but can still stand on their own should participants choose not to commit to the entire series.

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Our institute will focus on the real life implications of social justice education- who is visible, who has a voice, and how to work with our colleagues and students more intentionally. We were motivated by the stories of bullying, anonymity, and immigration laws that we could so easily reference on each of our campuses, so please bring your real life experiences to these sessions for discussion!

Some of you may be wondering about the vote to consolidate ACPA with NASPA, which will be open from March 15-April 15. If you have read the proposed framework, you may have noticed that our commission is not included in the new organization. Brian and I have had conversations with President-Elect Heidi Levine, and she fully understands our frustration with this development. While we understand that this is not a final overview of the new association, I must let you know how disappointed I am that we will need to justify our existence in whatever the new association becomes. For those of you that have been with the commission for some time, you may remember that we had a bit of an uphill battle to be recognized in 2005. There were many who did not think that we needed a group of our own, or thought that we would negatively impact their commission. We have proven to be a good partner to other commissions and standing committees, while paving the way for new initiatives of our own such as the Dial-A-Dialogue program, the Institute on Social Justice, and are working towards a publication in the next few years. I am hopeful that we continue to have a place at the table if consolidation is approved, but we do not have a guarantee.

As we head into the voting period as well as convention, I would strongly encourage you to take any opportunities you have to engage colleagues and association leadership in a conversation about our omission. We have always believed that ACPA has a strongly held belief in social justice as a pillar of our field, and yet we are one of only 3 commissions that does not exist in the new Communities of Practice structure, of which there are 29. How did we get to this place? I will own my conflict- I believe that consolidation is needed and have supported it since the beginning, but I am concerned about the guiding principles of this new organization if social justice is not a part of it. I encourage you to do your homework and read the consolidation documents, and cast your vote thoughtfully. If you are attending convention, please come to our open meeting on Tuesday for a more in-depth discussion of our future.

In Baltimore, I will pass the Chair position to Brian Arao, who has been a part of the commission since our beginnings in 2004.

We are incredibly lucky to have his leadership as we navigate the next steps of consolidation. Brian is a patient and thoughtful advocate, and will be able to represent the commission in the best possible ways. I know that he will not let us lose momentum on the projects that are important to us. A few years ago, when we didn't have a Past-Chair, we discussed possible responsibilities for that person to take on. We decided that the Past-Chair should be an advocate for the commission, and be the primary voice to name issues both in the association and in the field. While we never anticipated that we would need to advocate in this way, I am happy to continue in that role and appeal for our continued existence in the next iteration of our professional association. CSJE has been so important to me professionally and personally, and I thank you all for that. I look forward to seeing some of you in Baltimore, and continuing the work that we have started here.

Best Regards,
Kristi Clemens



Kristi Lonardo Clemens

Chair

Dartmouth College

kristi.l.clemens@dartmouth.edu



Brian Arao

Chair Elect

University of San Francisco

bparao@usfca.edu

commission

for social
justice

educators

convention

sponsored

programs

Monday, March 28th

**The Joy of Unlearning
Privilege/Oppression for
People from Privileged
Groups**

Diane J. Goodman, State
University of New York College-
New Paltz

1:30pm - 2:30pm
Hilton Baltimore, Key 4

**The Impact of Hearing
Privilege on College
Campuses**

Andrew M. Beverly, Rochester
Institute of Technology
Lissa Place, Iowa State
University
Alex Jones, Rochester Institute of
Technology

