# Intergroup Dialogue

**Spring 2011**

**Mona Elminyawi, melminya@wellesley.edu**

**Course Description**: Intergroup Relations is a nationally recognized program of the University of Michigan that “works proactively to promote understanding of intergroup relations inside and outside of the classroom.” In its Intergroup Dialogue course, undergraduate students are brought together to share experiences related to their diverse backgrounds. Although it was created for college students, I believe it is never too early to start educating students about issues of multiculturalism and diversity. This class will provide a safe space for students to explore the ways multiculturalism affects their everyday lives and engage in thoughtful dialogue.

“Dialogue is not something you do once and then forget about. It is in fact the way that we live together – the way we build community. To the degree that dialogue is effective you have a healthy community.” –Mary Rocklage

“...When dialogue is done skillfully, the results can be extra-ordinary: long-standing stereotypes dissolved, mistrust overcome, mutual understanding achieved, visions shaped and grounded in shared purpose, people previously at odds with one another aligned on objectives and strategies, new common ground discovered, new perspectives and insights gained, new levels of creativity stimulated, and bonds of community strengthened.” --Daniel Yankolovich

**Week 1--Setting the Stage for Dialogue**

Lecture: Clarifying what is meant by dialogue, difference between dialogue and debate, what it means to be a mindful listener, dialogue as a *skill*

dialogue --conversation with the goal of learning and understanding

debate--conversation intended to win

The stage must be set for honest, authentic communication. This means students must be comfortable and clearly express their thoughts and feelings. Disagreement is fine, and we must learn to use such phrases as “I hear you, and I have a different opinion.” Developing these communication skills will enable us to grow healthier relationships and better understanding. A healthy community practices ongoing dialogue

Activity: Getting to know one another, forming dialogue groups

**Week 2—Discussing the Importance and Complexity of our Identity**

Lecture: Construction and meaning of our social identities

Activity: Personal/Social Identity Wheel

Readings: B. Tatum, The complexity of identity: “Who Am I?” <http://www.son.washington.edu/diversity/docs/SPCG-ComplexityIdentity.pdf>

**Week 3—Group Building**

Lecture: Noticing Commonalities and Differences in Experiences

Objectives: Recognize similarities and differences within and between groups, thinking actively about the self, others, and one’s identity group(s)

Ultimately, students will strive to develop a new perspective on the world. This will be a kind of wholeness of thought that takes into consideration differences in people that are both inherent and acquired from context. It is this way of thought that makes up a peaceable and decent world community.

**Week 4—Rational Choice Theory**

Lecture: What is rational choice theory?

“All of our experiences are seen through our own personal lens. Our lens is shaped by our experiences, and how we show up in the world including the various dimensions of our identities that make us who we are.” –Anon.

Objective: to explore how our individual identity and socialization influences our perspective, feelings, and behaviors regarding real life issues. Also, to discuss what exactly defines “rational” thought and action using NBC’s The Office.

**Week 5—Understanding discrimination and why it happens**

Lecture: Discrimination as a result of: poor communication, lack of exposure to different social groups or purposely ignoring the existence of other social identities

Reading: Home in the Hills

**Week 6—Conflict and Coexistence**
Objective: examine examples of social conflict based on religion, ethnicity and culture, and theories that help to understand the nature of such conflict *(i.e.,* social identity, limited resources, psychological, neurological, communication, anthropology). These will be discussed “with an eye towards increasing capacity for coexistence.”

**Week 7—Action Planning**

Lecture: How to bridge the gap through intergroup collaboration, tying up loose ends

Encourage exploration of moving from awareness and dialogue to action. Purpose of course is ultimately to create lasting change in the world through large scale, meaningful intergroup dialogue.

We must agree to speak up in our community when we witness “otherizing talk” that can wound and grow into large problems and conflicts.

**Week 8—Pulling it all together and celebrating our learning**

Student Projects—with their group, students present their projects in response to one of the following prompts

1. What was your favorite topic that we talked about? Explore more about this topic and come to us with your findings.

**2. If you had $1,000, what project would you come up with to bridge the communication gap between different peoples?** This is an opportunity for you to create your own ideas for spreading awareness, and ideally, a project that creates a more peaceable world.