

Reprint

Teaching Inclusively

*Resources for Course, Department &
Institutional Change in Higher Education*

Edited by Mathew L. Ouellett

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Chapter 22

Moving the Mountain: Social Justice Education at the University

Julie Andrzejewski and John Alessio

This is the story of a collaborative violence prevention education project that was part of a long-term effort to influence a mid-western university to address issues of diversity and social justice.

Background

This project must be viewed in the context of important efforts that laid the foundation for its success. In the 1970s the Minnesota legislature required most teachers to have Human Relations training for licensure, establishing the seeds of an academic program that would grow into a department addressing social justice issues. In the early 1980s a precedent-setting sex discrimination lawsuit (Andrzejewski & Craik, 1995) was settled, establishing some parameters for institutional change (for example, provisions for more women department chairs, a full time Affirmative Action Officer, etc.). A few years later, the emerging Department of Human Relations and Multicultural Education established the most challenging and popular educational minor of any state university in Minnesota. Students from this minor initiated activist organizations on campus; others initiated a successful movement to require three MGM (Multicultural, Gender, Minority) courses as a component of the general education program. Faculty and staff tenaciously pressed for Women's Studies, Ethnic Studies, and various student support services based on race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, national origin, and religion.

In the 1990s, three university-wide grant projects fostered institutional change toward social and environmental justice. The first, Responsible Citizenship in a Democracy (Andrzejewski, 1993), provided small grants to students, faculty, or staff for initiating education or activities on active citizenship and

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participatory democracy. The second, Curriculum Transformation Through Critique (Alessio, 1996), provided reassigned time for faculty to transform a course by integrating non-western perspectives critical of dominant paradigms. The third grant project, Multicultural Perspectives and Global Understanding (Andrzejewski, 1997), brought distinguished women scholars of color to facilitate semester-long faculty seminars to deepen the critique and provide additional resources for curriculum transformation. Approximately 10 percent of the faculty participated in the seminars and changed their courses accordingly. At this same time, new student support programs were being established for women, students of color, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students.

The Problem

In spite of these significant achievements working toward social justice, St. Cloud State University (like most universities), continued to experience numerous incidents of disrespect, harassment, and hate crimes – ranging from vandalism to assault – based on prejudicial motivations. Students studying Change Agent Skills, the capstone course on activism in the Human Relations minor, first brought the seriousness of this situation to light in 1994. They collected anecdotal information indicating that incidents of harmful and degrading comments, jokes, harassment, threats, and bias crimes were occurring with some frequency in the residence halls. They noted that these events were, for the most part, not reported, and thus occurred below the radar of the university administration. Not long thereafter, the campus gained national notoriety when racist and anti-Semitic symbols and vandalism were reported. At the same university, data compiled each year by the campus women's center documented that sexual assaults most frequently involved first year students as victims and perpetrators. While a two-hour workshop on Respect and Responsibility is required of all first year students, the student study concluded that more in-depth education was needed to ameliorate these serious problems.

Developing the Project

Acting on the student recommendations, Andrzejewski developed a course for first year students called Human Relations (HURL) 101: Human Relations, Harassment, and Personal Behavior and successfully moved it through the curriculum approval process. Since no resources were available to offer the course, Andrzejewski began to explore grant support. In order to gain wide support for the project, she circulated a draft proposal of a project that would involve the residence halls, certain general education faculty, and staff of the

student support services. Advice was sought from the Affirmative Action Office, the American Indian Center, the College of Education Cultural Diversity Office, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Center, the Multicultural Student Program, Residential Life, Student Disability Services, Student Life and Development, the Women's Center, and the Departments of English and Communication Studies. She held several meetings with representatives of these groups during one academic year, reshaping the proposal based on their suggestions. By the time the proposal was submitted to funding agencies, detailed letters of support from many different groups strengthened the likelihood of success.

