SJS 215: EMPOWER

Supported by The Office of Community Engagement and Service, Urban Teaching Cohort, and Social Justice Studies Program at Miami University

EMPOWER OVERVIEW

EMPOWER is a ten week program for students at Miami University who are interested in expanding their understanding of social issues and their impact on communities. EMPOWER is a rewarding and intensive program that combines service, education, and critical personal investigation to foster social awareness, build community, and create a deeper understanding of diversity. Students in the Urban Teaching Cohort and Social Justice Studies Program will specifically explore the connection between economic and educational injustices.

Seminars

SJS 215: EMPOWER is a series of seminars. As such, this is a discussion (not lecture) based class. Achieving the goals of this course requires students' voices and experiences – thus, participation is a crucial way to share our stories and process our thoughts and feelings.

It is important to create a respectful environment in which everyone feels welcome and safe and is comfortable sharing.

Service-Learning

SJS 215: EMPOWER is a Service-Learning course. Miami University defines Service-Learning as "an experiential pedagogical practice that uses action and reflection to meet needs and enhance learning through mutually beneficial, reciprocal partnerships." Service-Learning involves integrating community service or other forms of engagement into course content. As a result, Miami students are able to gain real world skills and enhance their learning while contributing to the community.

In order to deepen understandings of social issues, EMPOWER students will complete five (or more) community service experiences during the semester. Students are encouraged to serve in areas that they are interested in or passionate about – e.g., education, homelessness, food security, aging, children's welfare, women's rights, etc. If students are involved in other service-learning courses or formal organizations that do service (e.g., Adopt A School, America Reads/Counts, fraternity or sorority life, volunteer organizations, etc.), these community experiences can also count for EMPOWER.

For students who are not already involved in formal service organizations or who are interested in expanding their experiences, students will have the opportunity to serve at agencies in Oxford, Hamilton, Middletown, and Cincinnati. Potential agencies include the Oxford Community Choice Pantry, Family Resource Center, Hamilton Living Water Ministry, Booker T. Washington Community Center, the Drop Inn Center, Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless, Freestore Foodbank, and more. To learn more about the volunteer opportunities available to EMPOWER students, you may visit www.MiamiOH.edu/communityengagement, stop by the Office of Community Engagement and Service Monday – Friday from 8 AM-5 PM, or call 513-529-2961. You can also sign up for volunteer opportunities directly online using the Office of Community Engagement and Service's organization site on the Hub: https://muhub.collegiatelink.net/organization/ces.

Urban Plunges

Additionally, each student will participate in one of two offered Urban Plunges. The Urban Plunge will count as one of the five required service experiences. These plunges will be offered exclusively for EMPOWER students. The tentative dates for EMPOWER Urban Plunges are:

October 12 – 14: Cleveland
October 26 – 27: Middletown

The Urban Plunge is a unique overnight experience for Miami students to volunteer and learn more about social justice issues present in local metropolitan communities. During Urban Plunges, students will engage with community organizers and leaders, learn about the community's history, hear perspectives on the community's assets and challenges, and volunteer with local non-profit organizations.

Students may also attend an Urban Plunge in Over-the-Rhine. These plunges are not specific to EMPOWER but would count as an additional service experience. For more information, visit www.MiamiOH.edu/urbanplunge.

EMPOWER OBJECTIVES

Through EMPOWER, students will:

- Gain a better understanding of social issues, identity, and social class, which affect people at the local, regional, and national level.
- Foster and build diversity awareness.
- Work firsthand with local agencies.
- Meet other Miami students who are interested in community service and social justice.
- Develop a continuing relationship with the Office of Community Engagement & Service and local core partner agencies.
- Improve their inter-personal and human relations skills, which are increasingly viewed as the most important skills in achieving success in professional and personal spheres.
- Explore possibilities for future education or career choices.

INSTRUCTORS

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EMPOWER APPROACH AND CULTURE

This experience is based on the principles of Service-Learning, and as such, uses a critical pedagogy approach. Critical pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that aims to raise learners' critical consciousness regarding oppressive social conditions. It also assumes that everyone can contribute to the educational experience. The classroom is envisioned as a place where new knowledge, grounded in the experiences of students and teachers alike, is produced through meaningful dialogue. Therefore, instructors and scholars will explore and learn from one another. This experience is designed to use group activities and discussion as catalysts for learning. By forming a network and developing our skills we can begin to create a supportive community for fellow service leaders and volunteers. This collaborative effort can ultimately strengthen service efforts and maximize the benefits both our community and for you as individual students.

EMPOWER EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Creating a Classroom Community

This course is largely based on discussion, self-reflection, and personal beliefs. Students are expected to share their personal experiences as well as respect their classmates' opinions. It is my hope that we will create a classroom community through this course. To begin this process, we will determine as a class what our expectations are for each other and ourselves.

