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Respecting Diversity, Building Identity

The Cultures and Communities program collaborates with a variety of departments to offer a course called Multicultural America, also recently available as the freshman seminar Multicultural Milwaukee. The course meets UWM's General Education Requirement in Cultural Diversity and is required for students who have opted to earn the Cultures and Communities Certificate.

In this issue we look at three versions of the course, all of which give students a chance to learn from other cultures and reflect critically on their own cultural identities—whether by piecing together a picture of generations of ethnic Milwaukeeans, studying the life lessons of one of the country's most notable civil rights activists or confronting the social and economic forces that today shape the lives of young girls.

Women's Studies Students Help Local Girls Stand Strong

UWM Women's Studies instructor Casey Gerhart knows young girls don't always have an easy time of it. They struggle with self-confidence, relationships, family issues and the everyday demands of school. But Gerhart's students are helping to ease their way with two projects that offer near-peer mentoring and tutoring.

The first, called "StandUp Girls," is a curriculum developed by Gerhart and offered at La Escuela Fratney and Clark Street Schools for fourth and fifth grade girls. Students in her Women's Studies class lead groups at both schools, where they work on building confidence, positive relationships and teamwork and leadership skills.

Gerhart, a doctoral candidate in English, says the name StandUp Girls is significant because it suggests the kinds of citizens girls can be and proclaims that girls are important in society. "They're really proud of the work they're doing," Gerhart says of her students. "As mentors, students

have an opportunity to engage with the community and affect positive and lasting change by preparing themselves and the girls with critical thinking skills. These kinds of relationships can be transformative for an individual and a community." In return, she adds, "They're realizing that the girls have a lot to teach them about what it means to be a kid today."



These girls worked with students from the Women's Studies Class on a skit for International Women's Day. They are flanked by UWM instructor Casey Gerhart (right) and Christiana Attere (left) of the Pan-African Community Association.



UWM student Ashley Schur (left) helps Sarhon with spelling at the Pan-African Community Association

Finding the “Real” Milwaukee: A City Emerges

Diverse and downright fascinating—that’s the city students discovered as they explored Milwaukee’s history, neighborhoods, landmarks and people in a new course called “Multicultural Milwaukee.”

Whether they grew up here or were from out of town, many students thought they knew Milwaukee. Summerfest, State Fair, breweries and baseball—attractions like these were often what defined the city for them. Or they had darker ideas, seeing Milwaukee as impoverished and plagued with crime.

“Ninety percent of our students come from segregated communities regardless of skin color,” says Professor Greg Jay, who developed and taught the class and is the senior director of the Cultures and Communities Program. “Students have limited experience with diversity. We show them a much larger mosaic.”

The course was filled with “ah-ha moments” as the students uncovered what Jay calls some big surprises about the city. For example, many didn’t know Milwaukee was the birthplace of a far-reaching civil rights/open housing movement. They were unaware of the history and growth of the Latino community and few realized that Milwaukee is home to one of the largest Hmong communities in the country. But through service learning experiences and projects that highlighted several of Milwaukee’s ethnic communities, including African American, Jewish, Native American, Hmong and Latino, the city came into focus.

“They come to see a neighborhood or landscape through the lens of its history, and that changes their feeling about it and comfort interacting in it,” Jay says, noting that students progress from surprise to knowledge. “They become the discoverers, they become active learners.”

Reflections written by students in the class describe this process and

how their thinking about Milwaukee was transformed.

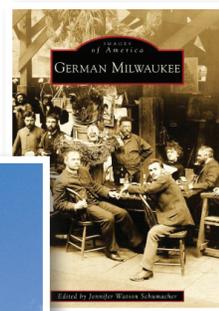
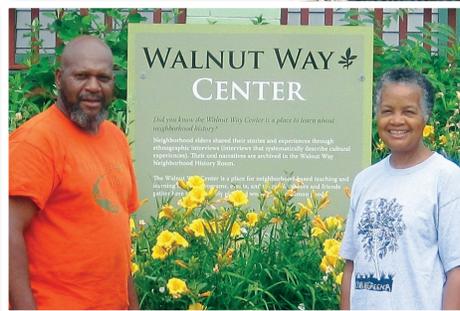
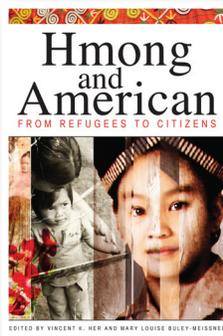
Says Rylee Wolf: “Now, after learning not only the history of the city, but the neighborhoods of today, my idea of Milwaukee has changed dramatically. I learned so much more in detail about who Milwaukee is made up of and what their impact on the city was. I knew that Milwaukee had German history, but I had no idea that the German influence reached all the way from beer and brats to politics,” she says. “Learning about the difficult histories of African-American, Latino and Hmong cultures gave me new respect for them. Knowing about the troubled pasts of these groups allows you to appreciate more where they are today and helps to remind me not to judge a book by its cover.”