Theoretical Foundations

The educational project was based on a number of theoretical traditions. John Dewey (1916) proposed that democracy and social responsibility are predicated upon education grounded in experience, reflection, and awareness. Paulo Freire (1970) identified the liberatory role that education can play through the study of domination and subjugation, and the critical examination of underlying assumptions and life experiences. Critical theory, critical race theory, feminist theory, and critical pedagogy illuminate various aspects of challenging hegemony and violence in schools (Banks, 1996, 1997; Bell, 1997; McIntosh, 1988; Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999; Sleeter, 1994, 1996; Young, 1990), including the following contentions:

- Harassment, hate crimes, and violence are not simply a result of aberrant actions by individuals but are supported by a hierarchical social, political, and economic system.
- Ignorance, misinformation and stereotypes about various groups of people are commonly perpetuated through media, schools, and other social institutions.
- Negative attitudes and behaviors toward groups different than one's own are defended as insignificant and are commonly used as a method of in-group bonding.
- At the same time, group-based privileges are largely invisible and unexamined.

Education at all levels often fails to address the existence and consequences of common everyday prejudicial behaviors. Instead, school and university responses to violence, harassment, and bias crimes tend to focus on punishment and increased surveillance rather than educational programs to change individual behaviors and social norms.

New research and data collection about climate in schools and post-sec-

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secondary educational institutions indicate that biased language, prejudicial remarks, name-calling, teasing, harassing, or bullying based on group status is a common experience in schools and on campuses (Bickmore, 2002; Dupper, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2001). Not surprisingly, even violence and bias crimes are not rare occurrences in higher education (Stage and Downey, 1999). The seriousness and complexity of the relationship between school violence and issues of diversity and marginalization is emerging from these studies. Many students are targeted for physical, behavioral, or perceived characteristics and some of these targeted students become so affected that they respond with violence (Vossekuil, Reddy, Fein, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2000).

The Tower of Violence

A model which illustrates possible connections between everyday acts of prejudice and more serious acts of discrimination and violence is the Tower of Violence, adapted and expanded by Andrzejewski from Outfront Minnesota.¹ This model is useful as a theoretical and educational tool for exploring and reflecting upon the everyday actions of individuals and groups and the relationship to disrespectful behaviors, harassment, bias crimes, and violence, based on visible or perceived characteristics. (See Figure 1.)

The Citizenship for Diversity Project

These theoretical foundations served as the basis for an experiential educational project initiated by Andrzejewski recommended by students and revised by staff and faculty. Titled the Citizenship for Diversity (C4D) project, it would provide first-year students with an opportunity to develop leadership skills in preventing or ameliorating harassment, bias crimes, and violence. The C4D project covered issues of race, class, gender, national origin, disability, religion, sexual orientation, and physical appearance, and focused on the links between everyday attitudes, jokes, and behaviors, and an environment conducive to harassment, violence, and bias crimes. The goal of the project was to raise awareness of the prevalence of these behaviors in everyday life, to prac-

¹A simplified version of this model was originally obtained from the Gay Lesbian Community Action Council in 1996 (now Outfront Minnesota). The model shown in this chapter has been revised by Andrzejewski. As she worked with it, she discovered the Anti-Defamation League had developed and copyrighted an almost identical model called the Pyramid of Violence. After extensive checking, neither ADL or Outfront Minnesota could identify the original source. ADL indicated Andrzejewski should continue to reference Outfront Minnesota as the source.

tice changing personal habits of oppression, and to develop leadership skills in changing the norms of daily living and learning environments.

A new course, Human Relations (HURL 101), served as the cornerstone of the Citizenship for Diversity Project. This course addressed the links be-