3:00pm - 4:00pm
Baltimore Convention Center, 342

**It Takes More than a
Dialogue: "Diversity"
Beyond the Classroom**

Paul Gorski, George Mason
University

4:30pm - 5:30pm
Hilton Baltimore, Key 5

Tuesday, March 29th

**Social Justice Education
Institute: Case Studies in
Contemporary Issues in
Social Justice Education**

Brian Arao, University of San
Francisco

9:00am-10:00am
Baltimore Convention Center, 341

**Social Justice Education
Institute: Balancing Personal
Beliefs with the Institutions
Around You**

Kristi L. Clemens, Dartmouth
College

10:30am-11:30am
Baltimore Convention Center, 329

**Social Justice Education
Institute: Who Draws the
Line? Responding to
Arizona's Immigration Law**

Keith B. Humphrey,
University of Arizona

12:00pm-1:00pm
Hilton Baltimore, Calloway A & B

**Social Justice Education
Institute: The Invisible
Minority, International
Students' Engagement on
Campus**

Sami Nassim, University of
Delaware

12:00pm-1:00pm
Baltimore Convention Center, 345

**Social Justice Education
Institute: Behind the Mask
— Anonymity On-Campus
and Social Justice
Implications**

Kristi L. Clemens, Dartmouth
College

3:00pm-4:00pm
Hilton Baltimore, Key 8

Wednesday, Mar.30^h

**Evaluating the Knapsack:
Assessing Privilege
Awareness in Social Justice
Programming**

Chris Orem, James Madison
University
Paul Krikau, Indiana University-
South Bend

8:30am-9:30am
Hilton Baltimore, Key 6

**Exploring the Process:
Prioritizing Equity and
Learning in Campus
Partnerships**

Robin Routenberg, University of
Michigan- Ann Arbor
Will Sherry- The University of
Michigan

8:30am-9:30am
Baltimore Convention Center,
346

**Race in Your Face:
Strategies for Teaching
About Racial Realities**

Sharon Chia Claros, University
of California, Los Angeles
Marc Johnston, University of
California, Los Angeles

10:00am-11:00am
Baltimore Convention Center,
342

For more details, see next page in newsletter.

Monday, March 28th

The Joy of Unlearning Privilege/ Oppression for People from Privileged Groups

Diane J. Goodman, State University of New York College- New Paltz
1:30pm-2:30pm
Hilton Baltimore, Key 4

Many people from privileged groups see unlearning privilege/oppression as something to be feared and avoided. However, based on recent research, I have documented how people who have participated in meaningful experiences to unlearn a form of privilege/oppression have found it to be freeing, healing and liberating. In this experiential workshop, we will discuss specific ways people have benefited from unlearning privilege/oppression and how these findings can be used in our work with others and our own development.

Tuesday, March 29th

Social Justice Education Institute: Case Studies in Contemporary Issues in Social Justice Education

Brian Arao, University of San Francisco
9:00am-10:00am
Baltimore Convention Center, 341

Cyber bullying of LGBT students. Anti-immigrant sentiments. Transgender students in university housing assigned based on biological sex. Dominant group resistance to participation in programs designed to increase inclusion for all. These are but a few of the many contemporary challenges faced by student affairs practitioners engaged in social justice education. Join us for discussion of case studies that will help you to better understand these issues, and respond more effectively on your home campus.

Social Justice Education Institute: Balancing Personal Beliefs with the Institutions Around You

Kristi L. Clemens, Dartmouth College
10:30am-11:30am
Baltimore Convention Center, 329

As practitioners, at times we may have to enforce an institutional rule that we disagree with. But what do you do when the policy, practice, or law comes into direct conflict with your personal beliefs? In this session, we will discuss ways to manage that internal conflict, specifically relating to issues of social justice. Participants should bring personal examples to share with the group, and we will discuss best practices.

The Impact of Hearing Privilege on College Campuses

Andrew M. Beverly, Rochester Institute of Technology
Lissa Place, Iowa State University
Alex Jones, Rochester Institute of Technology
3:00pm-4:00pm
Baltimore Convention Center, 342

This program will provide an opportunity for participants to explore what it means to be a d/Deaf/Hard of Hearing person on our campuses today. In an interactive way, we will address some of the major barriers to creating partnerships between the hearing and d/Deaf/hard of hearing world such as hearing privilege, oppressive campus environments, and the difference between accessibility and inclusion. We will challenge participants to look at their role and campus culture as it relates to inclusive spatial environments.

