We had experience to ground ourselves in the district and utilize data and evaluation to continually enhance their programs. We worked with curricular and administrative offices to form a qualified external evaluation vendor pool, solicit proposals from vendors, refine scopes of work, and oversee the implementation of external evaluations. We consulted with staff from curricular offices to help develop, refine and communicate strategic plans supporting program development including evaluation and research agendas. We partnered with colleagues to support grant and evaluation plan writing. Susan also served as a Research Review Board (RRB) Member and helped review the educational value, research methodology, and legal compliance of external research proposals. Occasionally we were able to provide training opportunities and mentoring for graduate students interested in applied work.

Overall, what an exciting and challenging juggling act!

**Skills**

While our past facilitated our entrance, little prepared us for the time and project press within this politically-charged setting. For instance, we had some academic training in evaluation coupled with more hands-on experience conducting mixed methods evaluations, most frequently as members of teams. We both had interdisciplinary training and interests. This positioned us nicely to collaborate with multidisciplinary team members but also stretch ourselves to take on a lot of responsibility, independently. We had experience to ground ourselves in new literatures when time afforded this luxury. We gained appreciation for the need to bridge and translate best practices and knowledge between the worlds of practice and research. We were well versed in writing reports and delivering presentations; yet challenged each other to reimagine dissemination materials for diverse stakeholders, materials that prioritized practical implications.

We had prior experiences conducting external research within schools. We experienced the confusion that resulted when the district did not communicate research policies well to stakeholders. Our time internal to CPS helped us more fully appreciate the protection of school time and the need to maximize the benefit of external research for internal reflection and change. We were able to help disseminate policies and procedures to internal and external audiences, to demystify the process, encourage engaged scholarship and practice, and bridge communication.

Through our respective graduate programs we received some, but not enough, training in consultation and organizational theory, however we have developed these skills “on the job” at CPS or other places. Mimi in particular had experience facilitating groups and supporting strategic planning, both proved invaluable when she joined the internal CPS evaluation unit; she shared these skills freely. We have had the privilege to help partners think deeply about organizational capacity. We have grown in our evaluation practice, strengthening linkages between related streams of work within a large organization, fostering efficiencies, prioritizing data use practices to reflect on participants, services, and outcomes.

These experiences certainly broadened our experiences, perspective and appreciation of urban educational contexts including the challenges and resources impacting the development and implementation of school-based programs. Our time within our internal unit provided us opportunities to collaborate with other practicing social scientists. Perhaps most importantly, we arrived at CPS with deep training and appreciation for ecological systems theories, empowerment theories, holistic child development, and the importance of collaboration and citizen participation.

We were challenged to collaborate with new stakeholders and sometimes unwilling “partners.” We challenged our colleagues with our vision of citizen participation and social justice. This foundation nurtured us and helped us stay focused on the overarching mission of our work, fostering a culture of learning such that school contexts are strengthened for children and families.

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**Cultural and Racial Affairs Committee**

*Edited by Rhonda K. Lewis, Wichita State University*

**Social Justice in the Classroom: Teaching Controversial Topics**

*Written by Ashlee Lien, Rochelle Rowley, Susan Long, Emily Dworkin, Nghi Thai, Olya Belyaev-Glantsman, Jameta Barlow, and Heather Grohe*

University classrooms are ripe environments for safely introducing controversial topics. In college, students are pursuing knowledge and expanding their horizons. Even so, that does not mean that raising uncomfortable topics in the classroom is an easy task. Social justice issues around inequality, oppression, and privilege often incite controversy.

A roundtable was organized at SCRA’s 14th Biennial Conference to discuss the challenges associated with teaching issues of social justice. Many challenges were identified and centered on several themes: designing the course; adapting to the diversity of your students; creating a trusting environment; responding to unexpected comments; and managing our own expectations as instructors.

**Course Design**

Designing courses that focus on issues of inequality, oppression, and privilege can be challenging. One of the first aspects to consider in organizing the course syllabus is the order of topics to be covered. Often, it helps to cover more difficult topics near the end of the semester (e.g., privilege) rather than the beginning. As the instructor, you will have a better feel for your students and they too will be more comfortable over the course of the semester in discussing these topics. Second, our combined experience has also shown that when teaching diverse and controversial topics, the inclusion of multiple teaching modalities is essential. Besides the standard lecture format (some choose not to lecture at all), instructor can use small group activities/exercises, large group discussions, debates, guest speakers, films/videos, and reflective journaling as major proportions of the time in their classrooms. A large part of this learning usually includes a high-level of student
Adapting to Student Diversity

Every classroom presents a unique set of challenges. Students arrive with different understandings of the topic based on diverse backgrounds and experiences, and this course may be the first introduction to topics such as social inequality, unearned privileges, and various forms of discrimination for some students. It is important to tailor your language and approach toward your students’ perspectives. This can be especially difficult in larger classroom settings or in classes where a dominant view has been asserted early in the semester.

