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SPSSI Teaching Resources Award Materials

Description of the activity, assignment, or exercise: I use Social Justice Missions throughout the undergraduate curriculum, from my first-year experience *Psychology of Prejudice* course to my senior-level *Advanced Social Psychology* course. These missions task my students with creating and implementing plans to positively transform their social worlds. The missions vary, but they share a common structure. I assign an objective (e.g., find an instance of bias in a social media exchange and use what you have learned in class about stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination to engage in the discussion in a way that promotes social justice). The students, either by themselves or in pairs, create an action plan for conducting their missions. The students then enact their action plans, and submit reports that describe their action plans and results (e.g., what did they do?, did they achieve their objective?, what was their operational definition of success?). Finally, we discuss their action plans and results in class, and my students and I discuss how to make their action plans more compelling and far-reaching.

The purpose of the resource: The purpose of my Social Justice Missions is to empower my students to creatively apply their social psychological knowledge and the science of psychology to the promotion of social justice in ways that are most important to them. These missions allow my students to improve their critical thinking skills, enhance their experiences of classroom and campus community, and practice their written (via the reports) and oral (via the class discussions) communication skills. More broadly, the purpose of my Social Justice Missions is to reinforce the academic learning in my classes about social inequality, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, and to promote social consciousness and activism in my students. My Social Justice Missions provide my students with the opportunity to work toward meaningful change in their social worlds, and to promote the ideals that organizations like SPSSI exist to endorse.

The resource itself: My Social Justice Missions vary in terms of their objective and scope depending on the class in which they are used. In my first-year experience *Psychology of Prejudice* course, my students complete several missions over the course of the semester in which they progressively build their skills and make meaningful changes in incremental ways, empowering them to complete the larger, perhaps more difficult missions. Each mission is a small portion of the course grade. The missions build from **The Greeting Mission** (in which they work toward making campus a friendlier place), to **The Social Connection Mission** (in which they work toward developing positive conversations with people they do not already know), to **The Discovering Bias Mission** (in which they seek to uncover covert instances of bias in their everyday lives), to **The Social Media Mission** (in which they promote social justice in online social exchanges), to **The Target of Bias Mission** (in which they explore what it feels like to be a target of bias), to **The Group Humor Mission** (in which they collect instances of and consider the implications of racial, gender, etc., humor), to **The Research Idea and Peer Review Mission** (in which they design their own independent research project to test hypotheses related to bias and social justice).

In my senior-level *Advanced Social Psychology* course, my students complete a single Social Justice Mission that is a larger portion of the course grade. My exact mission assignment directions are as follows:

Social Justice is advocating for the fair and just relation between the individual and society, and is typically measured in terms of distributions of wealth, opportunities, social privileges, social mobility, and power in social roles and norms. To meet the requirements for this assignment, your project should identify a group that is disadvantaged in one of these areas and describe what you did to either reduce that disparity or raise awareness regarding the issue. The objective is to accomplish a social justice mission on campus. Identify a tangible social justice mission to pursue. Create and execute a procedure that includes a timeline of action and a plan for evaluation. Be creative and ambitious to make a meaningful change! Reports may not be longer than one text page. However, appendices may be included without counting toward this limit. For example, you are encouraged to include pictures or videos.

The grading is based on the following components:

- **Mission Statement:** This is a one-sentence summary statement of what you tried to achieve. How did you intend to challenge bias or encourage acceptance of diversity?
- **Justification:** Describe how your chosen mission fits into the parameters of social justice. Describe the bias or injustice that exists and how your mission challenged that bias and/or encouraged acceptance.
- **Procedure:** Describe what you did and how it was intended to make progress toward the completion of your mission. Include a timeline and how you acquired the resources you needed. Describe the work you put in to designing and implementing your project.
- **Evaluation:** Describe how you measured and evaluated your progress on your mission. This could be concrete and measurable (e.g., use of surveys), but feel free to be creative. Discuss whether your mission procedure was successful according to this evaluation. Describe what worked well and what you would improve if you were to repeat this activity. Please conclude your report with a final sentence about your closing thoughts on your mission.
- **Quality:** This assesses how well-written the report is (including grammar, spelling, etc.), how well the idea is developed, the sophistication and innovation of the idea, and how well the author compelled the reader to care about the proposed issue and believe the project was worth doing.

Conclusion:

Through my Social Justice Missions, I provide objectives that my students creatively pursue, through which they enhance their critical thinking, experiences of community, written and oral communication skills, and social psychological research skills. My students report that these missions are highly engaging assignments that they are invested in and enjoy them. By applying the science of social psychology to transforming their social worlds, my students exhibit active learning both inside and outside my classroom walls. As such, they not only learn about, but engage in work to counteract bias-driven social issues that continue to plague our society. Finally, my Social Justice Missions may be easily adapted to courses on social issues at any level, in both campus-based and online course formats, and provide a flexible structure teachers may use to motivate their students' understanding of how our academic understanding of social issues may help them make positive and lasting changes in their worlds.