Course Description:

"Education must light the path for social change."

In this course we will explore the question: How can we educate to promote change toward more just, compassionate, and sustainable approaches to living and learning in a rapidly changing and increasingly complex world?

Throughout the semester we will explore three focal aspirations for social and educational reform: education for social justice, education for deep democracy, and education for ecological renewal. We will consider both the promise of positive changes and the peril of significant challenges that either inspire or impede efforts to enact these aspirations on local, national and international levels. We will also work both individually and collectively, on campus and in the community, to analyze specific social issues and reform strategies, in addition to conceptualizing plans for principled social action. We will address these complex issues from multiple perspectives using varied approaches to teaching and learning.

Course Objectives:

- To gain understanding of social, environmental, political, and economic structures that influence, and are influenced by, contemporary educational systems.

- To gain understanding of philosophic positions and cultural values as they diminish or enhance movement toward cultural and environmental futures that are both desirable and sustainable.

- To gain understanding of strategies for, and barriers to, positive change on personal, organizational/community, and societal/planetary levels.

- To identify a personal agenda for social and educational reform, and assess one’s potential to contribute to these processes.

Course Requirements:

1. Required Readings – Included are: Savage Inequalities, J. Kozol; Corporate Culture and the Attack on Higher Education and Public Schools, H. Giroux; Education for Public Democracy, D. Sehr; Is There a Public for Public Schools, D. Matthews; Education and the Environment, G. Smith; and Sustainable Education, S. Sterling; supplemented by relevant print, on-line, and other media resources. All texts are available at Ruminator Books.
2. Experiential Learning Activities - Throughout the semester students are provided opportunities to learn experientially, often by entering into teaching/learning relationships with others. Included are small and large group discussion sessions, interactions with colleagues on campus (faculty guest speakers, peer reviewers) and in the community (project consultants), participation in a civic engagement project, contributions to the course web page/Nicenet site, and aspects of the research & reflection journals as described below.

Two unique attributes of experiential learning are important to note here. First, because experiential learning so often requires cooperative interaction, regular attendance is essential. Second, because the experience of active approaches to learning is both radically social and highly personal, self- and social reflection and self- and peer evaluation play fundamental roles in the teaching/learning process.

3. Exploratory and Reflective Writing – We will engage in varied approaches to learning through writing. Included are a series of relatively brief informal exploratory papers of varied formats and two reflective essays.

4. Reform Composition – A term project integrating three complex tasks:

   a) The Research & Reflection Journal—a variation on the traditional annotated bibliography—will be developed by each student to synthesize and document ways in which their understanding and imagination regarding their selected reform topic have been affected through engagement with varied resources (interviews, experiences, print and on-line texts, works of art, etc.) Paper copies of all on-line exploratory contributions will also be incorporated in a separate section of this journal.

   b) The Civic Engagement Project is a semester long community-based research and service commitment of at least 10 hours. The project should provide opportunities for students to gain deeper understanding of the reform topic under consideration while making valuable contributions to their host organizations.

   c) The Issue Assessment & Action Plan should accomplish three tasks: (a) assess the current status of a condition targeted for reform, (b) outline a desirable end state to be achieved through reform efforts, and (c) identify major steps to be taken in order to accomplish reform objectives. The project should include at least one alternative mode of representation (visual aides, music, information sheets, lesson plans, computer “courseware”, editorial, etc.) to reinforce thoughts communicated through the traditional written format.

Evaluation:

A modified criterion-referenced approach to evaluation is used in this course. The class is structured to encourage all students to demonstrate a high quality of performance. Self, peer, and faculty evaluation are incorporated. Late assignments will not be evaluated unless arrangements are made with the instructor or peer reviewers in advance. Final grades are assigned upon completion of all course requirements and based upon the following guidelines:
Exploratory Writing  
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Self-Assessment I  
On-line conversations  
Participation in Guided Conversations  
Peer Review  
Resource Sharing  
Self-Assessment II  

Social Inquiry  
20%  
Course Guests/Guided Conversations  
Education for Deep Democracy  
Design Project/Strategic Narrative  

Reflective Essays  
20%  
Education for Social Justice  
Education for Ecological Renewal  

Reform Composition  

Research & Reflection Journal  
10%  
On-line texts  
Print texts  
Visual/aesthetic resources  

Civic Engagement Project  
10%  
Interviews  
Observations/Experiences  

Issue Assessment & Action Plan  
40%  
Assessment of current condition  
Reform vision  
Principled response  

Course Outline:  

I. Education for Individual Achievement and Economic Proficiency  
Dates: 1/27-2/3  

II. Education for Social Justice  
Dates: 2/5-2/21  
Readings: Kozol (2/5); Giroux (2/12)
III. Education for Deep Democracy  
Dates: 2/24-3/10  
Readings: Matthews, Sehr (2/24)  

IV. Education for Ecological Renewal  
Dates: 3/31-4/11  
Readings: Smith, Sterling (3/31)  

V. Reform Compositions  
Dates: 1/27-5/5  
Readings: selected by students  

Tentative Schedule of Submissions:  

2/3: Exploratory Writing: Self Assessment  
2/14: Reform Composition Abstract  
2/19: Reflective Essay I - Education for Social Justice  
3/17-21: Midterm – Spring Break  
3/24: Reform Composition Conceptual Maps (Peer Review)  
4/11: Reflective Essay II - Education for Ecological Renewal  
4/14: Reform Composition - Preliminary Presentations & Response  
4/21: Reform Composition - Extended Outline (Individual Conferences)  
4/28: Reform Composition Draft (Peer Review)  
4/30: Research & Reflection Journal/Civic Engagement Project  
5/5: Reform Composition  
5/9: Exploratory Writing: Self Assessment II  
Course evaluation