Classmate Golshan Motamedi had a similar experience. “At the beginning of the semester, I walked into class with a confidence that nothing in the course would be too much of a shock for me, but I found out very quickly that I was wrong. I’ve grown up around Milwaukee my entire life and never really thought about the influence of other cultures on the city. I look at the city now and try to picture it as it once was. I try to picture each culture group we’ve learned about entering the city. I try to imagine what they saw, what they did and what the city meant to them.

“Each culture here in Milwaukee is what gives the city its character and sass. But most, like myself before this, don’t really consider the struggles and efforts of the people of Milwaukee and how [these have] made our city what it is today.

“I’ve been to the museum dozens of times in my life, but lately I’ve had the urge to go again. Only this time, I’ll be taking in the information; I’ll be able to relate it back to what I’ve learned and what I hope to continue learning. From now on, through my eyes, the city of Milwaukee will be like a time travel machine for me. The images we’ve seen throughout the semester will always be in the back of my head.”

Multicultural Milwaukee will be offered again in the fall and class alumna Lindsey Dickhut has some advice for students who might be interested: “It was really beneficial because we all live in Milwaukee.” she says. “I feel like everyone should take this class!”



Uncovering a Life: History Students Catalog the James Cameron Collection

James Cameron left a rich and haunting legacy when he died in 2006 at the age of 92. The only survivor of a brutal lynching at just 16, he was an activist, community educator and founder of America's Black Holocaust Museum who worked tirelessly to bring to light the injustices suffered by people of African descent in America.

During his life, Cameron received numerous accolades and attention from national and international media, but Robert Smith, a UWM History professor, believes that Cameron never achieved the level of recognition he so deserved.

"As a survivor of that lynching, he went on to dedicate himself to a life of activism," Smith says. "That needs to be heralded more. It was a noble endeavor."

Bringing Cameron's lifework to a much larger audience now includes the efforts of students in Smith's History 150 Multicultural America class. A service learning project for the course took the class to the Wisconsin Black Historical Society where they began to catalog Cameron's vast collection of books, newspapers, magazines and personal reflections.

Under the direction of the Society's Clayborn Benson, the students uncovered a collection striking in its breadth and depth: the writings of Mao and Machiavelli; works on American history, black experience, local, national and international politics, the Jewish holocaust—the list goes on and on. It is a collection that gives testament to Cameron's role as a public scholar and intellectual. He was a voracious reader, self-taught historian, writer, lecturer and author of the memoir, *A Time of Terror: A Survivor's Story*.

"The array of material was outstanding," writes student Nathan Chisholm in a reflective essay for the class. "[It] was not only on many subjects, but each subject contained many different views. For example, there were books on every president this country has had, but for every president, there were books written by Catholics, Jews, Democrats, Republicans, etc."

Women Studies Students continued

For Teresa McCabe, a freshman in the class who worked with the girls at La Escuela Fratney, the experience has been powerful. "It's crazy to think that girls who seem so much younger than me are so similar," she writes in her reflections for the course. "They bring up issues about being bullied, excluded; issues of body image and self esteem. They talk about friends that hurt them and not feeling like they fit in anywhere.

"I feel like I am taking away from this more than I ever thought I would," she continues.

"I think I was under the impression that I needed to shed my light, instead of basking in others. I still love to think that I am making a difference in their lives, but all of the girls there are making such a difference in mine."

The feeling is mutual at the Pan-African Community Association

Delving into Cameron's collection at the Wisconsin Black Historical Society and puzzling over its enormity and meaning gave students a particularly rich context for exploring their own histories and cultural identities as well as the history of Milwaukee.

