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# Assessment of Student Learning in Racial Issues Courses, Spring Semester 2013

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# Assessment of Student Learning in Racial Issues Courses Spring semester 2013

**Dr. Luke Tripp**

## **Introduction**

To what extent are students learning what we attempt to teach them about race relations in the USA? This is the central question in this assessment report. In the fall semester 2000, St. Cloud State University implemented mandatory racial issues courses that were designed to help students understand and reflect on race relations in the USA.

## **SCSU Liberal Education Curriculum**

Currently, all racial issues courses are designed to meet Goal 7 under St. Cloud States University's Liberal Education Program.

**Goal 7. Human Diversity:** To increase students' understanding of individual and group differences (e.g. race, gender, class) and their knowledge of the traditions and values of various groups in the United States. Students should be able to evaluate the United States' historical and contemporary responses to group differences.

***Liberal Education Program (LEP) Objective:*** *Examine patterns of racial and ethnic inequality in the United States; the heritage, culture, and contributions of racially subordinated groups; and how race and ethnic relations are embedded in the institutions that structure our lives. Students can meet this requirement through 1 approved course or experience.*

## **Students will be able to:**

1. Understand the development of and the changing meanings of group identities in the United States, history and culture.
2. Demonstrate an awareness of the individual and institutional dynamics of unequal power relations between groups in contemporary society.
3. Analyze their own attitudes, behaviors, concepts and beliefs regarding diversity, racism, and bigotry.

4. Describe and discuss the experience and contributions (political, social, economic, etc.) of the many groups that shape American society and culture, in particular those groups that have suffered discrimination and exclusion.
5. Demonstrate communication skills necessary for living and working effectively in a society with great population diversity.

***Consistent with LEP Student Learning Outcomes, students will also demonstrate their ability to:***

- *Demonstrate awareness and understanding of historical and current race relations in the United States.*
- *Explain the concept of “race.”*
- *Analyze current events and conditions at the local, statewide, and national levels using course theories and concepts.*
- *Identify forms of institutional discrimination in areas such as education, media, housing, employment, economics, politics, and the legal system.*
- *Describe the basic history of discrimination against and contributions of African Americans, Asian Americans, American Indians, Latinos, and recent immigrants of color.*
- *Engage in dialog and self-reflection concerning racism, racial oppression, and white privilege.*

This report will describe the shifts and stability of my students’ beliefs, feelings, and awareness of racial issues in the United States. It is assumed that the students’ beliefs, feelings, and awareness of racial issues were influenced to some extent by the racial issues course that they took in the spring semester 2013.

### **Research Design**

Two assessment instruments were designed to measure the extent to which my racial issues course *Race in America* helped mostly first-year students understand the concept and meaning of race, the impact of racial classification, and the patterns of racial oppression. I designed one questionnaire (Tripp Survey) for my particular course, which mainly focus on the Black American experience. My faculty colleagues and I developed the second questionnaire (Racial Issues Course Assessment Survey). In seminars, in the summers of 2004-8, a group of professors of racial issues courses

revised an assessment instrument with the understanding that it will be part of a larger, multi-faceted approach to assessing the impact of the racial issues course requirement on race relations on campus at SCSU.

The scholarly and collegial process that followed during the seminars reinforced for us the value of teaching and assessment in the important field of race relations. In preparation of developing the survey, we spent several sessions sharing and demonstrating pedagogical approaches to teaching about race and ethnicity in the United States. Using these discussions as background, several faculty members representing their specific field of study participated in the stimulating work of creating an inter-disciplinary assessment tool. The questionnaire specifically addressed the extent to which current racial issues courses were in accord with the LEP objectives. In revising the questions for the instrument, we reflected on the students' responses to our previous assessment surveys. In the summer of 2010, we revised our questionnaire after testing it with student focus groups.

In the spring semester, both the Tripp Survey and the Racial Issues Course Assessment Survey questionnaires were administered twice: on the first day of class (January 14, 2013) and during the last week of class (May 3, 2013). Students were told that the survey was voluntary and that it would not affect their grades in the class. The survey was given to students prior to the distribution of the course syllabus or any other information pertaining to the class. By doing so, this limited the likelihood that students would respond according to their perceptions of the instructor's viewpoints.