A well-designed course is important, but must include the ability to adapt to your students. If a course is structured too rigidly, you lose the ability to explore certain topics more in depth when needed. Many students have experiences that are relevant to social justice issues and may speak out on those experiences. Discussions can therefore become heated and, as instructors, we may need to change the plan for the class. It is important to engage the students in a series of discussions and targeted questions that can be used to teach critical thinking skills in these moments. The material may also need to be adapted by spending more or less time on planned topics, or even introducing new material mid-semester. Making the material relevant to their experiences and highlighting their privilege, acknowledged or unacknowledged, is critical to discussions of social justice issues. Adapting materials and questions to fit within a student’s experience helps to expand their perspectives on critical issues.

Creating Class Climate

A safe classroom climate is critical when teaching sensitive topics, and must be considered even before the class meets for the first time. We recommend pre-planning strategies that set the tone for the semester. First, including guidelines for discussion on the class syllabus is crucial. It is also important to revisit those guidelines throughout the semester. Consider that students may be taking the course because it fulfills a school requirement, and plan strategies to build buy-in early on. The students are more likely to reject the issues discussed in class if they feel like they are forced to take the course rather than having chosen to take it themselves. Without buy-in from the students, the classroom climate may suffer. That is why it is useful to address the topics, structure, and importance of the class at the beginning of the semester.

Responding to Unexpected Comments

Occasionally a student will make a comment that is offensive, discriminatory, or generally challenging to the subject matter. The challenge to the instructor is how to respond to the comment in a way that is respectful and encourages critical thinking. It is important to handle unexpected comments quickly and in a way that does not hinder the remaining discussion by other students.

The first solution for unexpected comments is to establish discussion guidelines in the syllabus, and refer back to them when discussions become heated. Setting the boundaries for respectful communication at the beginning of the course provides students with a type of contractual understanding of the expectations. While outright verbal fights rarely occur in the classroom, it can be a concern for some instructors. Throughout the semester, the instructor is responsible for monitoring the class climate and calling a time out before the conversation moves to this intensity. It is important to challenge our own discomfort when uncomfortable moments happen and as a result the most learning actually occurs. Students can be empowered to think critically about a topic based on the comments made and offer counter arguments, in a respectful manner, which increases the opportunities for all involved to build on their critical thinking skills.

Instructors must also be diligent in grading written work, as we may encounter papers written by students who voice discriminatory beliefs in their writing. It is important to take time grading these papers and set them aside in order to gain clarity and professionalism, when needed. Using a rubric helps to organize the grading in such a way that reduces subjective grading in these situations. One of the best ways to address these types of inappropriate comments in writing, however, is to include a requirement that sources be cited and valid. This requirement encourages students to research their topic in a way that can educate them and challenge these degrading and discriminatory beliefs.

Managing Your Own Expectations

When teaching issues of inequality, oppression, and privilege, it can be disappointing when it seems that students are not living up to the instructor’s expectations. Instructors who are aware of strategies to manage their expectations may be better positioned to sleep soundly at night without worries that students are falling short. There are three strategies that could be helpful in managing expectations. First, it is critical to ensure that instructors are aware of their own expectations and have designed their courses to best promote the expected changes. We find that creating a logic model for the learning outcomes is a useful strategy to employ in the planning process. As the instructor, you should identify your ideas of successful and unsuccessful learning outcomes and consider how the readings, activities, and class discussions move you toward those successful outcomes.