Co-Sponsored with Standing Committee on Disability

Social Justice Education Institute: Who Draws the Line? Responding to Arizona's Immigration Law

Keith B. Humphrey, University of Arizona
12:00pm-1:00pm
Hilton Baltimore, Calloway A and B

This workshop will review the administrative response to recent legislation in Arizona (the SB1070 immigration bill and HB 2013 revoking of domestic partner benefits for state employees) on the educational and work climate of The University of Arizona. Up-to-the-minute information will be shared with participants (as the legal process evolves) that detail one public university's experience supporting faculty, staff and students while maintaining neutral. Effects on student enrollment and faculty-staff hiring will be shared.

Social Justice Education Institute: The Invisible Minority, International Students' Engagement on Campus

Sami Nassim, University of Delaware
12:00pm-1:00pm
Baltimore Convention Center, 345

The world is knocking at our doors and many of our institutions are not ready for the increased numbers of international students on our college campuses. During this session, we will discuss some of the issues related to equity and inclusion that our international students face in our campuses. We will also explore ways to create intentional engagement between our international students and their domestic counterparts as well as best practices in infusing them into the heart of our communities.

It Takes More Than a Dialogue: "Diversity" Beyond Good Intentions

Paul Gorski, George Mason University
4:30pm-5:30pm
Hilton Baltimore, Key 5

Despite the good intentions of "diversity advocates" and "multicultural affairs" professionals, many diversity initiatives accentuate existing inequities. Drawing on the concept, "decolonized multiculturalism," through interactive discussion and exercises, participants will explore how "diversity" is framed, often in ways that support hegemonic conditions related to race, sexual orientation, gender, and so on. We will discuss common ways these conditions are perpetuated through well-intentioned diversity initiatives and how to challenge ourselves to transcend the dominant discourse and push for equitable learning environments.

Social Justice Education Institute: Behind the Mask — Anonymity On-Campus and Social Justice Implications

Kristi L. Clemens, Dartmouth College
3:00pm-4:00pm
Hilton Baltimore, Key 8

The heat on your campus is rising, but no one can pinpoint the cause. Anonymous message boards, comments on the online student newspaper, mysterious e-mails, and even banners are posted around campus, but how can you respond if you can't identify the source? Join us for a spirited discussion on how students are using anonymity to affect campus climate through attacks on specific individuals or groups based on their identity. Case studies and best practices will be shared.

Wednesday March 30th

Evaluating the Knapsack: Assessing Privilege Awareness in Social Justice Programming

Chris Orem, James Madison University
Paul Krikau, Indiana University-South Bend
8:30am-9:30am
Hilton Baltimore, Key 6

It can be difficult to reliably measure the impact of social justice programming on attitudes and awareness of privilege. Finding measures that have been studied enough to generalize any claims about program outcomes, yet broad enough to apply to diverse audiences is particularly challenging. This session will provide participants with information about a new instrument designed to measure social justice programming outcomes related to privilege. Details about the instrument's development and applications to social justice program assessment will be discussed.

Exploring the Process: Prioritizing Equity and Learning in Campus Partnerships

Robin Routenberg, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor
Will Sherry- The University of Michigan
8:30am-9:30am
Baltimore Convention Center, 346

How do you ensure that your approach to your work is congruent with the outcomes you strive for? How do you engage with staff across campus to support students' long-term learning? This presentation focuses on these two questions through group discussion and example-sharing from Growing Allies (a social justice ally development program at The University of Michigan). Growing Allies' administrative structure promotes equity and justice across collaborators and focuses on staff learning to better support students' long-term understanding of allyhood.