#### **Assessment of Student Learning in a Racial Issues Course (Spring 2013)**

Eighty students completed the first survey questionnaire and 100 completed the second. The same questionnaire (pre-test and post-test) was administered in order to measure the changes that occurred over the semester. There are at least two reasons why the number of students who took the pre-test is different from the number who took the post-test, 1) Some of the students who took the pre-test may have dropped the course or been absent on the day of the post-test, and 2) Some of the students who took the post-test did not take the pre-test because they were not in class or enrolled on the first day of class at the beginning of the semester.

My assumption is that the facts above did not significantly alter the basic character of the two groups. The data in Table A show that in terms of one factor, racial identity, the two groups are comparable.

Table A In the United States, how do you identify yourself?	Time of Assessment	
	Jan. 2013	May 2013
White	(65) 80%	(75) 75%
Person of Color	(15) 20%	(25) 25%
<b>Number</b>	<b>N=80</b>	<b>N=100</b>

Table B Are you an international student?	Time of Assessment	
	Jan. 2013	May 2013
YES	(8) 9%	(14) 14%
NO	(64) 81%	(86) 86%
<b>Number</b>	<b>N=80</b>	<b>N=100</b>

Note: the racial identity data was collected using the RIC questionnaire.

## Discussion

The following is a discussion of some preliminary quantitative results from this survey. I discuss them as they relate to my teaching objectives that are in accord with the LEP student learning outcomes. For a specific outcome, I present several examples of the shifts and stability of students' beliefs and suggest possible implications for teaching strategies and improvements in the assessment instrument.

**LEP Student Learning Outcomes:** A course must examine the concept and meaning of race, ethnicity, and oppression.

**Teaching Objective:** To provide the students with theoretical frameworks and analytical tools to help them understand the meaning of race and ethnicity as a biosocial construct shaped primarily by political forces.

The data in Table 1.1 show that there was a significant shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of race as *a group defined by specific social, economic, and political relations based on perceived similar physical characteristics*. At the beginning of the semester about 6 percent conceptualized race

in this way, but at the end of the semester 35 percent did. I attempted to teach the students that to better understand the dynamics of race relations in the United States, one must understand how social and political forces and institutions define racial groups in different ways during specific periods in history. I emphasized that racial groups are located in hierarchical structures of society according to the extent to which they have access to resources and possess economic and political power or according to how they are assigned value or worth in society. The data indicate that there was a significant desirable shift in the students understanding of race as a social construction. But I have to work harder to get that point across.

<b>Table 1.1 (item 1: Understanding) The concept of race can be best understood as the idea of a group of people:</b>	<b>Time of Assessment</b>	
	<b>Jan. 2013</b>	<b>May 2013</b>
In a distinct category based on skin color, common descent, blood, and heredity.	(36) 45%	(25) 26%
Related by a common ancestry, ethnicity, religion and/or nationality.	(29) 36%	(24) 25%
<b>Defined by specific social, economic, and political relations based on perceived similar physical characteristics.</b>	(5) <b>6%</b>	(34) <b>35%</b>
Connected by common interests, genetic traits, a unifying culture, and similar behaviors	(10) 13%	(15) 15%
<b>Number</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square Test: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .000</b>		

The data in Table 1.2 show that there was not a statistically significant shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of ethnicity. At the beginning of the course about 29 percent of the students conceptualized ethnicity as *socially constructed characteristics of culture and origin* as compared with 51 percent who conceptualized it as a combination of *race and national origin*. This comparison remained stabled. At the end of the semester those who conceptualized ethnicity *as socially constructed characteristics of culture and origin* was 30 percent while those who conceptualized it as a combination of *race and national origin* was 49 percent. This comparison suggests that the course did not move the students in the desired direction, which was to help them understand the ethnicity as a social construction.