Second, communicating expectations to students can set students up for success. Instructors’ expectations of personal growth and change are not normally discussed in academic settings. You can normalize their reactions by sharing your own “ah-ha moments” and gaffes. At the same time, it is important to remember that your students have varied levels of motivation to change, and that they come to the class with different experiences. This acceptance of varied viewpoints can help create a climate that facilitates change. Third, making students' positions transparent throughout the term provides feedback to both you and the students regarding their progress towards your expected outcomes. You and your students can monitor how their ideas change by using standard assessment tools relevant to the topics being discussed such as myth belief scales or identity assessment scales. Students can also be encouraged to place their experiences next to alternate views to help situate...
When designing a course around social justice, it is important to take time to plan the course, create a safe and trusting environment, and focus on the process of change in addition to the expected outcomes. When teaching sensitive issues, a carefully-designed course can help prevent problems in the classroom. When designing a course around social justice, it is important to take time to plan the course, create a safe and trusting environment, and remain flexible to adapt to your students’ needs, and respond quickly and respectfully to unexpected comments. Keeping these basic principles in mind helps make a course about inequality, oppression, and privilege where students can go beyond basic knowledge and gain practical learning experiences. As instructors, we must remember to manage our own expectations of how the class will go and how each student will learn. When designed correctly, courses around issues of social justice can encourage students to expand their horizons and become agents for social change.

**Early Career Interest Group**

*Written by Michèle Schlehofer, Salisbury University and Ashlee Lien, SUNY College at Old Westbury*

Greetings! We hope that those of you who attended the 2013 biennial in Miami had a wonderful conference experience and a safe trip home. The 2013 biennial was pivotal for us in many respects, first and foremost because the Executive Committee approved the formation of the Early Career Interest Group (ECIG)!

The idea for the interest group was born when a group of early career SCRA members met at the 2011 biennial in Chicago and realized a need for mentoring and professional development within SCRA that was specific to those of us at the early stages of our career. This led to the development of an Early Career Task Force, which has been working for the past two years to develop a group devoted to professional development, networking, training, and recognition of early career SCRA members. We are quite excited to become a formal interest group, and have great plans for the future. Our first chair is Susan Long (Lake Forest University), with Chiara Sabina (Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg) serving in a support capacity.

Also at the 2013 biennial, we held our first-ever Early Career Professional Development Pre-Conference Workshop on Wednesday, June 26th. This half-day event featured five presentations on professional development topics relevant to early career professionals. Susan Wolfe (Susan Wolfe and Associates) started our workshop with her presentation on “Community Consulting in Practice,” followed by a talk by Isa Fernandez (Nova Southeastern University) on “Federal Grants 101.” Lenny Jason (DePaul University) shared his expertise in “Influencing Public Policy,” followed by Eric Mankowski (Portland State University), who provided insight into “Forming and Sustaining Inter-Cultural Partnerships for Community Research and Action.” Finally, David Julian (Ohio State University) rounded out our morning with a session on “Practicing Community Psychology in Local Health and Social Service Settings.” Overall, approximately 40 early career professionals were in attendance, and informal feedback on our pre-conference workshop was positive. We will be placing materials from the workshop on our page on the SCRA website.

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**Mission Statement of the ECIG**

The ECIG supports SCRA members who have been working as a community psychology researcher; practitioner; activist; or teacher or professor; or in a related field, for no more than seven years. The important aims of this group are to: (1) promote the concerns, interests, and issues unique to early career individuals within SCRA; (2) promote opportunities for early career scholars to make contributions to or hold leadership positions within the SCRA community; and (3) promote formalized opportunities for recognition of professional accomplishments by early career SCRA members. ECIG will accomplish these goals by providing professional development networking, training, information-sharing, social support, and mentoring in order to advance the careers of early career professionals and promote collaboration. Membership is open to all with an interest in the development and support of Early Career Community Psychologists (ECCPs), including graduate students, ECCPs, and those with more established careers.

**Moving Forward**

Last year, the Task Force gained significant momentum, which we hope to continue as an interest group. We established an early career listserv, and encourage you to join. The list is open to anyone interested in early career development, regardless of whether or not you are still early career. To join the list, send an e-mail to LISTSERV@LISTS.APA.ORG. Leave the subject area blank, and in your message area type: SUBSCRIBE SCRA-ECP Your first name Your last name (e.g. Fred Smith).

During the last year, we have also offered one-time mentoring opportunities via our Mentored Conversation series. Here, mentors with expertise in a variety of topics provided small-group mentoring to early career professionals via the SCRA conference line. Topics included work/life balance; building a program of research as a faculty member; and forming community partnerships.

As the ECIG, we would like to extend upon our prior efforts and offer increased opportunities for early career professionals within SCRA to connect with each other. We are also looking to hear from you on where to focus our efforts. What would you like to see offered? What would be most useful to you? To this end, we will be conducting an online survey of early career professionals. Please keep an eye out in *The Community Psychologist* and over the SCRA listserv for our survey.

If you are interested in learning more about the ECIG, have ideas for what you’d like to see us accomplish, or would