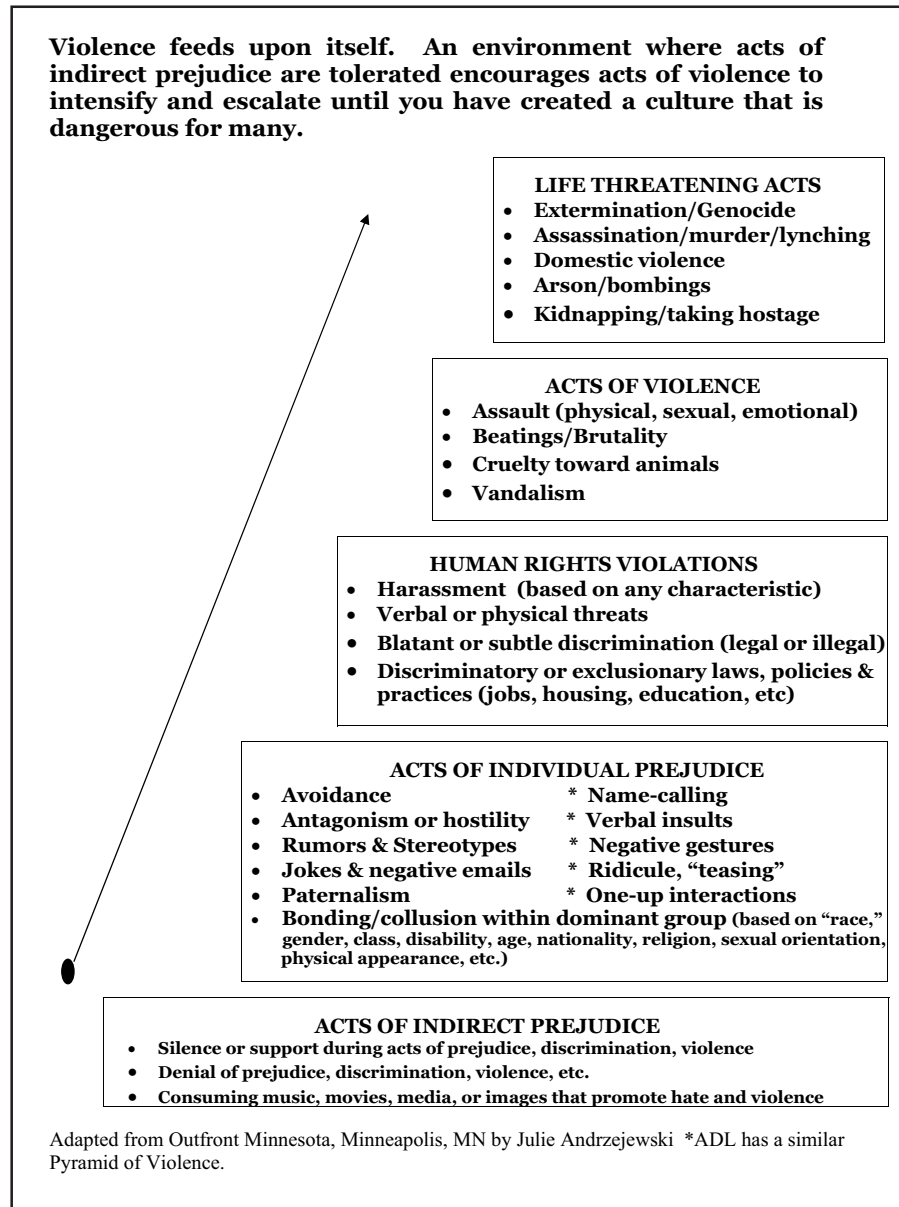


Figure 1. Tower of Violence

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tween violence, ignorance, and negative behaviors toward non-dominant groups. The project provided the opportunity for first year students, living in the same residence hall, to take Human Relations 101 paired with an English or Speech Communication general education core course through a student retention program. The goal of the project was to engage first year students in developing knowledge and skills for grassroots leadership efforts to prevent disrespectful behaviors, harassment and violent bias crimes on campus. The project was supported by \$75,000 from the Otto Bremer Foundation, \$4,000 from the Minnesota Council Against Violence and Abuse and matched by approximately \$35,000 from the university.

The project included three linked components:

1. *A core group of students living in the same residence hall.* First year students in residence halls were the first target population. Therefore, students in a student retention program who lived in the same residence hall were given the opportunity to participate. The objective was to create a knowledge and skill base among enough students to change the norms of common everyday attitudes and interactions that may unconsciously establish a biased and hostile living and learning environment for students from non-dominant groups.
2. *Enrollment in HURL 101 paired with an English or Communication Studies course.* Students in the student retention program were able to choose whether to be involved with the C4D project. From the courses available to them through the student retention program, they could select or avoid the paired courses in this project. While they were given a one-page explanation of the project, we were unable to determine how many actually read the information before making their course selections.