Race in Your Face: Strategies for Teaching About Racial Realities

Sharon Chia Claros, University of California, Los Angeles
Marc Johnston, University of California, Los Angeles
10:00am-11:00am
Baltimore Convention Center, 342

As the term "diversity" becomes more pervasive on college campuses, there is a need to re-examine the central roles race and racism play in students' lives. Yet, the concept of race is often elusive, given the move toward colorblind ideologies (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). This session invites student affairs educators to be more intentional in teaching about racial realities by deconstructing common myths about race, investigating the influence of implicit biases, and exposing the realities of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Co-Sponsored with Standing Committee for Multicultural Affairs

CONGRATULATIONS!

The Commissions for Social Justice Educators is proud to announce the winners of our annual awards to be given in Baltimore at the [CSJE Social on Tuesday, March 29 from 7:00-9:30 in the Hilton Baltimore – Blake](#). Please join us in celebrating the contributions of our colleagues across the country for their commitment to creating a more socially just world.

- [Outstanding Social Justice Collaboration: Growing Allies, Collaborative Program at the University of Michigan](#)
- [Exemplary Social Justice Contribution by a Graduate Student: Krystal Dains, Kent State University](#)
- [Innovative Response, Social Justice: Dawn Snyder, Victor Santana-Melgoza, & Willie Morgan, Oregon State University](#)
- [Outstanding Social Justice Educator, Trainer, or Mentor: Kris Bergbom, Assistant Director of Student Programs, Mount Holyoke College](#)
- [Contributions to the Commission: Stephanie Bondi, Iowa State University](#)

A very special thanks to our nominators and awards reviewers for their time and energy. We look forward to recognizing more outstanding work next year!

Reflections on Pledge of Allegiance

By: Vijay Pendakur

DePaul University - Chicago, IL

Director - Office of Multicultural Student Success

This essay was written at the request of a colleague of mine who has a daughter at an elementary school in Chicago. The elementary school is planning on having the 4th grade students study the Pledge of Allegiance. My colleague began gathering critical reflections on the Pledge, written by members of marginalized communities and social justice allies, in order to offer the principal of the school a set of counter-narratives on the Pledge of Allegiance. My colleague's hope was to add a critical lens to this new unit on the Pledge, thereby complicating the young students' engagement with this ritual in American civic life.

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

I am a second-generation American. My parents are immigrants from India who came to North America in the 1960s as students. My family and I have endured racial and socioeconomic discrimination and have also achieved a middle-class lifestyle that, when measured against the rest of the world, makes us quite privileged. The journey from poor immigrant to middle-class American is an often told story that, if engaged uncritically, supports dominant myths that America is "one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

I find the Pledge of Allegiance both personally offensive and deeply problematic. For me, the Pledge invokes an oath of national fealty that I find narrow and constricting. As a citizen of the world and a humanitarian, the allegiance to a single flag and the republic it represents is an investment in nationalism that stands in direct opposition to a greater commitment to human rights. Our current national crisis, with undocumented immigration and the need for comprehensive immigration reform, is a powerful example of how nationhood can render human beings invisible if they don't have the appropriate national documents. The history of the 20th century is a history of nations trumping humans when it comes to issues of liberty and justice. Secondly, I find the Pledge offensive because it seeks to equate my adherence to atheism as being un-American. There are millions of non-believers in America - how can they say this pledge with integrity?

DIAL-A-DIALOGUE

On February 9th, 2011, CSJE hosted another exciting Dial a Dialogue phone institute! A group of individuals from various institutions around the country discussed the topics of dominant narratives, 'Perfectly Logical Explanations', and multipartiality - stemming from the Winter 2010 Voices article: Facilitating Through 'Perfectly Logical Explanations (PLEs)' and Other Challenging Participant Comments, written by robbie routenberg (University of Michigan) and Tony Sclafani (San Diego State University).

Conversations touched on both the importance and difficulty of addressing challenging comments in dialogic settings. One of the complexities discussed was the responsibility for facilitators to recognize dominant narratives and PLEs. Expecting facilitators to always do this is unrealistic; yet striving for this critical awareness is necessary. Participants on the call shared examples of such types of offensive language and were struck by how difficult they were to detect. This highlighted the challenges inherent in the work.