Table 1.2 (item 2: Understanding) The concept of ethnicity can best be understood as the idea of a group of people placed in a distinct category based on:	Time of Assessment	
	Jan. 2013	May 2013
A common ancestry, race, religion and/or nationality.	(41) 51%	(48) 49%
<b>Socially constructed characteristics of culture and historical heritage</b>	(23) <b>29%</b>	(29) <b>30%</b>
Skin color, common descent, blood, and heredity.	(8) 10%	(16) 16%
Language, food, music and holidays	(7) 9%	(5) 5%
<b>Number</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square Test: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .66</b>		

The data in Table 1.3 show that there was a not significant shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of racism as *a system of advantages and disadvantages based on the idea of racial differences*. At the beginning of the semester 11 percent conceptualized racism in this way, but at the end of the semester 16 percent did. I attempted to teach the students that to better understand the racism in the United States, one must understand how social and political forces and institutions define and structure a racial hierarchy in which the white race is privileged and other races are oppressed in different ways during specific periods in history. Although the student's concept of racism did not change in the desired direction, the data suggest that there was a significant shift from their conceptualizations of racism as being about prejudice and stereotypes to their interpretation of racism as being an ideology of racial superiority. These results indicate that I have to link more closely the ideology of racism to its fundamental material base of systematic racial advantages and disadvantages.

Table 1.3 (item 3: Understanding) The concept of racism is best understood as:	Time of Assessment	
	Jan. 2013	May 2013
<b>A system of advantages and disadvantages based on the idea of racial differences.</b>	(9) 11%	(16) 16%
An ideology that distinguishes between superior and inferior cultural groups.	(13) 16%	(30) 30%
Prejudicial behaviors based on negative beliefs and stereotypes.	(47) 58%	(43) 44%
The hatred of races other than your own	(10) 13%	(9) 9%
<b>Number</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square Test: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .33</b>		

The data in Table 1.4 show that there was not a shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of institutional racial discrimination as **the systematic denial of access to resources such as jobs, education, and housing based on race**. At the beginning of the semester 79 percent conceptualized racism in this way, but at the end of the semester 80 percent did. I attempted to teach the students that to better understand institutional racial discrimination in the United States, one must understand it as a social mechanism to distribute goods, services, positions, and prestige on the basis of race. Most students apparently understand what institutional racial discrimination is at the beginning of the course.

Table 1.4 (item 4:Understanding) The concept of institutional discrimination is best understood as:	Time of Assessment	
	Jan. 2013	May 2013
Race based policies such as affirmative action	(2) 3%	(7) 7%
<b>The systematic denial of access to resources such as jobs, education, and housing based on race.</b>	(63) <b>79%</b>	(78) <b>80%</b>
Voting only for people of your own race.	(0) 0%	(2) 2%
Racial bias in practices such as racial profiling	(13) 16%	(11) 11%
<b>Number</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square Test: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .53</b>		

The data in Table 1.5 show that there was a shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of assimilation as *the imposition of white culture on communities of color*. At the beginning of the semester about 25 percent conceptualized assimilation in this way, but at the end of the semester 39 percent did. I attempted to show the students through historical examples that the assimilation process in the USA for people of color has occurred to varying degrees, depending on racial identity, through conquest and oppression. Historically, the dominant White racial group imposed its own brand of truth on the entire society, monopolized elite positions, and required adoption of its cultural values and styles by those who wish to gain acceptance and opportunities in the mainstream.

<b>Table 1.5 (item 5: Understanding) The concept of assimilation is best understood as:</b>	<b>Time of Assessment</b>	
	<b>Jan. 2013</b>	<b>May 2013</b>
The culture shock of moving to a new country	(7) 9%	(7) 7%
Retaining one's culture while acquiring the culture of another culture	(43) 54%	(54) 55%
<b>The imposition of white culture on communities of color.</b>	(20) <b>25%</b>	(37) <b>39%</b>
The creation of a new culture based on a community of color.	(8) 10%	(0) 0%
<b>Number</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square Test: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .05</b>		

The data in Table 1.6 show that there was a significant shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of oppression as *the use of power by a racial group to gain advantage at the expense of others*. At the beginning of the semester about 25 percent conceptualized oppression in this way, but at the end of the semester 44 percent did. I presented a series of analyses of the power relationships among racial groups in the spheres of economics, politics, and social relationships over historical periods, to help students learn how a dominant racial group uses its power to exploit other groups for its own advantage.

