

Through the Eyes of Others

English 140.003 Winter, 2002

Tu. Thurs. 1-2:30 4175 Angell Hall

A Community-Based First Year Seminar

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**Helen's Office Hours: By appointment in 1128 Angell Hall
(Sweetland Writing Center) or at various coffee shops**

Time Commitment

In order to register for this course, you'll need to make sure that you can fit your volunteer commitment and the FIGS (First Year Interest Groups) meetings into your schedule. Please see Community Service Placement and What Is FIGS? for details.

Please note: Because of all the work you're doing outside of class time, you'll get three class "days off" at strategic points during the semester (See Calendar).

Required Reading (Books available at Shaman Drum)

1. Coursepack. Available at Dollar Bill
2. Barnes, Annie. (2000) *Everyday Racism*. Napierville, IL: Sourcebooks
3. Canada, Geoffrey (1995) *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
4. Conley, Dalton (2000). *Honky*. N.Y.: Vintage.
5. Erenreich, Barbara (2001) *Nickel and Dimed*. N.Y.:Vintage

Introduction

College is mostly head work – read, write, memorize, regurgitate, then read and write some more. There's little opportunity for reflection, even less for human connection. This time-honored method may work – more or less – for the study of microbes, or legal briefs, or gravitational forces, or cost-benefit analyses. But if you're trying to learn about people, it doesn't cut it. To understand how people live, what motivates them, what infuriates them, what brings out their best selves – you have to get to know them, listen to them, see things through their eyes.

To some extent, you can learn about human beings and human nature through reading, especially the kinds of reading we will do for this course: memoirs, interviews and creative writing based on lived experience. But the best way to understand people at a deep level is to talk with them, to experience their circumstances and frustrations, to share friendship on an equal basis, to work with them with an open heart and mind.

That's why this course gets you out into the community – or rather, the part of the upscale Ann Arbor community that most of its residents don't know about – the community that struggles to survive from day to day, that fears for their children, that

knows full well the way they're judged by people who know them superficially or not at all.

Many of the kids and adults you'll meet won't know much about you, either. Some will be curious about you and your world, others (even, at times, the same people) will see you as part of the problem, or judge you because of who and what you represent. You can turn these challenges into learning opportunities by finding the courage to face yourself, your motives, your privileges, your judgments of others.

In class, our readings and discussion will concentrate on four issues, all of which contribute to poverty or are exacerbated by it: "everyday" racism, lack of cash, the threat and lure of violence, and unequal education. These are not the only causes of trouble in poor people's lives, but they are important ones. In your community service placement you may hear about others: substance abuse, early pregnancy, mental and physical illness, child abuse, aging, and so on. I encourage you to explore these issues through your own reading and/or other courses at Michigan.

The FIGS program (see **What is FIGS?** below) is also designed to help you see "through the eyes of others – but these "others" will be University of Michigan students. Through structured dialogues and experiential exercises with trained FIGS facilitators, you will learn to talk more deeply and meaningfully about sensitive issues of race, class, gender, and oppression. We'll do some of this in our own class meetings, as well.

Community Service Placement

Everyone will do two hours a week of community service (not counting the time it takes to get there and back) at an agency of your choice from the list below. It's up to you to call the contact person at the agency, find a way to get there, and provide your warm, respectful presence in whatever way benefits the children, teen, or adult clients.

It's good to think of community service as a two-way exchange: while you are providing valuable staff support to the agency, the people you serve are providing you with invaluable educational and leadership experience. As with most things in life, you'll get out of your service what you put into it. Writing in your community service journal immediately after each session will help you reflect more deeply on what happened, what questions the experience brought up for you, and how your observations and conversations might relate to the readings and the discussions you're having in class and in your FIGS group. (See Community Service Journal).

To help you decide which placement is for you, check out the options on line! All the organizations have websites. Just search (www.google.com) for Ann Arbor plus the name of the group.

Marit, your friendly TA, is also available to help you hook up with a placement, answer your questions about it, and help you deal with any difficulties or frustrations you're having with it.

Here are your options. Please note the maximum number of volunteers that are needed at each site:

Greenbaxter Court (a program run by Options Center)

1737 Green Rd. (near North Campus)

Contact: Linda Hiller 662-9590

Transportation: Bus: No. 2 AATA; or car.