At the end of the call, some CSJE members asked themselves what the Commission can do to provide additional resources and networking to support facilitators. One idea was to find a way to share information about the subtle dominant narratives that we may not otherwise recognize. An additional idea was to supplement this with a guide of facilitator strategies for addressing these challenging comments.

Please, join us for the next Dial a Dialogue call on **April 6th @ 12-1 (EST)**, as we discuss Tori Svoboda's article: "Cultivating class consciousness: An imperative for student affairs practitioners".

To access this event, dial: (218) 339-2500 Access Code: 148331#

Why does a country that poses as a secular republic have a commitment to God in its Pledge of Allegiance? The positioning of America “under God” was inserted into the Pledge in 1954, in response to the American fear of communism (McKenzie, 2004). In the Pledge, God isn’t even representative of faith or spirituality, God is a stand-in for capitalism.

Beyond being personally offensive, the Pledge is also very problematic, as it invokes a language of "one-ness" rather than a language of "whole-ness." If we have to possess a national identity, I would prefer us to be a "whole" nation, made of up a rich diversity of difference. The Pledge, with its language of "one nation...indivisible" collapses and obscures important differences under the banner of the republic. In a nation that is deeply stratified along race and class lines, steeped in patriarchy, committed to neo-colonial exploitation abroad, and rapidly moving away from secularism, any attempt at "one-ness" is a mechanism through which marginalized groups in this society become erased. This "One America" is still, unfortunately, ruled by privileged groups and the myths that support their superiority. This "One America" is the supposed meritocracy where only rugged individualism and hard work yield success and anyone who is struggling must not be trying hard enough.

My parents raised my sister and I to be critical thinkers. I stopped saying the Pledge of Allegiance in the 4th grade. Every day, when my class would stand, place their right hand over their hearts, and mumble words that we had never critically explored as a group, I would just sit at my desk. My choice immediately placed me outside the "one" - the other kids looked at me as different and weird. My choice, and the other children's reaction to it, never became a topic for discussion, however. Each day, after spending a minute on the Pledge, we would dive right into the subject we were studying. The oath was made, the nation was constituted, outsiders were identified, and life went on. The Pledge worked.

Cultivating of Class Consciousness: An Imperative for Student Affairs Practitioners

By: Tori Svoboda

Throughout my graduate student years, I was told again and again that I lacked the proper decorum of a graduate student, that I did not understand my place. Slowly I began to understand fully that there was no place in academe for folks from working-class backgrounds who did not wish to leave the past behind. That was the price of the ticket. Poor students would be welcome at the best institutions of higher learning only if they were willing to surrender memory, to forget the past and claim the assimilated present as the only worthwhile and meaningful reality (books, 2000, p. 36-37).

Does that sound at all familiar? It certainly resonated with me when I first read it, and I continue to worry that I lack the proper decorum to be both a student affairs professional and a social justice educator. Perhaps like some of you, I don’t quite fit in at work, where I’m a little too direct and coarse, but I also don’t quite fit in at home, where I’m accused of using fancy words like aspire, fatigue, or context. I often feel simultaneously out of step and in exactly the right place, both grateful and guilty for the privileges I have been afforded, and both inside and outside of the systems I inhabit.

At the [Institute for Social Justice](#) last fall, this crystallized for me over something that seemed so simple – a dinner salad with a lovely presentation, stack of greens wrapped in long cucumber slices. At my table, we kept looking around to see how others were eating it. Did they unwrap the long cucumber ribbons first? Cut into it like a stuffed grape leaf?

Just when I thought I had figured out the sundry forks and spoons and the location of the bread plate and drink, another piece of dining etiquette crept up and slapped me on the head. Thankfully, a small child was at our table, and she picked it up with her hands like it was a burrito and took a bite. The adults all laughed. How could something so small make us feel so small, so anxious that we were going to be found out for the uncouth people we were?

