Law, Societies, & Justice Program

A Commitment to Diversity

Law, Societies, and Justice is a very new program, only in its third year of full curricular offerings after receiving funding from a College UIF award in 2000. But well established institutional roots have made diversity a central issue on the LSJ agenda. The old Society and Justice program from which LSJ evolved, and the Political Science public law program that administered it, were very committed to the ideal of promoting education about and respect for diversity. Indeed, the politically charged character of the program focus on law, power, and justice ensures that confronting these issues of diversity is unavoidable. Given the basic premise of "equal justice for all" that is at the heart of the rule of law ideal, addressing what "differences make a difference" among citizens, their situations, and their actions is at the very heart of program study. Moreover, the faculty and staff of both SoJu and Political Science have long shared a commitment that diversity can be a very positive achievement, and that certain types of diversity and respect for that diversity are essential to democratic, legally constituted societies.

The dramatic transformation from the SoJu program into the new Law, Societies, & Justice expressed and deepened these commitments. The new LSJ curriculum was conceived and planned in coordination with the Curriculum Transformation project funded by Ford Foundation and led by Betty Schmitz in the mid 1990s. Michael McCann, who has led the program reform effort, participated in that initial faculty group and used the experience to rethink what LSJ could become in light of commitments to diversity. This legacy has been expanded by initiatives from Andrea Simpson, Arzoo Osanloo, Angelina Godoy, and other faculty members promoting continued curricular transformation to enhance diversity. In addition, the LSJ director sponsored no less than four open forums soliciting student input about program development, organized a focus group seminar on the new program, and invited comment from faculty in a variety of ways. In all these discussions, the commitment to teaching about and promoting the ideal of diversity was prominently featured.

These discussions about, and activities of implementing, program transformation have addressed a variety of issues relating to diversity. These are briefly summarized below with comments about program changes that directly reflect the principles at stake.

1. Diversity Among People in the Program

We believe that the commitment to diversity is not simply an abstract matter for reflection. Understanding and developing respect for differences among people must develop from practical interaction and relationships. As such, we have been committed to welcoming and promoting diversity along the lines of race, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, sexual difference, and the like among the people in our program -- the faculty, the staff, the students. We not only link our words to our actions but, when the program fosters attention to issues of diversity, such discourse in part builds on recognized differences among us as a community.
a. **Students.** The SoJu program historically attracted one of the most diverse student groups of any program on campus. In particular, our undergraduate constituency long has included many members of minority racial and ethnic groups (African American, Asian American, Hispanic, Native American) -- at times as many as 20% of the student body -- as well as women. This legacy has been reproduced and expanded in LSJ. Even in the post I-200 era, the SoJu program and the public law classes in Political Science continue to attract and actively recruit a very diverse group of students on and to our campus. The new LSJ program should even further increase that diversity with its expanded, more varied but still "law, power, and justice centered" curriculum. Our program offers evidence that prominently and extensively featuring classes that directly address diversity issues will attract a diverse study population.

b. **Faculty.** The newly hired and affiliated faculty members in LSJ likewise represent one of the most diverse groups on campus. Not only do our faculty affiliate with half a dozen different disciplines, but our demographic profiles are highly unique: Of our program faculty, roughly one-half are female. Faculty consist of a varied array of ethnic backgrounds including: African American, Latino, and Iranian descent; affiliate faculty include women of Native American and East Indian descent. Overall, this mix is far more diverse than the UW faculty as a whole, than the social sciences as a whole, and probably than any single unit outside of AES. Moreover, we are actively pursuing connections with other new and existing faculty who will even further increase this diversity of faculty members. Finally, we have actively initiated and supported efforts to bring in speakers from academic and political life around the world that reflect the fundamental differences enumerated above. Our working premise is that a diverse faculty is critical to presenting a world of diversely situated inhabitants to students as well as attracting a diverse array of students within the confines of the UW context. Our success in recruiting and retain our diverse faculty reflects our strong, explicit commitments to these values of multi-culturalism.

c. **Staff.** We have taken diversity seriously in staff hiring. Our first permanent LSJ staff member was a Latina Ph.D. from the Political Science Department. She was terrific and we hoped she would stay, but she opted instead to take a tenure track faculty position at a California university. We then hired Karin Stromberg, an experienced curriculum coordinator with long connections to Political Science and well evidenced commitments to issues of minority recruitment and relations. We are very aware that our staff matter a great deal for shaping student perceptions and experiences with the program, and we count diversity as among the leading factors in making such choices.