HURL 101 drew upon many pedagogical traditions in content and method. In addition to readings on such topics as white privilege, male bonding, fat oppression and the like, we worked closely with the various student support service directors who recommended student speakers to share personal experiences of harassment, hate crimes, or violence with the classes. In some cases directors of the support services also came as part of the panel to share information about what services their office provided for students.

Videos exposing the hidden influences of the media and other aspects of discrimination and violence augmented the informational component of the course (for example, Katz, 2000). Experiential out of class projects increased student awareness of each of these issues in their personal lives. Students interviewed others about knowledge of anti-Semitism, identified examples of racism and xenophobia in their personal lives, investigated myths about socioeconomic class, stepped outside gender role boundaries, exam-

ined the consequences of name calling and jokes about GLBT students, observed judgments based on physical appearance, and explored campus attitudes toward students with disabilities.

3. *General education courses in English or Speech Communication were paired with HURL 101* to broaden the research base, analytical skills, and personal development.

Writing and communication assignments in paired sections of English and Communication Studies classes developed critical analysis skills, social awareness, and consciousness of citizenship; providing opportunities for students to process information from the Human Relations course. Essays, research projects, small group presentations, and public speeches in these classes helped students transition from egocentric perspectives to social awareness, develop critical thinking about social justice issues, and consider life goals related to making a better world.

Faculty/Staff Collaboration: Implementing the Citizenship for Diversity Project

Boyer's (1990) concepts of scholarship, especially the scholarships of teaching, integration, and application informed the faculty/staff development component of the project. About the scholarship of teaching, Boyer states, "As a *scholarly* enterprise, teaching begins with what the teacher knows.... Pedagogical procedures must be carefully planned, continuously examined, and relate directly to the subject taught.... [Great teachers] stimulate active, not passive, learning and encourage students to be critical, creative thinkers.... Further, good teaching means that faculty, as scholars, are also learners.... [T]eaching, at its best, means not only transmitting knowledge, but *transforming* and *extending* it as well..." (pp. 21-22). By design, the C4D project drew upon faculty teaching general education required courses who already had commitments to diversity and social justice, who were already involved in transforming their curricula, many of whom had participated in previous curriculum transformation projects.

We began our scholarship of teaching by considering the first semester as a pilot project, knowing that we would be revising and improving. The first faculty to teach the paired courses (one each from Human Relations, English, and Communication Studies) met a few times in advance to discuss the evolution of the project, our assumptions about the students, our goals, and initial plans. We assumed students would have had many experiences with stereotypes and discrimination, with little to no previous education to help them evaluate the consequences to themselves or others. As we focused on the long-term

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goal of actually reducing harassment and hate crimes, we generated questions and ideas about using experiential projects where students would use the analyses, knowledge, and skills in their everyday lives. What might motivate students to become leaders for social justice? What skills and practice would they need to make a difference in their living and learning environments? These questions guided our thinking as we left our discussions to develop curricula for our respective courses to reach our collective goals.

All the primary assignments in the Human Relations class were experiential and reflective. For instance, after readings, speakers, videos, and discussions, students were given two weeks to identify examples of racism and xenophobia in specific areas of their own lives. Many who insisted they would not be able to find *any*, returned with a raised consciousness, concern, and questions about what to do. Some students experienced dissonance. They now knew the seriousness of discriminatory language, jokes, and actions, but were afraid of changing themselves, losing friends, or offending family members. Other students were ready to learn how to change their habits and environments. Meanwhile, students in a paired Communication Studies class were asked to observe their listening habits for 48 hours. They were asked to analyze the effect of presumptions about race, class, gender, and other characteristics, to examine whether they listened as they would want others to listen to them, and what they might change if they could do it again. Those students paired with an English class began a series of writing assignments challenging them to move beyond individual and material success to critical analysis, civic-mindedness, and their interest and responsibility to a larger community. Discussions from one class often spilled over into another.