Okay, so maybe it was just me who felt anxious. But at the Institute, I had the privilege of facilitating a conversation about social class. I asked a group of colleagues the following questions, expanded a bit here for your consideration:

- What were or are markers of your social class? Using just a word or phrase, how would you define your class of origin and your current class? How would others define your class?

- What hopes and fears do you have in discussing your class of origin and any shifts that may have occurred in your class identity over time?
- Do you recognize any patterns of internalized dominance or subordination when reflecting on your class identity(ies)?

I expected silence but the room buzzed with conversation. Shame on me for expecting anything less from my colleagues. There have been plenty of times in my career in higher education where I have felt like an outsider, being “outclassed” and feeling like a bull in a china shop. In those moments, social justice educators have been the ones who named my imposter syndrome. They helped me identify my sense of not being worthy or enough as a logical outcome of institutional inequities rather than simply a personal flaw.

I was in awe of the wisdom generously offered at the Institute. People spoke of habits they developed in their youth they carry today – from not answering the phone (it might be a bill collector!) to downplaying their wealth (don’t want to be teased for being Theo Huxtable). Some of the early habits remain useful (being able to stretch a budget), while others have outlived their usefulness (carrying a sense of shame, guilt, or even righteousness). People carried both pride and shame about their class or origin and once again, I was reminded I am not alone.

As you reflect on your own journey – your family, your friends, your workplace – where in the class puzzle are you?

Reflection Questions:

- Do you think about class daily, rarely, or somewhere in-between?
- When was the last time you were asked to discuss class? Was it in the company of students? Your family? Your co-workers?
- How has your class identity shown up in your experience of higher education - as an undergraduate student, graduate student, employee, parent, etc?

Complications and contradictions

I understand we have plenty of reasons to avoid or get lost in this work. For starters, class is hard to define. Are we talking about income or wealth? Job prestige? Educational attainment? Cultural or social capital? What is the difference between low-income, working class, and blue collar? I know what *I* mean when I use these terms, but is that a *shared* understanding?

In the US, the myth of meritocracy teaches poor and working class folks their financial situation is their own fault, that those with fewer resources simply are not working hard enough. The heavy emphasis on consumerism teaches wealthier folks that *every* American family has a 3-car garage and marble countertops, so the gap between basics and comforts is blurred. Research indicates both poles – poor and rich – move towards the middle when asked about their class. The draw towards the middle may be motivated out of emotions of shame or guilt, again at either pole. In any case, our inability to agree upon class definitions makes it difficult to study or organize around.

Additionally, class identity is unlike other forms of identity. We may value the richness of diversity in other areas, but we should not be celebrating the fact that many people live at or below poverty levels. Comparing the average family income of students at your institution to the average family income of students in your state is a good way to see how well your institution is serving the common good.

Another difficulty is how class mobility means class identity can change over time – more so for some than for others. Those of us who started as low-income, first-generation students have attained some measure of class mobility simply by completing the college degree necessary to work in student affairs. Of course, this does not mean that we have forgotten where we came from or “surrendered memory” of our past. For some, that past is still very present in our families and friends, perhaps more so than in our workplaces. But, often it is assumed that because we “made it,” we are all middle class or should at least have the decency to pretend we are.

Most importantly, class is impossible to disentangle from other forms of identity. Class is certainly racialized and gendered, and likely intersects with other identities. Critical race theory identifies “interest convergence” as a way in which poor Whites are encouraged to align themselves more with their racial identity than their class identity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

We do not have to look far to see this played out – in politics or on our own campuses. Similarly, sexism makes the class experience different for men and women.

Because of the intersections of sexism and classism, working class women of all races may have a different investment in the concept of “respectability” than their male counterparts (Overall, 1998; Skeggs, 1997).