Course Readings and Assignments

There are no required textbooks for this course – all readings will be posted on Edmodo (see below). However, we are asking that students purchase a journal or notebook for their reflective journal entries. If students prefer using an electronic outlet (e.g., a blog, word document, or tumblr), this may be arranged with the instructor.

Students are expected to have each assignment (reading or media or journal entry) completed *before* coming to class, as the readings and media assignments will inform their knowledge of topics and discussion. *Note: This syllabus is subject to change. Both the facilitators and the students may propose changes to the course calendar.*

Edmodo

All readings will be posted on Edmodo, a website that blends elements of Facebook and Niikha. You can access Edmodo at www.edmodo.com. To join SJS 215: EMPOWER, enter the group code 1mmdhd. Please note that we will not use Niikha for this course – everything will be posted on Edmodo and communications will occur via Edmodo or via email.

Attendance

Given that this is a discussion based course, attendance is very important. Because class participation is an integral part of this course, students are expected to attend class regularly. If by any means you are unable to make it or an emergency occurs, please contact Hailee Gibbons at gibbonhm@muohio.edu. Each student has one excused absence.

Tracking Attendance

Attendance will be tracked via index cards. Students are asked to bring a 3 x 5 index card to each seminar. On one side of the card, students should write their name and one things they learned or one insight they had. On the other side, they should write one question they have following the seminar discussion. These index cards should be submitted at the end of class.

Electronics Policy

As previously mentioned, come to each class prepared to participate. Bring a notebook and writing utensil to each class as well as a good attitude. Please do not use any recreational portable electronics during class time. Please silence and put away cell phones. Unless deemed appropriate by the instructors, no students should be using laptops during discussion. If you use a portable device to access readings, please ensure that is the only reason you are using that device – it is inappropriate to also be accessing email, getting on Facebook, etc. during class time.

Service Experiences

In signing up for EMPOWER, you are making a commitment to the communities and agencies in which you will be serving. Because you will represent not only yourself, but also the EMPOWER program and Miami University, we ask that you take this responsibility seriously and remain respectful, conscientious, and accountable. Please serve during the times for which you sign up, and inform instructors *in advance* if you need to reschedule a service experience. Students who miss a scheduled service experience without notifying the EMPOWER instructors and the partner agency, will be required to write a letter of apology to the agency.

The Diversity Portfolio: Reflective Journals, Artifacts, and Final Project

> "*Social diversity* and *social justice* are often used interchangeably to refer to *social differences* as well as to *social inequality*. These two terms are closely related but not interchangeable. When we refer to *social diversity*, we have in mind differences between social identity groups based on social categories such as race, gender, sexuality, and class. These differences are reflected in a group's traditions, language, style of dress, cultural practices, religious beliefs and rituals, and these are usually termed "differences" from some norm that is privileged. It is difficult to perceive oneself, one's family and group traditions, language, style of dress as part of *diversity*—rather, the norm shapes one's notion of the "differences" of *others*, who are marginalized precisely because they are different. In this sense, it is clear why *diversity* ("difference") profoundly shapes the advantages of some groups (those who are part of the norm) relative to the disadvantages of others (because they are "other") and maintains *social inequalities* that are rationalized on the basis of these differences. We also use terms such as *oppression* and *social justice* to emphasize our focus on inequality as something more than difference.
>
> Thus, although these terms are not interchangeable, they are inextricably linked in everyday discourse in that *diversity* is too often used to provide an excuse or justification for *inequality*. It's much more comfortable to talk about diversity than equality, although clearly we need to understand both. We need to appreciate and value social and cultural differences, if we are to envision a society that acknowledges and appreciates such differences, by de-centering the norm…**Our challenge is to appreciate social diversity while working to dismantle social inequality**."
> -Maurianne Adams, *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice (2nd Edition)*

Diversity is a complex reality, reflecting issues of difference and equity, which call on people to develop several key skills, including critical self-reflection, relationship building, collaboration, and the ability to effectively read and respond to situations of difference.

The Diversity Portfolio will require students to submit key artifacts that highlight their engagement, learning, and teaching in diverse situations and with diverse people each year. It will also require students to complete a reflective analysis that focuses on how these key experiences have impacted their understanding of diversity and their growth in their ability and confidence to function effectively in situations of cultural diversity.

In order to begin this process (which is often a lifetime journey for many people), students will be asked to complete five journal entries over the course of EMPOWER and a final project at the end. Prompts for each journal entry will be provided via Edmodo. The purpose of these journal entries is to practice and strengthen our ability to critically self-reflect. The only access we have to understanding and advocating for others is through the self, and if this self is an unexamined self, then it is far more likely to alienate than it is to build relationships across difference. Critical self-reflection is the process of exploring and understanding one's self as a complex cultural being influenced by various people, places, traditions, and rituals.