2. **Diversity as a Curricular Commitment**
The SoJu program from the start addressed at great length issues of race and class in its curriculum. Indeed, virtually every class concerning criminal, constitutional, and civil law as well as other related topics in the curriculum addresses issues of race, class, and ethnicity. Indeed, this issue of racial/class difference is, to a large degree, what the program has been all about. The revised LSJ program has added dramatically to this substantive focus in three general ways.

a. **Social Construction of Race, Class, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality, Disability, etc.** The revised program features much greater attention to issues of gender, sexual difference, and disabilities along with class, race, and ethnic differences among citizens. Indeed, three new faculty members were hired and a half dozen campus faculty were "recruited" explicitly to expand the program curriculum along these lines. Not surprisingly, LSJ became the host unit for three new classes on disabilities studies by a group of scholars on campus, and we played a key leadership role in recruiting former EEOC Commissioner and disability rights activist Paul Miller in the Law School; he hopes to join in teaching our undergraduates. Moreover, and more generally, the revised program builds into recognition of demographic differences much greater, more focused attention to issues regarding how identity is "constructed" in social life and the implications for citizenship status, differential power, inclusion/exclusion, and justice/injustice.

b. **Comparative Cross-National and Transnational Study.** The revised LSJ curriculum also takes a giant step in expanding the curriculum to address issues of differences among nations and regions in an increasingly globalized world, beyond a narrow focus on differences among citizens within the United States. This commitment is reflected in: the program name, Law, Societies, & Justice; in the name of the related center that oversees LSJ, Comparative Law and Society Studies Center; and in the expansion of the curriculum to include many classes on legal practices and institutions in other parts of the world, including Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Islamic societies in different regions. The new program specifically addresses both the trends toward "convergence" or homogeneity and the persistence of differences or creation of new differentiation that attend globalization, and in which law is playing a huge role.

c. **Ideals of Tolerance, Understanding, and Respect.** The old SoJu curriculum ostensibly placed attention to basic principles of justice at the core of the program, although focus on the theme often fell short of the mark. This commitment is greatly augmented in the revised program through new classes regarding justice as well as a fundamental curricular commitment to study of human rights. Concepts such as justice, rights, equality, and the like are interrogated throughout the LSJ curriculum as normative standards that are both internal and external to law. In this pursuit, questions of difference prominently arise at every point. The faculty are united by commitments to
basic principles of justice and rights as essential foundations of citizenship
while they individually approach those norms from a variety of different
substantive and pedagogical angles.

3. Differences in Ways of Knowing

The new LSJ program radically increases the SoJu program commitment to
interrogating different forms of knowledge and different ways of knowing as a
substantive component of contemporary education. This focus addresses both issues
of different knowledge forms themselves and their linkages to different citizens' social situation or traditions. To understand differences among people, we believe, we must become more attentive to the different ways in which people know, the different modes of thought, the different sources of knowledge, and the different types of normative claims that separate and, potentially, enrich us. This commitment has a variety of particular implications.

a. Epistemology and Methodology. The program requires classes in social science statistics, but many other courses in the program prominently mix different types of methods in data collection/presentation into the class experience, raising questions about how different types of data build on different assumptions and point toward different ways of knowing. The social constructionist inclination of many teachers makes this focus on linking epistemology and method a routine, integral aspect of class inquiry.

b. Multiple Sources of Knowledge. Many classes in the curriculum also integrate many types of information from diverse resources -- newspapers, radio, TV, novels, movies, etc. as well as academic sources. In using such multiple sources, attention is placed on the different forms of knowledge privileged by different institutional processes, and the relationships between these institutionalized forms of knowledge production and power relationships in and among societies. What we know, how we know it, where the knowledge comes from, and whose knowledge is expressed or position advantaged -- all are related issues for a number of our faculty. This inclination flows from long established traditions of studying law specifically, but also from study of politics, power, and social relations generally.