An additional complexity related to intersectionality is that people with multiple subordinate identities may not be invited or allowed to explore class identity, as class oppression may seem less significant than the oppression experienced based on race or sexual orientation. Those who grew up in class-privileged homes may be reluctant to acknowledge class privilege because of the oppression they face in other social identity groups. Their class privilege may be mediated by other social identities, but it is not necessarily erased by other forms of oppression. Similarly, those who have been disadvantaged by class but possess dominant identities may have a hard time acknowledging this privilege. Experiencing class oppression does not erase White privilege, but it can complicate it.

Gratefully, we have models for understanding the complexity of how these social identities intersect, varying by situation and context, as well as the meaning we make from them (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). We must practice naming those intersections in terms of both individual identity development and institutional policies/practices/environments that can support or damage students of all backgrounds.

Reflection Questions:

- What other social group identities shape your class experiences?
- Has it mattered whether those are subordinate or dominate groups, or both?
- What patterns do you notice about your class identity shifts, if it ever has (over time, in different contexts, etc?)
- What do you hold on to (cling to) and what have you given up (been forced to let go)?

Cautions

As I continue my journey into exploring class, I have fallen into some traps that I hope you can avoid. I have been guilty of using my class of origin as an “out” from owning both my current class privilege and my other forms of privilege. Colleagues have gently and not so gently helped me stop using my past to avoid responsibility in the present – which is not the same as surrendering memory or forgetting where I come from, a fear I think many have if they are pushed to let go of their past.

I also have engaged in “deficit ideology,” locating a problem in marginalized people rather than embedded in social institutions. When I write this, it sounds absurd – who would do such a thing?

The problem is, my internalized class oppression has me hanging on to the notion that I’m not worthy, and my internalized race dominance has me believing that I should charitably “help” those less fortunate than me. Whenever I get into a list of challenges that low-income, first-generation, and/or working class students face, I need to check myself and turn my attention to the systems that maintain these inequities. Most helpful to me in this work are Paul Gorski’s critiques of the “culture of poverty” and presentations about deficit ideology.

And, most painfully, I have made judgments – of myself and of others. When I see how quickly others move up an administrative ladder, supported by family members who are academics or otherwise engaged in “high brow” activity, I find it easy to be resentful towards those who grew up with more material, cultural and social capital than I did...particularly if they dismiss class as irrelevant. Still, I am trying to be kind to everyone for where they are at, rather than where I wish they were. Whatever growth I have experienced has come from people who were gracious enough to show me what I did not yet know without judging me for it. I am a work in progress, trying to deepen conversations rather than avoiding them.



Concluding thoughts

Instead of just listing what “not” to do, let me share some of what I attempt to do. I don’t presume to have all the answers, but I believe this is as good a place to start as any and may be helpful for people of any class background.

Hunt for assumptions: Look for storylines about how inequities occur. Who benefits from the stories being told that way? Can we notice and name deficit ideology when it occurs? Can we notice and name internalized dominance or subordination when it occurs? For example, if I listen to my own internalized subordination and accept the belief that low-income students’ families do not value education, will I ever be motivated to learn how to engage the families in a way that suits them rather than what suits me?

Engage in reflexive praxis: How is that for a series of \$10 words, as my folks would call them? Simply put, let us be our own worst critics and our own best reviewers. Take time to evaluate our work, ask for feedback – good and bad, and let that shape our practice. For me, it means paying attention to the gap between who I say I am (inclusive, student-centered) and how I may show up in the world (exclusive and cliquy within professional associations, distancing myself from those who have not yet explored class differences rather than engaging them).

Cultivate a sense of class consciousness: Rather than studying the “other,” explore our own identity, values and experiences, and how those shape our interpretation of others’ identities, values and experiences. This is especially essential for student affairs folks, as I notice we are often drawn to talking about students we serve instead of our own work, as well as talking about subordinate identities rather than dominant ones. I am trying to hold multiple truths at once - honoring my class of origin as a meaningful part of my past and a meaningful part of my present through interactions with family, friends and a partner who remain working class, while at the same time acknowledging my current class privilege as a person with formal education working in a university setting.