<b>Table 1.6 (item 6: Understanding) The concept of oppression is best understood as:</b>	<b>Time of Assessment</b>	
	<b>Jan. 2013</b>	<b>May 2013</b>
The exploitation and mistreatment by individuals or hate groups such as white supremacists	(23) 29%	(25) 26%
Laws that discriminate on the basis of race such as segregation	(19) 24%	(19) 19%
<b>The use of power by a racial group to gain advantage at the expense of others</b>	(20) <b>25%</b>	(43) <b>44%</b>
A perceived disadvantage suffered by historically suppressed groups	(17) 21%	(11) 11%
<b>Number</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square Test: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .16</b>		

*Key Question: What impact did my course have on the racial ideology of my students?*

**LEP Student Learning Outcomes:** *Demonstrate awareness and understanding of historical and current race relations in the United States.*

**Teaching Objective:** To help students to gain knowledge about racism and racial groups and understand the dynamics of racial oppression as well as how one's color is an important aspect of one's identity. Since one's racial perspective depends largely on one's racial identification in America, I analyzed the students' responses to the next set of assessment items based on their racial self-identification.

### **The Ideology of Color Blindness**

The color-blind perspective represents a liberal view of dismantling racism. It is predicated on the belief that if we ignore an individual's racial characteristics in our treatment and prejudgments of her/him, racism will fade away. Although the colorblind approach represents a well-intentioned effort to treat people of all races equally, it will not achieve the goal of racial equality because it does not address the history, structure, and nature of racism. It prohibits or evades discourse on racial oppression, White privilege, and the structure of White power. As a political ideology it is used to negate institutional racism by deflecting attention from white supremacy.

### **Colorblindness Leads to Equality**

On the pretest 75 percent of the White students compared with 71 percent of the students of color indicated that color blindness should lead to equality (Table 2.1A). Likewise on the posttest 70 percent of the White students compared with 76 percent of the students of color indicated that color blindness should lead to equality (Table 2.1B). Thus the opinions of White students and students of color were stable with a large majority maintaining their opinion that color blindness will lead to equality. It appears that my course did not affect their opinion on the efficacy of the colorblind strategy to achieve racial equality.

Table 2.1A (RIC: item 11) Color Blindness (ignoring people's color/race) will lead to equality in a racialized society such as the United States.	Time of Assessment	
	Pre-test Jan. 2013 White Students	Pre-test Jan. 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(12) 18%	(6) 43%
Agree	(37) 57%	(4) 29%
Disagree	(13) 20%	(2) 14%
Strongly Disagree	(3) 5%	(2) 6%
<b>Number</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .28</b>		

Table 2.1B (RIC: item 11) Color Blindness (ignoring people's color/race) will lead to equality in a racialized society such as the United States.	Time of Assessment	
	Post-test May 2013 White Students	Post-test May 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(20) 27%	(8) 32%
Agree	(32) 43%	(11) 44%
Disagree	(15) 20%	(3) 12%
Strongly Disagree	(8) 11%	(3) 12%
<b>Number</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .81</b>		

### People of Color Experience Racism

On the pretest 86 percent of the White students compared with 78 percent of the students of color indicated that people of color frequently experience racism in blatant and subtle ways (Table 2.2A). And on the posttest 86 percent of the White students compared with 92 percent of the students of color indicated that People of Color frequently experience racism in blatant and subtle ways (Table 2.2B). Thus the opinions of White students and students of color were fairly stable.