Dates/Times: Monday through Thursday 4-6 PM

Who: Kids 5-10 years old

Orientation: Short orientation with Director

Max # of volunteers they can use: 5-6 students, but flexible

Options Center is a private, nonprofit human service agency that has been a part of the Ann Arbor community since 1978. It provides support services to offenders, ex-offenders, homeless adults, and other “at-risk” members of the community. These services range from employment training and housing support to mentoring programs and support groups. **Greenbaxter Court** is a public housing community center operated through Options Center. Volunteers will work with children from 5-10 years old in the after-school program, which includes arts and crafts, recreation, and some tutoring and mentoring.

Neutral Zone

637 S. Main St.

Contact: Heidi Dunbar

Phone?

Transportation: walkable.

Dates/Times: Tu/Thurs 5-7 PM

Orientation: Short orientation with the Director.

Max #: 4-6 students

Who: Teens

Neutral Zone is Ann Arbor’s teen center open to young people aged 13-18. Programs range from Youth for Social Change to poetry slams to hip hop workshops. Volunteers will work with their tutoring program for 11th and 12th graders. Students especially needed to help with math, sciences, and Spanish.

Arbor Heights

1447 Washington Heights Drive

Contact: Frank Cantu

Phone: 302-2210

Transportation: walkable (near the UM hospital)

Dates/Times: by appointment, after 6 PM or weekends

PLUS MANDATORY Wednesday training sessions 8-9 PM.

Orientation: On first Wednesday with Director

Max # 6

Who? Teens

Arbor Heights Center is a residential facility for delinquent and abused/neglected youth (mostly boys) who are state wards. Volunteers are needed to participate in a one-on-one

tutoring/mentoring program. Volunteers will arrange one hour a week to work with students and a second hour for the weekly Wednesday meeting with all volunteers from 8-9pm.

Hikone Community Center

2724 Hikone Rd. (off Packard, past Stone School Rd.)

Contact: Nancy Bogan 677-3033 (between 9AM and 5PM)

Transportation: Car preferable, but bus also stops there.

Dates/Times Hikone will reopen either Jan. 10th or Jan. 14th. Hours are 4-8PM Monday through Thursday; 4-7PM Fridays.

Orientation: Informal

Max # Can use any number of volunteers.

Who? Kids and teens

Hikone is a public housing project funded in part by Ann Arbor's sister city, Hikone, Japan. Its community center provides after school programs for kids and teens and some activities and services for their parents, some of whom are struggling with severe substance abuse and self-esteem issues. Volunteers will tutor and mentor 4-16- year olds, help with crafts and other activities, and help implement substance abuse and violence prevention curricula.

Avalon Housing – Pilot Light Tenant Organization

Contact: Michael Appel 663-5858

Transportation: Car

Dates/Times: Contact Michael for details

Orientation: Same

Max: 3 or 4

Who? Adult public housing residents

The goals for this project include building community among tenants of Avalon, a public housing complex, increasing tenants' self-determination and access to resources; and creating a formal, ongoing tenants organization to represent tenant interests in Avalon's evaluation, planning, and decision-making process. Students are needed to work with residents on building repairs and other projects to-be-determined. Avalon is trying to strengthen its volunteer program and increase connections between U of M students and its public housing residents. This would be an interesting way to see how programs get off the ground.

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What is FIGS?

FIGS stands for First Year Interest Groups (a dull name, but an interesting concept).

Each semester, six to eight instructors who are teaching first year courses related to race, ethnicity, identity, and/or poverty get their classes together for two, large experiential learning sessions and four smaller dialogue sessions. These sessions, HELD OUTSIDE OF OUR CLASS TIME, will get you interacting with other first year students with similar interests as yours. You'll meet new people, talk in a structured, "safe" environment about sensitive issues of race, ethnicity, gender and other identities, and gain important skills that will help put you on a leadership path at Michigan – and in life. You

will continue these discussions with FIGS participants through *mandatory* participation in the FIGS on-line dialogues (See FIGS Digital Dialogues, below).

The FIGS Schedule: (Six meetings in all.) Also see Calendar, below.

TUES Feb. 5 7-9:30 PM First Joint FIG.

4 FIGS CIRCLES: Each group meets once a week during the weeks of Feb. 11, Feb. 18, Mar. 4, and Mar 11. Choices of meeting times are 6-8 PM on Tuesdays, 7-9PM on Wednesdays, and 4-6 PM on Sundays. You will have your choice of circle topics: Race/Ethnicity OR Gender.

(Note: Students observing Chinese New Year or Tet should avoid scheduling meetings on Tues. Feb. 12. Students observing Ash Wednesday should avoid Weds. Feb. 13.)

TUES Mar. 19 7-9 PM Second and last Joint FIG.

