

Class explores democracy, alternative teaching methods

The class will bring in students from several different local colleges to focus on specific community problems and democratic solutions

By Eric Ginsburg
STAFF WRITER

My friends often comment that I take classes they haven't heard of and request that I tell them all the "cool classes" I've found before they sign up. This time, I'll let everyone in on the surprise.

Next semester, Guilford's justice and policy studies (JPS) department will be offering an innovative new course titled "Reclaiming Democracy: Dialogue, Decision-Making, and Community Action" (JPS 350). After meeting on Monday nights from 6-9 p.m. for approximately a month, the class will be held at the Elon University School of Law located in downtown Greensboro.

The four-credit course will be taught by professor Sherry Giles, a new JPS teacher, along with six other teachers from five local colleges. The class will bring in a maximum of 25 students from Bennett College, Elon University, Guilford, Greensboro College, UNC-Greensboro (UNC-G), NC A&T, and the broader community. Students and teachers will create a group definition of democracy and will collaborate to shape course material.

"We're trying to model democracy as well as thinking about it, so students will be shaping the issues," Giles said.

Students will spend the first part of each class together listening to panels and interactive lectures but most of the course will be spent in small groups of approximately ten to twelve students. Each group, facilitated by a professor, will pick an issue to focus on for the course. Students will

have input about which group they participate in but professors will make the final decision in order to mix up students from different institutions. At the end of the course, each group will present their research to the class and larger community.

"It sounds like a great networking and community-building experience," junior John Douglas said.

Issues will include topics such as desegregation, terrorism, community organizing, the economics of racism, and truth and reconciliation. While topics will incorporate a global and national context, "all of the issues will be grounded in Guilford County," Giles said. Most readings will be primary documents or articles, and likely only one assigned text.

The course, which is modeled after a class by Tim Tyson in Durham, is the brainchild of Giles and Spoma Jovanovic, professor of communications at UNC-G. Together, Jovanovic and Giles will teach the course along with Elon professor of philosophy Stephen Schulman, Bennett professor of political science Gwen Bookman, longtime community activist and organizer Ed Whitfield, A&T economics professor Larry Morse, and Greensboro College religious studies professor Dan Malotky.

Course material will be split into three parts: where we are, how we got here, and where do we want to be and how do we get there.

"We want to find a way that communities can do things for themselves, and have things done for the community as opposed to being done to it," Whitfield said.

"Reclaiming Democracy" is an upper level JPS elective aimed at juniors and seniors but interested sophomores should contact Giles. Financial aid will be available to those who need it.

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ALUMNI MAGAZINE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

important because by doing that companies will be cutting down less trees so there won't be as much deforestation, which requires more energy," Deutsch said. "Using environmentally sustainable products usually doesn't require as much chemicals to make, and it doesn't harm the environment. These products also biodegrade, so you don't have to manage or treat hazardous chemical waste."

The paper industry governs the FSC to ensure that every step taken in the production of paper is eco-friendly.

"The FSC ensures a chain of custody of the paper which starts from the forest, to the pulp manufacturer, to the paper manufacturer to the paper merchants and then to the printer," said Michael Crouch, associate director of communications and marketing. "So picking FSC approved paper is safe because we know they are using fair labor practices from the very beginning, starting with the lumber industry."

FSC's holistic approach particularly impresses Yarbray.

"The FSC considers things like indigenous peoples rights in forestry management, the whole community surrounding the environment, workers rights, and at the whole ecosystem of the forest," Yarbray said.

Since the FSC considers where the wood fibers come from, it is able to consider the environmental impact on the community that surrounds the environment.

"They take into consideration how each step will affect the animals that depend on the trees for survival," Yarbray said.

Crouch added that working with FSC-approved paper is valuable because many of companies buy paper from other countries like China or countries in South America that clear-cut rainforests.

"The Chinese government subsidizes the paper industry in China and as a result they flood our market with cheaper paper, which strains the ecosystems, takes resources away from native people and the animals that live there," Crouch said.

Ledbetter said that individual involvement will lead these corporations to be more responsive and take the environment into account, regardless of economic

issues.

"It's up to us to make companies know that we care," Ledbetter said. "We have to be responsible (and) smart and we have to be environmentally friendly. It's an accountability and responsibility issue."

Guilford has already taken active steps to becoming more environmentally responsible.

President Kent Chabotar signed the Climate Commitment, which according to Guilford's Web site, "aligns Guilford with more than 250 institutions of higher education across the country who have pledged to address global warming by neutralizing their greenhouse gas emissions and accelerating research and educational efforts to equip society to re-stabilize the earth's climate."

"Switching to FSC paper is a perfect way we can start to implement the Climate Commitment," Crouch said. "The paper that the campus stationary paper will be FSC approved by the end of this year and it is my hope that we will pick that up and move forward."

Ledbetter has worked with schools like Elon University, UNC-Greensboro, and Winston Salem State to help them select environmentally friendly paper suppliers and hopes to work with Guilford in the near future.

Many environmentally-friendly products are more expensive, which is a major handicap that Guilford faces when trying to adopt more eco-friendly practices.

Yarbray hopes that Guilford will continue to use more environmentally sustainable products, but "we have to make the right choices because if the cost is double, it might not necessarily be the most sustainable thing for our school. You have to balance and make the improvements you can."

Deutsch said that "being environmentally conscious and responsible isn't only about buying environmentally friendly products and recycling but also doing things like picking up the trash," which are things that students can contribute for free.

"Guilford should encourage students to take care of the environment in the ways they live," Deutsch said. "To make an impact you have to take an extra step, and you can't expect it to be easy."

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