Table 2.2A (RIC: item 12) People of Color frequently experience racism in blatant and subtle ways.	Time of Assessment	
	Pre-test Jan. 2013 White Students	Pre-test Jan. 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(15) 23%	(1) 7%
Agree	(41) 63%	(10) 71%
Disagree	(8) 12%	(3) 21%
Strongly Disagree	(1) 2%	(0) 0%
<b>Number</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .03</b>		

Table 2.2B (RIC: item 12) People of Color frequently experience racism in blatant and subtle ways.	Time of Assessment	
	Post-test May 2013 White Students	Post-test May 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(25) 33%	(11) 44%
Agree	(40) 53%	(12) 48%
Disagree	(6) 8%	(2) 8%
Strongly Disagree	(4) 5%	(0) 0%
<b>Number</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .70 Post-test</b>		

### Race, Effort, and Well-Being

On the pretest 11 percent of the White students compared with 21 percent of the students of color indicated that if people of color would only try harder, they could be just as well off as Whites (Table 2.3A). And on the posttest 4 percent of the White students compared with 24 percent of the students of color indicated that if people of color would only try harder, they could be just as well off as Whites (Table 2.3B). Thus the opinions of White students and students of color were fairly stable, but there was a significant difference between them. A very small minority of White

students as compared with a small minority of students of color believed that the statement was true. This seems to suggest that the course did not affect their opinions regardless of their racial identity.

Table 2.3A (RIC: item 13) If people of color would only try harder, they could be just as well off as Whites.	Time of Assessment	
	Pre-test Jan. 2013 White Students	Pre-test Jan. 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(1) 2%	(1) 7%
Agree	(6) 9%	(2) 14%
Disagree	(28) 43%	(5) 35%
Strongly Disagree	(30) 46%	(4) 29%
<b>Number</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .35 Pre-test</b>		

Table 2.3B (RIC: item 13) If people of color would only try harder, they could be just as well off as Whites.	Time of Assessment	
	Post-test May 2013 White Students	Post-test May 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(1) 1%	(0) 0%
Agree	(2) 3%	(6) 24%
Disagree	(42) 56%	(8) 32%
Strongly Disagree	(29) 38%	(11) 44%
<b>Number</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .01 Post-test</b>		

### Lives for People of Color Have Improved

On the pretest 86 percent of the White students compared with 86 percent of the students of color indicated that over the last 10 years the situation for people of color in this country has gotten better (Table 2.4A). And on the posttest 76 percent of the White students compared with 84 percent of the students of color indicated over the

last 10 years the situation for people of color in this country has gotten better (Table 2.4B). Thus the opinions of White students and students of color were fairly stable and there was not a significant difference between them. A large majority of White students and students of color believed that the statement was true. This seems to suggest that the course did not affect their opinions regardless of their racial identity.

Table 2.4A (RIC: item 15) Over the last 10 years the situation for people of color in this country has gotten better.	Time of Assessment	
	Pre-test Jan. 2013 White Students	Pre-test Jan. 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(8) 12%	(4) 29%
Agree	(48) 74%	(8) 57%
Disagree	(8) 12%	(2) 14%
Strongly Disagree	(1) 2%	(0) 0%
<b>Number</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .78 Pre-test</b>		

Table 2.4B (RIC: item 15) Over the last 10 years the situation for people of color in this country has gotten better.	Time of Assessment	
	Post-test May 2013 White Students	Post-test May 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(6) 8%	(10) 40%
Agree	(51) 68%	(11) 44%
Disagree	(18) 24%	(3) 12%
Strongly Disagree	(0) 0%	(1) 4%
<b>Number</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .00 Post-test</b>		

### Racial Profiling

On the pretest 76 percent of the White students compared with 93 percent of the students of color indicated that racial profiling is a serious problem in this country

today (Table 2.5A). But on the posttest 90 percent of the White students compared with 88 percent of the students of color indicated racial profiling is a serious problem in this country today (Table 2.5B). Thus the opinions of White students shifted in the direction of the opinions of the students of color, which remained fairly stable. At the end of the course there was not a significant difference between them. A large majority of White students and students of color believed that the statement was true. This seems to suggest that the course may have had an effect on White students.