Writing Assignments and Writing Style

All writing for this course is INFORMAL. That means you can (and should) use “I” language, since the purpose is to explore what you think, feel, experience, wonder, and come to understand. It does NOT mean that your writing should be “off the top,” that is, so informal it is unintelligible to the outside reader. I’d like you to work at getting all the ideas in your head onto the paper using some kind of organizational scheme, and to learn to observe carefully, describe using vivid, concrete language, reproduce conversations in a lively way, relate your experiences to readings and conversations in class and in the FIGS sessions, and ask (and attempt to answer) deep questions. All this can be done in simple, straightforward, informal prose. Please edit carefully by reading over each writing assignment (reading aloud helps to catch typos, repetition, and unclear spots) before handing it in.

Although most writing you do at the university is expected to be in “Standard” (i.e. white, Midwestern, formalized) English, for these journals you are encouraged to write in whatever dialect of English comes the most naturally to you and fits the situation you’re writing about and the “voice” you’d like to take on. The fact that dialects and variations (such as African American Vernacular English; Caribbean English; “Spanglish,” Indian English, etc.) are often demeaned by the general public as ungrammatical, lazy, stupid, foreign or slang, these judgments are not shared by professional linguists, who point out that all languages and dialects are equally complex, that the difference between a language and a dialect is a matter of power (“a language is a dialect with an army and a navy”), and that unique grammar rules govern all these varieties (See articles by McWhorter and Smitherman in your course pack). If you don’t speak a particular dialect, I suggest you write in it *only* when you’re reproducing the language of native speakers (as in conversations or dialogues). Even then, listen carefully, and reproduce accurately.

1. Reading Journal

Every two weeks you will hand in several pages of in-depth reflection on quotes or questions I assign from the required reading. For each topic, question or quote I expect you to write **at least two double-spaced, typed** pages—more if you like. For some of the pieces I will encourage you to get creative – poetry, lyrics, dialogues, even drawings will be options. At other times I will ask you to

comment in depth on quotes of your choice. For these journal entries you should type the quote or question out in full, then give your response. You may ask yourself questions, refer to personal experiences or other readings, disagree with the author (giving your reasons), or show your thinking about the reading in any way you like. I will grade reading journal entries as follows: ++ for excellent work, + for reasonably okay work, and RW (rewrite) for entries that need more depth of reflection and/or attention to sentence level issues (word choice, clarity of ideas, etc.). You **MUST** rewrite your “rewrites,” and you **MAY** rewrite your + if you like. Since writing almost always improves with rewriting and rethinking, you may re-write a paper endlessly (and we will comment endlessly) until the last day of the course. Rewriting shows your commitment, thought, and care.

2. Reflections on class discussion/presentation

After a particularly interesting class discussion (one that brought out lots of ideas, emotions, and/or disagreements) or after a speaker or film, I may ask you to write your reflections to hand in at the next class period. “Reflections” could include emotional reactions, questions, thoughts, memories, new ideas, questions, and so on. One or two typed pages will usually be enough, though you can always write more, if you like. These reflections will also be graded with the ++, +, RW scheme.

If you must be absent on a day when a reflection is assigned, you generally don’t need to make it up (since you can’t really write about a discussion or speaker you didn’t hear). Ask me to make sure.

3. Community Service Journal

Every two weeks, at the same time I collect the Reading Journal, you will hand in **2-3 typed, double-spaced pages of reflection on EACH of your community service visits.** (If you choose Arbor Heights, where an hour of tutoring/mentoring and a one-hour volunteer group meeting are required, your single, weekly journal entry can comment on either or both of these sessions).

Marit, your TA, will comment on this journal. She will ask you questions, give her reactions, help you link your experiences to the readings and class discussions, and be your friend and guide. I will read both your writing and Marit’s comments, and then grade it (++, +, RW) before returning it to you. I am looking for quality (honesty, depth of reflection, inclusion of concrete details, questioning, creativity) and quantity (avoidance of repetition and blah-blah-blah).

4. FIGS Digital Dialogues

As part of your participation in the FIGS program, you will be asked to participate in **weekly on-line discussion** on questions posed to the entire FIGS group by the list moderator, Julieanne Muir. I will receive a print-out of the number and length of your contributions from Julieanne, and I’ll have access to the whole discussion to understand the issues and the honesty and depth of thinking that you have tried to promote through your comments.