Boyer's work on the scholarships of integration and application also provided guidance to the project. Boyer suggests that "interdisciplinary *and* integrative studies, long on the edges of academic life, are moving toward the center, responding both to new intellectual questions and to pressing human problems" (p. 21). By drawing upon the expertise of faculty and staff from many academic and student life programs, the knowledge and resources from diverse perspectives enhanced the flexibility and responsiveness to student needs. Faculty teaching during a particular semester, graduate interns from the Social Responsibility program (a new program in Human Relations and Multicultural Education), and residence hall staff continued to meet on a regular basis throughout each semester to plan, re-examine, and learn from each other and our students. As we examined the strengths and weaknesses of each semester, we improved our assignments by building on our knowledge of the other classes and increasing application practice. One Communication Studies professor worked with role-playing dialogues to help students practice how one might respond to common discriminatory situations that arise. The Human

Relations assignment evolved to include the practice of educating others about social justice issues with a kind and caring approach rather than a self-righteous and judgmental one. Students chose the actions they wanted to work on from many options. It was reasoned that familiarity and practice would allow them greater flexibility upon which to base decisions about their personal behaviors when the classes ended.

Regular meetings provided a forum for faculty and staff to explore problems as they arose and to come to collective decisions about how to handle a particularly difficult teaching or student support situation. In one instance, an English professor asked for advice. In writing about her new consciousness of sexism, a student revealed in one of the essays that she had recently been sexually assaulted, but had not sought any support services. The professor wanted to discuss how she might best respond to the paper and support the student. We had an intense conversation about confidentiality, how to share resources with students, how to deal with personal experiences of bias crimes in our teaching.

At the same time, the residence hall director expressed concern about the standard protocol for supporting students who were attacked or assaulted. We began to examine whether it incorporated best practices of sexual assault victim advocacy. There was also a question about how the student might feel and react when sexual assault survivors spoke in class. A consultation with the Director of Sexual Assault Services in the Women's Center increased our own knowledge base and helped us decide which teaching methods or residence hall procedures might provide the most protection and support. While the Women's Center staff was well prepared for the responses of audience survivors, our involvement provided a stronger support network for their work as well. Because of the project, we had an opportunity which was not readily available to faculty teaching alone, or to staff working in the residence halls, to apply our collective knowledge to find the best responses for this situation.

In another instance, a residence hall director shared her observations about the project:

The students that have participated in this project have emerged as leaders to challenge existing norms of harassment and hate and to redefine a norm that fosters social justice. In particular, participating students have become more aware, active and action-oriented in an attempt to prevent and respond to incidents of bias and hate within their residence hall and campus community. For example, when a group of students protested a bulletin board about "White Privilege," students from the project responded by challenging and educating about hidden aspects of racism in their own lives.

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On the whole, students (from the project) are more conscious of their environment and report incidents of inappropriate and bias related materials. Other students have chosen to post signs on their doors to demonstrate their intolerance for hate crimes and harassment. Several students participated in a hall diversity committee where they discuss their concerns and coordinate programs to educate their peers. (Andrzejewski et al., 1999)

By applying shared knowledge from different facets of the university to work toward the prevention of disrespect, harassment, and hate crimes on campus, the C4D project exemplified the concept of the scholarship of application as well. Boyer contends that, “such a view of scholarly service—one that both applies and contributes to human knowledge—is particularly needed in a world in which huge, almost intractable problems call for the skills and insights only the academy can provide” (p. 23). The experiential projects and opportunity to actually practice new behaviors (like not telling or laughing at racist jokes, or educating others about the impact of racist jokes, etc.) meant that the C4D project had real-life applicability. Once students decided to change their own unexamined habits, they became more in control of their own behaviors in relating to others. Further, by having a group of people they lived with going through the same experiences, they could discuss and apply their knowledge in a context where others would understand.

In some cases, however, this “cohort-like” status had its drawbacks. Sometimes, early in the semester, students might complain about having to learn about these issues or might try to reinforce denial that racism or sexism is such a big problem. However, through weekly reflection papers, negative attitudes, frustrations, and fears surfaced, were discussed openly, and were allayed in supportive ways so that student learning would not be truncated.

Assessing Student Learning

Assessment plans were built into the project from the outset to provide a basis for re-examination and revision of the project implementation as well as to report to the institution and fund agencies. The primary form of assessment was a pre-post survey of knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors (Andrzejewski & Alessio, 2001). We wanted to try to measure, using a self-report questionnaire, whether students would demonstrate changes in knowledge or could identify changes in behaviors as a result of their participation in the project. The development of the instrument and the statistical analysis provided the bases for another faculty collaboration with sociologist John Alessio.

