

News

College implements Social Justice Seminars: Pandemic, Protests and Police Brutality

Bree Gray, News Editor | July 24, 2020



The summer semester for students enrolled in a Social Justice Seminars is almost complete. During the fall semester, the students will continue their seminars in-person as a module course.

This novel program was announced on June 24, in an email to the campus community, by Dean of Institutional Diversity Kristin Dukes and Dean of Curriculum & Registrar Ian Binnington. The program introduced a series of two-credit courses offered over the summer and into the fall semester focused on contemporary societal concerns.

“This started as a plan to add value to the Allegheny Bound experience, a “taste of the curriculum” experience for new students, if you will, to introduce them to a liberal arts education,” Binnington wrote in a statement to the Campus. “As we started to get course proposals from faculty for this program it was clear that we had more courses than we could reasonably use for new students and that many of the courses were cohering around a theme of social justice related to pandemic and race. Given everything going on in the world right now and the obvious desire of many of our students to engage with those themes on an intellectual level, we expanded the program to include seminars for continuing students as well.”

The program includes 12 seminars focused on pandemic management, Black Lives Matter

and police brutality. The Social Justice Seminars are offered at no additional cost to full-time enrolled students for the 2020-2021 academic year.

“These classes are being taught by folks across the campus, who are bringing their disciplinary perspectives to the issues,” Binnington said. “My strong suspicion would be that many of the course offerings will have both contemporary and historical roots.”

Within a one week period, over 250 students expressed interest and enrolled in both Allegheny Bound Seminars for new students and the new Social Justice Seminars for returning students. A remarkable success for a novel program, Binnington added.

The seminars’ summer portion is almost complete and students have generated opinions on the new program.

“I was unable to go back to work due to COVID 19 so I enrolled in a Social Justice Seminar,” said William Nese ’23. “It has only been a week since my class started, however, I am already learning a lot more about the plague than I even knew existed.”

Students were apt to question the use of a new class platform, Canvas, as opposed to the traditional Sakai for the Social Justice Seminars. Binnington acknowledged the change in platforms and announced that the College will be replacing Sakai with Canvas as the industry standard.

“We (the College), for at least a year, have been working toward replacing Sakai which has been our learning management system for at least 15 years,” Binnington announced. “These (seminars) are the first classes that have been put on the Canvas platform but students going forward in the fall will see more classes on Canvas. We will continue to support Sakai for about a year, I believe, but we will be replacing it entirely with Canvas.”

This decision came after a year of deliberations within the College, collection of student feedback and comparison of quality relative to other institutions, Binnington added.

One of the main goal of the Social Justice Seminars is to provide students with the opportunity to have a more productive summer while engaging with current circumstances.

“I enrolled in the course because I wanted to see what other people thought about what is going on during this time,” said Brian Roberts, ’22. “I want to gain more insight and see what other students think about the current circumstances.”

While many students enrolled in the course to fill their summer schedules or explore alternative perspectives, other students chose to participate out of academic curiosity and the desire to have a secure and lighthearted environment ahead of uncertain times.

“I decided to enroll in a Social Justice Seminar because I enjoyed the subject matter and I wanted to learn more about it (Black Death),” said Luka Kathman, ’23. “I hope to gain more knowledge about the subject as well as more knowledge about conducting research in the discipline.”

The Social Justice Seminars offer a very fun and engaging way to obtain two credits during the summer, student Andrew Briercheck, ’23 added.

Some students have also expressed interest in enrolling in another Social Justice Seminar next year, if they are offered again. Binnington indicated that the College intends to implement the Social Justice Seminars beyond this academic year, however, official logistics have yet to be finalized as this is a novel program.

[binnington](#) [Black Lives Matter](#) [COVID-19](#) [dukes](#) [Social Justice Seminar](#)

About the Writer



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Bree Gray is a sophomore from Washington, Pennsylvania. She is a Global Health Studies major with an Economics minor. This is her first year on staff,...

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