"Throughout this semester in History 150, and my service learning at the Wisconsin Black Historical Society, I have become much more aware of the history of our nation and how our state and Milwaukee came to be as they are today," writes Brianna Kacmarowski in a class paper. "Without this knowledge, it is impossible to appreciate our own heritage, and therefore ourselves. . . . Anyone who participates in this service learning will walk away with a better understanding of the past and gain reasoning for why they are at the place in their life that they are today."

Smith's students also finished their class with the knowledge that one day the work they did on cataloging Cameron's collection will help expand the exhibits available at America's Black Holocaust Museum, now a virtual institution at www.abhmuseum.org/.

They have also laid a foundation for bringing Cameron's story to local middle and high schools—a service learning activity that will likely be included in the next History 150 class.



James Cameron shown with part of his collection, writing in his basement study in Milwaukee

(PACA) where students from Gerhart's class guided seven girls from the Coalition of African Youth—six of whom are recent immigrants from Africa—in writing and performing a skit for this year's International Women's Day celebration.

According to senior JaNaya Lee, the process of creating the skit was a confidence builder for the girls, who range in age from 9 to 16. In their skit, the girls dramatized some of the cultural and social constraints that girls and women face in Africa and spoke of their desire for education and accomplishment.

"They have such big dreams—one wants to be a nurse, one wants to be a marine biologist, one a doctor, one a lawyer," freshman Ashley Schur says. "I just loved getting to know the girls. They have such a passion for their country and cultures, but they're so excited to be here in America to get an education."



FROM THE DIRECTOR:

Greg Jay

What Do Our Students Learn?

Our faculty are excited about the courses they have designed, the service-learning projects they have directed, and the many fascinating products their students have created (including essays, art installations, photo journals, videos, electronic portfolios, and web sites). This all looks great, but we need more systematic ways of assessing just what students are learning through their experiences in our classes. The Cultures and Communities Certificate Program has ten general "Learning Goals" for students (see www.uwm.edu/cc/students/goals.cfm). Our Exit Survey, which every graduating Cultures and Communities student fills out, helps us measure how well we are achieving these goals.

The latest analysis of data from the survey indicates that the Certificate Program is substantially meeting its student learning goals in the classroom and through community engagement. This is most evident through student responses to these statements: (1) "The course helped me to learn facts and concepts related to multiculturalism and diversity that I did not know before," and, (2) "The learning and experiences provided by the course helped me in my daily life when it comes to understanding and working with people who are different from myself." Depending on the course area, 70-94% of students agreed, with the highest percentages going to the "Multicultural America" core courses.

Numbers above 80% were also common for other goals, such as increasing awareness of community needs, expanding self-reflection, strengthening overall academic performance, and

increasing commitment to civic engagement. In the comments section, one student wrote: "Taking classes related to diversity has allowed me to re-examine myself as a person and become aware of my own subconscious prejudices, as well as given me tools in addressing and changing those prejudices, [which] has made me a better person over all. I am extremely grateful for the life lessons [that] enrolling in this program has taught me."

Particularly high marks were given to the service-learning component of CC courses. Eighty-five percent agreed that service learning for the Cultures and Community certificate "improved [their] interpersonal skills," and 88% agreed that service learning "increased [their] understanding of diverse cultures," "expanded [their] self-reflection," and made them "more aware of community needs." Seventy-four percent credited service learning with increasing their commitment to civic engagement. In addition, almost all (91%) agreed that they "achieved course learning outcomes" through service learning, and 82% agreed that service learning supported their understanding of course content. The data suggests that service learning experiences positively affected survey participants not only academically, but also played a role in increasing their ability to self-reflect as well as shifted their perceptions of the world around them.

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Raoul Deal Awarded Fromkin Lectureship

Raoul Deal, Senior Lecturer, UWM Department of Art and Design and Cultures and Communities artist-in-residence, has been awarded the 2012 Fromkin Research Grant and Lectureship. Deal will explore Latino identity in Milwaukee's Latino immigrant community.

Deal is preparing an exhibit, to be displayed at the Latino Arts Gallery in the United Community Center, of woodcut images based on personal immigration stories from families of recent Latino immigrants in Milwaukee.

He plans to supplement the exhibit with a historical investigation of Mexican immigration in the city and will research the contribution of printmaking to immigration movements elsewhere in the U.S. His lecture, to be delivered in the fall, will be the 43rd in the Fromkin lecture series, the longest running continuous lecture series on campus.

More information about the annual \$5000 Fromkin Research Grant is available at www.uwm.edu/libraries/special/fromkin/grant.cfm

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