Over the course of the three-year Citizenship for Diversity project the

pre and post surveys were completed by 330 students, in their respective semester. The substantive section of the survey consisted of 72 statements to which students responded by identifying the extent of their agreement or disagreement on a scale of 0 to 10. The first 48 questions measured attitudes, beliefs, and information related to eight areas of oppression: ableism, classism, heterosexism, looksism, racism, religious oppression, sexism, xenophobia or general attitudes and beliefs toward excluded groups, hate crimes, and oppression. (See sample statements below.) Grand mean difference scores between pre and post surveys represented composite indices for each category.² All composite category pre-post difference scores were significant at the .000 probability level. Of the first 48 items, 11 items changed more than two full points (2.0 to 3.6 points) between pre and post surveys.

Top Knowledge and Belief Survey Items (in order of pre-post differences)

1. One of the most important factors in male bonding is the degradation of women.
2. Corporations receive more government assistance than any other group in the United States.
3. White people bond with each other through racial jokes, eye-contact, stereotypes.
4. Corporations benefit substantially from sexism by paying lower wages to women.
5. People with disabilities experience harassment, hate crimes, and physical violence.
6. Racism in the United States is a result of the control of resources by whites.
7. In the United States, many resources are distributed based on physical appearance (size, weight).

Additionally, pre- and post-test mean scores were compared on 16 items measuring the students' perceptions of how much oppression currently exists among various groups in the United States. It was hypothesized that perception of the amount of oppression would increase as students were exposed to information. A final set of eight questions measured the students' citizenship and leadership skills. (See sample statements below.) Seven pre-post difference scores were significant at the .001 probability level. Finally, students were asked

²Complete results and analysis of the data are available from Andrzejewski.

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to evaluate different aspects of the Human Relations course and the project to help the team explore improvements. There was a very high level of satisfaction with the courses and with most of the teaching methods. A graduate student conducted interviews with 35 students five months after they completed the semester and found that the majority either maintained or increased their “awareness and involvement [in] reducing prejudices and discrimination” (Storms, 1998).

Top Citizenship Skill Survey Items (in order of top pre-post differences)

As a citizen in the community and on campus:

1. I challenge oppressive jokes and remarks on a daily basis
2. I recognize oppressive behaviors on various issues.
3. I have skills to help create a safe and just environment on campus.
4. I know how to collaborate on constructive solutions to discriminatory policies.
5. I know support systems for targets of discrimination and hate crimes.
6. I join organizations working for social justice.
7. I understand university policies and know where to report discrimination.

The results of the pre-post survey showed notable shifts in the thinking and behavior patterns of students who participated. These shifts were particularly strong among the composite variables of sexism, racism, xenophobia, and looksism. Furthermore, the results on the citizenship items suggest that students also developed a commitment and ability to do something about disrespect, harassment, and hatred.

Results of Faculty/Staff Teamwork

Through the Citizenship for Diversity project, the faculty and staff presented at a national conference and wrote a collaborative article on the project (Andrzejewski et al., 1999). Teaching methods, course objectives, resources, and content, residence hall events and support systems were all transformed toward fostering social justice. While occasional obstacles and problems surfaced, the teamwork increased knowledge and skills for students, faculty, and staff through regular meetings. While it is impossible to know or document all the ripple effects engendered by this project, there are significant reasons for our belief that it enhanced the overall institutional transformation toward addressing diversity and social justice.

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John Alessio is a professor of Sociology at St. Cloud State University where he teaches graduate courses in Research Methods and the Sociology of Social Responsibility. Dr. Alessio recently spent three years as an academic dean, successfully leading a major core curriculum transformation project. He has also been involved in a number of other curriculum development projects such as initiating and co-developing the MS in Social Responsibility Program at SCSU. Dr. Alessio has written many scholarly papers, and has published in numerous professional journals. His scholarship covers a wide range of topics – most recently in the areas of animal rights and gender equity.