c. Pluralities of Voices. It follows from the previous sections that both individual class readings and the overall curriculum seek to represent different voices from differently situated groups. For example, students not only read about and discuss how the US criminal justice system deals with racial difference, but efforts to include voices by a diverse array of people -- including variously situated citizens of color -- are made in most classes. In particular, our classes make special efforts to include voices of the dispossessed, to portray law “from the bottom up,” as we routinely say. Diverely situated people become not just objects of study but subjects whose own understandings are part of the class material.
d. **Internships.** Finally, the program's longstanding internship requirement is committed to connecting academic/intellectual discourse with practical activity. Our internship requirement explicitly aims less to give students direct experience in the "real world" than to provide an opportunity for them to bring intellectual questions and understandings about power and difference to everyday settings of practical action. Internships in LSJ traditionally have been venues for students to push their comfort levels of involvement with diverse communities and then examine this experience in light of their academic work.

4. **LSJ Outreach into the Community**

The facts of extremely limited staff support and a very junior faculty group have limited systematic outreach of LSJ into the community. However, individual faculty members have done a great deal and we surely have big plans for building community linkages over time, as we develop the capacity.

a. **Individual Faculty Efforts.** Each of our individual faculty members have contributed in various community forums and developed diverse connections to citizen groups. For example, Arzoo Osanloo has spoken widely in many different venues on issues related to Islamic polities; Joel Migdal is a major public figure on issues regarding the Middle East; Katherine Beckett recently conducted a much publicized study of racial disparities in drug arrests in Seattle and has talked to many community groups and media outlets about the subject; Michael McCann has spoken to many community groups on a wide range of issues, and to the media many times over the years on many topics, in the last few years most often about the “lawsuit crisis” in the U.S.; Angelina Godoy has engaged in extensive outreach to the local Latino community and addressed the press often on issues concerning Latinos in Washington state; Rachel Cichowski has regularly talked to community groups about women’s rights; Andrea Simpson and Patrick Rivers have spoken to many groups on issues related to race; virtually everyone in the faculty group has participated on and beyond campus in forums on post-9/11 era issues.

b. **Internships.** The much heralded LSJ program requires all students to take a 100 hour internship in the community, virtually in governmental or non-profit institutions; many students take additional hours of internship credit or continue non-profit community service even without taking credit. This means that we place students throughout the community in ways that benefit not only our students but public agencies and groups. This is great for building connections among diversely situated citizens, officials, political actors, civic leaders, and ordinary citizens.

c. **Inviting Visitors from around the World.** The CLASS Center actively raises funds to bring in speakers from around the world to talk to our students.
and to the broader community. Our human rights speaker series and conference this year is the most dramatic example of this; we are bringing speakers from Africa, China, and Latin America as well as activists from immigrant communities around the US.

5. Challenges and Limitations

Despite our ambitious vision and considerable success, we have faced many challenges and limitations that no doubt will impede continued advances. The larger context of Seattle and the UW campus itself poses many challenges for those of us committed to promoting social justice in an increasingly divided world.

a. Selective Admission and Legal Limits. One of the distinctive features LSJ is its selective admission policy. We admit only about 70-80% of those who apply; most students who are admitted have a 3.2 GPA or better. We used to pursue an aggressive affirmative action policy to promote diversity, and even after I-200 we still advance diversity indirectly by weighing students’ interests, background activity, and career goals. We encourage students to write about their social involvement, personal experiences, identity and educational goals as part of the admissions process; students’ depth and richness of experience counts greatly in admissions decisions. However, as demand for LSJ grows, our flexibility in advancing diversity through program admission is increasingly constrained.

b. Limited Staff Support. LSJ and CLASS together have one staff person to advise 115 majors and another 25 minors, administer a special human rights minor an organized the internship program, do all curriculum planning and management, and do all clerical work for the undergraduate, graduate, and CLASS Center activities. There simply is no staff time available to help expand our outreach commitments in the various campus programs committed to diversity.

c. New/Junior Faculty. Our small faculty of six is two-thirds Assistant Professors who are highly committed to diversity but must make research publication, teaching, and program administration the first priority. Everyone is doing more than is feasible at present.

6. Final Thoughts

The above outline only scratches the surface regarding how faculty, staff, and students focus on issues related to diversity in the LSJ program. Moreover, we want to emphasize that this is an ongoing project. We are still working on curricular development, faculty recruitment, and program design, as the new program reforms will not be fully implemented until fall of 2004. Moreover, we are working with the
Curriculum Transformation Project to review further what we have done and the directions in which we are or should be going regarding these issues.