Table 2.5A (RIC: item 16) Racial profiling is a serious problem in this country today.	Time of Assessment	
	Pre-test Jan. 2013 White Students	Pre-test Jan. 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(14) 22%	(2) 14%
Agree	(37) 57%	(11) 79%
Disagree	(14) 22%	(1) 7%
Strongly Disagree	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
<b>Number</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .04 Pre-test</b>		

Table 2.5B (RIC: item 16) Racial profiling is a serious problem in this country today.	Time of Assessment	
	Post-test May 2013 White Students	Post-test May 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(25) 33%	(14) 56%
Agree	(44) 57%	(8) 32%
Disagree	(4) 7%	(3) 12%
Strongly Disagree	(1) 1%	(0) 0%
<b>Number</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .10 Post-test</b>		

### Students' Opinions about Obama's Race and the Opposition to His Policies

On the pretest 75 percent of the White students compared with 57 percent of the students of color indicated that Barack Obama's race is not a major reason why people oppose his policies (Table 2.6A). But on the posttest 71 percent of the White students compared with 40 percent of the students of color indicated that Barack Obama's race is not a major reason why people oppose his policies (Table 2.6B). Thus the opinion of White students was stable with a large majority maintaining their opinion that Barack Obama's race is not a major reason why people oppose his policies. By contrast, the opinion of students of color shifted from a large minority to a significant majority who believed that Obama's race was a salience factor why people oppose his policies.

Table 2.6A (RIC: item 17) Barack Obama's race is a major reason why people oppose his policies.	Time of Assessment	
	Pre-test Jan. 2013 White Students	Pre-test Jan. 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(1) 2%	(0) 0%
Agree	(15) 23%	(6) 43%
Disagree	(38) 58%	(7) 50%
Strongly Disagree	(11) 17%	(1) 7%
<b>Number</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .68</b>		

Table 2.6B (RIC: item 17) Barack Obama's race is a major reason why people oppose his policies.	Time of Assessment	
	Post-test May 2013 White Students	Post-test May 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(4) 5%	(3) 12%
Agree	(17) 23%	(12) 48%
Disagree	(47) 63%	(9) 36%
Strongly Disagree	(7) 9%	(1) 4%
<b>Number</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .04</b>		

### Students' views of Obama's Election and Racial Progress

On the pretest 60 percent of the White students compared with 64 percent of the students of color indicated that Barack Obama's election has led to better race relations (Table 2.7A). Note, however, that there is a significant difference in the intensity of the opinions held by the White students and the students of color. There was also a significant difference at the end of the course. On the posttest 52 percent of the White students compared with 78 percent of the students of color indicated that Barack Obama's election has led to better race relations (Table 2.7B). Thus the opinion of White students was fairly stable with a small majority agreeing that Barack Obama's election has led to better race relations. By contrast, the opinion of students of color shifted from a small majority to a large significant majority who believed that Obama's election has improved race relations.

Table 2.7A (RIC: item 18) Barack Obama's election has led to better race relations.	Time of Assessment	
	Pre-test Jan. 2013 White Students	Pre-test Jan. 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(0) 0%	(3) 21%
Agree	(39) 60%	(6) 43%
Disagree	(24) 37%	(4) 29%
Strongly Disagree	(2) 3%	(1) 7%
<b>Number</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .03</b>		

Table 2.7B (RIC: item 18) Barack Obama's election has led to better race relations.	Time of Assessment	
	Post-test May 2013 White Students	Post-test May 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(2) 3%	(7) 28%
Agree	(37) 49%	(15) 60%
Disagree	(31) 41%	(2) 8%
Strongly Disagree	(5) 7%	(0) 0%
<b>Number</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square: Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .00 Post-test</b>		

On both the pretest and posttest over 90 percent of the White students the students of color agreed that they can see the connection between this course and real life situations I might face on the job, with my family, and as a citizen (Tables 2.8A and 2.8B).

Table 2.8A (RIC: item 14) I can see the connection between this course and real life situations I might face on the job, with my family, and as a citizen.	Time of Assessment	
	Pre-test Jan. 2013 White Students	Pre-test Jan. 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(22) 34%	(6) 43%
Agree	(38) 58%	(7) 50%
Disagree	(3) 5%	(1) 7%
Strongly Disagree	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
<b>Number</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>14</b>

Table 2.8B (RIC: item 14) I can see the connection between this course and real life situations I might face on the job, with my family, and as a citizen.	Time of Assessment	
	Post-test May 2013 White Students	Post-test May 2013 Students of Color
Strongly Agree	(32) 43%	(14) 56%
Agree	(38) 51%	(9) 36%
Disagree	(2) 3%	(2) 8%
Strongly Disagree	(3) 4%	(0) 0%
<b>Number</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>25</b>