Be the change: Understand we are a part of (and not *apart from*) the systems we wish to change. Whenever I complain about colleges being elite institutions that maintain social stratification rather than transform it, my dear sister tells me, “Stop bitching about the man. You are the man.” Ouch! But she has a point. I do have immense privilege to work in a college setting and even if I feel small, I should not forget that I do have circles of influence and I should use them. I hope you will join me – just don’t ask me how to eat that damn salad.

Reflection Questions:

- What do we take for granted in student affairs that may actually be a class-based practice or assumption? (The first thing that comes to mind for me is “helicopter parents” - is classed construction that was assume is universal, even when it is not?)
- Although our field has knowledge communities or affinity groups based on gender, race, or sexual orientation, how are we focusing our attention on socio-economic class?
- Who are we reaching on a daily basis and mentoring into our field? As we seek to increase diversity within the field, are we attending to all forms of diversity, including economic?
- What else can we be doing individually or institutionally to narrow gaps in educational outcomes and experiences of campus climate along many dimensions and not just a few?

Tori Svoboda

is a Bush Leadership Fellow, focusing on completing her dissertation about the experiences of White female student affairs professionals from working class backgrounds. She is an adjunct faculty member and associate dean of students at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota. For comments, suggestions, or further dialogue, please feel free to contact Tori at tori.svoboda@gmail.com.

Resources

For me, some of the most helpful resources related to defining class have come from readings listed in the references, as well as the organizations, media and blogs noted below, in my humble opinion.

- [Class Action](#): a nonprofit organization that hosts workshops, has done work on the intersections of class and race, and has wonderful online resources - including a recent article about making sure you are not a classist anti-racist educator.
- [United for a Fair Economy](#) - another organization working to raise awareness about the causes of economic equality and grow the movement for economic justice. They have some great work on the racial wealth divide and popular economics education tools.

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Resources continued...

- Economic Policy Institute's [State of Working America](#) – yet another organization that documents economic inequalities. This piece has nice interactive tools.
- Youngstown State University's [Center for the Working Class Studies](#) – great resources, particularly for “working class academics” (faculty members from working class backgrounds), including a nifty chart that outlines various theoretical understandings of class as more than simply income.
- New York Times' [Class Matters](#) series – great online interactive graphs help identify various components of class and show how class mobility has changed over time.
- National Public Radio (NPR)'s [Living in the Middle](#) series – interesting list of “you might be middle class if...” and good information about what middle class looks like in the US.
- Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)'s [People Like Us](#) film – great film, showing how class is experienced at all levels in the US, with fun online games like “name that class” and “chintz or shag.”
- [Education and class blog](#) by Jane Van Galen, a faculty member at the University of Washington Bothell. She is an author of numerous articles about the need to use class as an analytic lens in educational research, a skilled blogger with insightful posts, and a first-generation college student herself. This is one of the more active blogs, with refreshing commentary.
- [Social class on campus blog](#) by Will Barratt, a faculty member at Indiana State University. He is often a presenter at ACPA and NASPA conferences. I believe he coined the term “academic capital” to go along with economic, social and cultural capital when explaining the various regenerative forms of capital included in the definitions of classes.

Submit to “Voices”

Submit an article to be published in the quarterly newsletter published by the Commission for Social Justice Educators. We are happy to publish articles that address issues of diversity and social justice both in and outside of higher education.

The deadline for submission for our Spring 2011 edition of “Voices” is:

April 15th, 2011

- All submissions to the “Voices” newsletter are subject to CSJE’s publication guidelines.
- For a complete listing of guidelines please visit our website: <http://www.myacpa.org/comm/social/>
- Details about content and formatting can be directed to the Newsletter Editors, **Heather Wilhelm** at heather.wilhelm@uconn.edu