

## **Race, Dis/ability and Class: Confronting Interlocking Privilege and Oppression**

**Seminars November 17-20, 2011 and January 19-22, 2012**

**to be held at the Leaven Center in Lyons, Michigan  
Program funded by grant for Creating Inclusive Excellence  
Office of Inclusion, Michigan State University**

Racism, ableism, classism and every other form of structural inequality are simultaneously systems that oppress some people while granting privileges to others. Understanding where we stand in relation to systems of privilege and oppression is life-long work for all of us. As an interactive series, *Race, Dis/Ability and Class: Confronting Interlocking Privilege and Oppression (RDC)* seminars will give participants the opportunity to explore the dynamics of privilege and oppression by focusing on three systems of structural inequality: racism, ableism, and classism. *RDC* will examine the histories and dynamics unique to each of these systems as well as identifying how these systems intersect and reinforce each other. Participants will also explore strategies for recognizing and unlearning the habits and practices that protect their privilege. Core to these seminars is the assumption that we can become as passionate about dismantling the systems from which we unjustly benefit as we are about eradicating the systems that oppress us.

The *RDC* seminars will be offered by Allies for Change (see Facilitators, below), an organization comprised of a network of educators and activists who share a passion for social justice and a commitment to creating and sustaining life-giving ally relationships and communities. Resisting a hierarchy of oppressions and working as allies across difference, Allies for Change helps individuals and groups to create new patterns of relating and to transform unjust structures.

Action and reflection will form the pedagogical heart of the *RDC* seminars, with the goal of equipping participants to become effective, knowledgeable, and compassionate agents of structural change. Participants will engage in rigorous social and historical analysis, and practice strategies for interrupting oppression.

The training will consist of two weekends held at The Leaven Center, a local retreat and study center in Lyons, Michigan. The *retreat* format—running from 7 p.m. Thursday to 1 p.m. Sunday—intensifies the participants' experience of entering fully into the program. The first weekend will be devoted to foundational concepts and an analysis of the dynamics of privilege and oppression, and will explore what it means to be an ally with people targeted by systems of oppression. The second weekend will focus on strategies for organizational change. As well, participants will meet in facilitator-led sessions (to be arranged) between and after seminars to continue to explore issues and provide support in implementing personal and professional goals. Graduate students may register for 1-3 hours of independent study in spring semester.

The action/reflection pedagogy at the heart of *RDC* makes these seminars unique in many people's experience. The ultimate goal is not the acquisition of knowledge; the goal is to equip individuals to become agents of structural change where they live and work.

## **Allies for Change Facilitators:**

**Melanie S. Morrison**, Ph.D., M. Div., is Executive Director of Allies for Change, an organization that provides anti-oppression education, training, and resources. She is an educator, activist, and author with 23 years experience designing and facilitating transformational group process. Melanie is passionate about working with individuals and organizations to better understand the connections between systemic oppressions and to nurture collaborative action and authentic relationship across differences such as race, age, gender, abilities, and sexual orientation. Prior to founding Allies for Change, Melanie served as Executive Director of The Leaven Center, a retreat and study center in Lyons, Michigan. In 1994, she co-founded Doing Our Own Work, an anti-racism program for white people, and has co-facilitated this program for seventeen consecutive years. She is the author of three books including *The Grace of Coming Home: Spirituality, Sexuality, and the Struggle for Justice*. Melanie has a Masters of Divinity from Yale Divinity School and a Ph.D. from the University of Groningen in The Netherlands.

**Rahnee K. Patrick** is Director of Independent Living at Access Living in Chicago. She is a local and national leader in ADAPT, a disability justice organization that engages in nonviolent direct action to advocate for systemic and organizational change. As an anti-oppression educator, Rahnee specializes in leadership training for young adults and has been instrumental in mentoring a new generation of disability activists across the country. In 2008, she was the recipient of the Paul Hearne Award of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD.) Since 2008, she has served on AAPD's board of directors. A member of the direct action group ADAPT and Not Dead Yet, Rahnee is also a co-founder of Feminist Response in Disability Activism (FRIDA). Rahnee graduated in 1996 from Indiana University at South Bend, where she co-founded Students Together Active and Respected (STAAR), a group of students with disabilities. Rahnee is an award-winning writer whose short stories have been published and aired on radio. She is the daughter of a Thai immigrant mother and a European American father.

**Monique Savage**, MSW, has been the director of Counseling Services at Adrian College for the past 24 years. She has taught classes in the Sociology and the History department. Monique has 25 years of experience developing, lecturing, and presenting multicultural and diversity programs throughout the country. She specializes in issues that impact African American women and is much sought after as a speaker. Monique attended Olivet College where she earned a BA degree, and she received her MSW from the University of Michigan. She has worked for the Adrian Training School and the State of California Department of Social Services. She has partnered with Michigan State University Extension diversity training team for the past 10 years, and is a frequent presenter at the Leaven Center in Lyons, Michigan. She co-founded the Woodson /Wheatley children's reading program and the Christ Temple Children's writing club. She has been the recipient of the MLK, Jr. Community Service Award, the Hispanic Heritage Award, the Phenomenal Woman Award, and the NAACP Humanitarian Award.