## Conclusion

We should not expect a 16-week course on racial issues in America to dramatically change the deeply embedded racial attitudes and beliefs of young students in such a short period, especially when they are constantly influenced by the dominant color-blind ideology. However the assessment of their learning in my course suggest that it may have had some influence in helping them gain a better understanding of race relations in America. For instance, the data indicated that White students became more aware of racial profiling through the personal racial harassment stories of students of color and the research reports and discussions on racial profiling. To fulfill a writing assignment and oral presentation, quite a few students chose racial profiling and the criminal justice system as their topics. Through these activities the class had

an opportunity to discuss the relationship between the Black community and the criminal justice system. That probably accounts for their shift towards the opinions held by the students of color.

It appears that both White students and students of color generally use the same color-blind ideological frame to interpret social realities. However, students of color had a greater tendency than White students to use racial frames when issues were more concrete. This tendency is probably related to the fact that students of color more aware of the racial bias inherent in America, which is based of White supremacy. Although White students tend to be oblivious to their white skin advantages and privileges, the data did reveal that that they are highly aware of the racial bias against people of color.

### **Students' Opinions about Obama's Race and Opposition to His Policies**

A large majority of White students maintained their opinion that Obama's race does not significantly influence people's opposition to his policies; however, by contrast, students of color changed their opinion. At the beginning of the course a large minority of students of color believed that Obama's race was a factor, but at the end of the course a majority believed it was. The difference in the opinions between the White students and students of color was statistically significant at the end of the course.

A slight majority of White students maintained their opinion that that Barack Obama's election has led to better race relations; however, by contrast, students of color changed their opinion. At the beginning of the course a majority of students of color believed Barack Obama's election has led to better race relation, and at the end of the course that majority had dramatically increased. Again the difference in the opinions between the White students and students of color was statistically significant at the end of the course.

### **Obama's race and policies**

The analysis reveals that the course had a greater effect in changing the opinions of students of color as compared with those of white students. Two facts may help explain the differential effect. First, about half of the students of color are international students who had little understanding of American culture and history. Perhaps as they became more knowledgeable about the racial character of American

society they used racial frames (analytical racial concepts) more often to interpret social and political events. Second, as compared with white students they had been less exposed to the dominant colorblind ideology that permeates the culture of present day America. Colorblindness is predicated on the negation of the importance of race. It does not accept race as a valid analytical tool and it denies that it plays a central role in determining social relations, hierarchies, and the distribution of power and resources. This ideology is deeply ingrained in the American psyche.

American students of color are more sensitive to racism than white students because they continue to experience systemic racism in their daily lives in a very concrete way. Moreover, they are more aware that American society is racially structured and operates on the principle of white supremacy. The basis premise of White supremacy is that Blacks are not fully human; therefore they are not worthy of respect and social equality. As American born students of color learn more about racism, like international students, they also apply racial frames more often to interpret social and political events.

I surmise that the course had less effect on white students political views because they are more influenced by the colorblind ideology, which minimizes anti-black resentment or down plays the role of race in explaining or justifying political behavior. Moreover, they tend deny the salience of race. These survey results suggest that racial identity influence the way White students and students of color understand and interpret American political dynamics. They also imply that I need to include more content and discussion on the ideology of colorblindness.

In summary, my racial issues course was effective to some extent in raising my students' awareness and increasing their understanding of race relations in America. Its effectiveness is limited because the dominant color-blind ideology has a constant powerful influence in shaping their beliefs and views. This ideology distorts the social reality of White supremacy and fosters individualism. Consequently, it is difficult to challenge the colorblind ideology because it is reinforced and perpetuated by the powerful forces of the media, government, educational establishment, and cultural mainstream.

Finally, there are grounds for optimism, over 90 percent of both White students and students of color realize the importance and relevance of the racial issue course to

their lives. Furthermore, I have had more than a small number of my former students, years later, write or visit me to say how my course changed how they think about racial dynamics in America. As educators we must continue to advocate for genuine racial issues courses and develop more effective teaching methods so that we can be a force for change in our struggle against racism.