The final project will be a portfolio that is similar to a "critical autobiography." We encourage you to write new material as well as synthesize and edit your writing from your journal entries to create this piece. We also encourage students to supplement it with artifacts or media – e.g., photographs, video, podcasts, collage, poetry, presentations, scrapbooks, etc. More information about the final project will be provided via Edmodo and discussed in class.

	EMPOWER SYLLABUS OVERVIEW		
	Section One: Foundational Frameworks for Service and Social Justice		
	Topic	*Readings and Assignments (Completed Prior to Class)*	*Abbreviated Class Agenda*
Week 1 – 09.25	EMPOWER Overview and Introduction to Service and Social Justice	**Assignments:** None	• Introductions • Course and Syllabus Overview • In-Class Review of Readings • Helping, Fixing, Serving Activity and Discussion • Starfish Story Discussion • How Do You Define Engagement? Activity
		Readings: • Helping, Fixing, Serving • The Starfish Story and Starfish Hurling • Building Communities from the Inside Out • Volunteer Code of Ethics	
Week 2 – 10.02	Conceptual Frameworks for Social Justice: Identity, Privilege, and Oppression	**Assignments:** Bring Magazines, Newspapers, Pictures, Crafts, etc. to Class for Collage Activity <u>and</u> Submit Service Plan to Instructor	• Discussion of Readings • Social Identity Wheel Activity • Collage Activity • Watch "Danger of a Single Story"
		Readings: • The Complexity of Identity: Who Am I? • Identities and Social Locations • The Social Construction of Difference • Theoretical/Conceptual Foundations	
Week 3 – 10.09	Conceptual Frameworks for Social Justice: Identity, Privilege, and Oppression	**Assignments:** Journal Entry One Due	• Discussion of Readings • Cycle of Socialization Activity
		Readings: • Five Faces of Oppression • Cycle of Socialization • Cycle of Liberation	
	Section Two: Understanding the Issues		
Week 4 – 10.16	Economic Injustice: Social Class and the "American Dream"	**Assignments:** Journal Entry Two Due	• American Dream Activity • Explore Issue of Class in America – Class Association Activity • Viewing of People Like Us • Discussion of Media and Readings
		Readings: • Shadowy Lines that Still Divide • Deep Thoughts about Class Privilege • Listen or Read Transcript of "American Dream for the Middle Class – Just A Dream?" (NPR)	
Week 5 – 10.23	Poverty and the Local Community	**Assignments:** Bring Laptop to Class (Please Email Instructor	• Play Spent Activity • Discussion of Media and Readings

		ahead of time if you do not have access to a laptop so other arrangements can be made.)	• Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless – Voices of Homelessness Panel (7 PM – 8 PM), Sponsored by the Urban Leaders
		Readings: • At the Edge of Poverty • Listen or Read Transcript of "How America Is Losing the War on Poverty" (NPR) • What's Debt Got to Do With It?	
Week 6 – 10.30	Educational Injustice	**Assignments:** Journal Entry Three Due	• Viewing of Waiting for Superman • Discussion of Readings and Media
		Readings: • Still Separate, Still Unequal • Achievement Gap Persists for Low-Income Students While Competing Philosophies Vie for Influence	
Week 7 – 11.06	Intersections of Education, Racial, and Economic Injustice	**Assignments:** None	• Discussion of Readings and Media • Viewing of Maxed Out
		Readings: • Waiting for Superman: An Assessment from a Social Justice Perspective • Surge in Homeless Pupils Strain Schools • Breakfast in Class: Fight Against Kids' Hunger Starts in School • Debt for Diploma System	
Section Three: Making A Difference and Acting Towards Positive Change			
Week 8 – 11.13	Building Coalitions and Communities & Becoming Allies	**Assignments:** Journal Entry Four Due	• North Country Clips and Ally Behavior Activity • Discussion of Readings and Media
		Readings: • Reflections on Liberation • Toward a New Vision • Interrupting the Cycle of Oppression • Allies • Bridging Differences through Dialogue	
Week 9 – 11.20	NO CLASS – Happy Thanksgiving!		
Week 10 – 11.27	What, So What, Now What? : Creating Social Change and Becoming an Ally	**Assignments:** Journal Entry Five Due	• Activist Training • Re-evaluate Stereotypes of Activism • How Do You Define Engagement? Activity • Discussion of how Students can become
		Readings: • Privilege, Power, and Difference – Chapter 9 – What Can We Do?	

			Agents of Social Change
Week 11 – 12.04	Continuum of Community Engagement and Looking Toward the Future	**Assignments:** Work on Final Project	• Review Social Action Wheel • Reading and Media Discussion • Exploration of Future Service and Social Justice Opportunities • End of EMPOWER Evaluation
		Readings: • Developing a Liberatory Consciousness • Review "Cycle of Liberation" • Generational Issues Articles • Top 10 Youth Activism Victories in 2007 • Building a Better World	
Week 12 – 12.11	No Class	**Final Project Due by Friday at 5 PM**	