Here's how to participate in the FIGS Digital Dialogues: Go to:

<http://coursetools.ummu.umich.edu/umaa/rackham/figs/dod.nsf>

Enter your username and password

Click on Discussions

Each Monday, a new dialogue question will be posed by moderator Julieanne Muir (jmuir@umich.edu). You will have until the following Sunday at 11:59 PM to post your dialogue entries. Of course, it's better to check the dialogues several times during the week and respond whenever you feel you have something to add, or when you'd like to move the discussion along. To post your entries, just click on Respond and type your comments in the text box provided. If you type longer than 15 minutes YOU WILL LOSE YOUR WORK so you might want to cut and paste longer entries (or entries where you're thinking while writing – recommended!) from a Word program. If you have questions about the dialogue or the site, please e-mail Julieanne Muir, above.

Assessment

Your course grade will be determined by:

- *your attendance and active participation in class, your placement, and FIGS*
- *your contributions to class and FIGS discussions*
- *the quality and quantity of your written work*

PLEASE BE PRO-ACTIVE in making appointments with me for individual help with your writing, for discussion of difficulties you may be experiencing or questions that are on your mind, and/or general conversation about you and your career at Michigan or about your later professional life. I'll make plenty of time for each of you.

Because of my philosophy of teaching and learning, I generally do not assign letter grades to writing, as it seems to pit students against each other, inhibit risk-taking, and make both students and teacher forget any higher purpose of education. I'll be glad to tell you how you're doing in the course if you ask me in conference. It will be up to you to keep up with assignments, because nothing will ever really come "due" until the last day of class (see Portfolios, below).

Portfolios

On the last day of class you should bring your portfolio which will include all drafts of all your writing including your reading journal, your community service journal, any reaction papers assigned in class, and a **2-3 page introduction to your portfolio that describes your personal growth in the course**. These pages should be arranged sequentially and fastened securely with metal prongs in a cardboard binder.

My Expectations

- * Be there! Attendance is particularly important in a course centered on your own thoughts, emotions, reflections and actions. If you must be absent, please try to message me beforehand and let me know what's up.

* Be involved! Speak up, write a lot in your journals and on-line dialogues, come see me in conference, and show responsible and helpful leadership in your community service placement.

* Work on your writing. Be attentive to feedback, come to me for help at any stage in the writing process, and carefully edit your final products.

* Be honest and pro-active. If I say or do something that offends you, let me know about it. If someone in class or at your community placement is driving you crazy, use your skills in listening and dialogue to help improve the situation. If you're having difficulty with your community placement, see Marit about it.

IMPORTANT: Assignments for the next class will be posted on the board at the beginning of each class session. When you must be absent, be sure to let me know, then contact another student for the assignments for next time and to find out what happened in class. Please do not ask me for this information.

CALENDAR

Note the three “days off”: Thursday Feb. 14; Thursday March 21st, and Thursday April 11th.

Tues. Jan. 8 Introduction to the course and each other.
Start reading EVERYDAY RACISM (Barnes).

Thurs. Jan. 10 Team Building: Identities, Group Norms.

RACE, ETHNICITY, and RACISM

Tues. Jan. 15

Thurs. Jan. 17 **Start Community Service.**

Mon. Jan. 21 **MLK Day!**
Required attendance and write-up of at least one event

Tues. Jan. 22 **Journals due.**

Thurs. Jan. 24

Tues. Jan. 29 **Start reading NICKEL AND DIMED (Erenreich)**

Thurs. Jan. 31

POVERTY and “THE WORKING POOR”

Tues. Feb. 5 **Journal due.**
AND 7-9:30 **First Joint FIG**

Thurs. Feb. 7

Tues. Feb. 12

First FIGS dialogue (Tues, Weds. or Sunday of this week, as assigned)

Thurs. Feb. 14 ***day off #1*** **Happy Valentine's Day**

Tues. Feb. 19

Journals due.

Second FIGS dialogue (Tues., Weds., or Sunday of this week, as assigned)

Thurs. Feb. 21

Start reading FIST, STICK, KNIFE, GUN (Canada)

SPRING BREAK

VIOLENCE, VICTIMS, AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Tues. Mar. 5

Third FIGS dialogue (Tues., Weds., or Sunday of this week, as assigned)

Thurs. Mar. 7

Tues. Mar. 12 Journal due

Fourth FIGS dialogue (Tues., Weds., or Sunday of this week, as assigned)

Thurs. Mar. 14

Start reading HONKY (Conley)

Tues. Mar. 19

7-9 PM **SECOND (and last) JOINT FIGS**

Thurs. Mar. 21

day off #2

EDUCATION, RACE, and CLASS

Tues. Mar. 26

Journal due.

Thurs. Mar. 28

Tues. Apr. 2

Thurs. Apr. 4

Tues. Apr. 9

Journal due

Thurs. Apr. 11

day off #3

Tues. Apr. 16

PORTFOLIOS DUE. Celebration!