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## News Feature

### **Why Does Race Seem To Be A Race?**

EDWARDSVILLE, Ill.- Have you questioned racial differences that led to discomfort when interacting in a diverse setting? The truth is that variations exist among individuals ranging from religions, ethnicities, upbringing, and geographical location. However, these differences are often assigned a color and mistaken as a racial influence leading to a breach in communication.

Many people feel concerned about racial differences and remain curious about diversity, but sometimes continue to keep quiet surrendering to assumptions and stereotypes. Perhaps this results from fear, uncertainty, embarrassment, or ignorance. By keeping quiet society may feel they are keeping the peace, when in reality, they are only inhibiting interracial communication progress. This lack of communication is comparable to shaking up a soda bottle and twisting off the lid. Without a true resolution, society is only adding to the pressure which will lead to an explosive outcome.

For decades, a portion of society has considered the color of a person's skin to reflect their abilities, social status, preferences, and demeanor. Even today, society appears to be lacking in their ability to communicate about race. On September 25, 2009 a rally against a white supremacist group gathered by the courthouse in Belleville, Ill. This resulted from an incident on a Belleville West school bus where a fight between black and white children

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occurred. The community labeled it as a hate crime. At the rally, snipers were present as well as flags broadcasting swastikas. The white supremacists and protestors both struggled to have their voices heard, but their strategies failed as everyone walked away only feeling more discouraged and disappointed. It seems obvious that these circumstances are a direct result of a lack of constructive communication among and about races. Strategies such as a rally that are implemented to communicate about race fail to successfully accomplish a goal or make progress in communicating interracially. After so many years of confusion and consequences, society might ask themselves why races have not yet began effectively communicating.

Fortunately, not everyone is keeping quiet. Faculty and students on the campus of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) are passionate about promoting respectful and efficient interracial communication. In order to address typically avoided racial issues, the Department of Speech Communication offers an Interracial Communication course as an elective (SPC 210).

The course is offered the first two weeks of the summer session, and is abbreviated to only one week with nine hours of class per day. This time span is essential for enhancing trust among students allowing them to more comfortably express personal concerns. The itinerary of this course includes topics concerning discrimination, respect, theories, love, mindfulness, and words. The class is tailored to sensitive subjects using a structured schedule and in-depth explanations.

The goal of the course is to educate students through facts, lessons, and insights each day. This gives students the opportunity to express feelings or address hot topics. The

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instructors demand respect but promote openness throughout discussion. Emotions and stories are typically shared and used to enhance the lessons. This technique clarifies various uncertainties which opens up students' minds creating more productive communication among races. Although this atmosphere may seem awkward for some, SIUE students refer to the course as a life-changing experience. The professors also take pride in the accomplishments of this course.

Dr. Laura Perkins, a skilled interracial communication professor at SIUE shares, "I think the Interracial Communication course I co-teach with Ms. Renee Fussell is one of the most important courses students can take during their undergraduate experience. The course offers students a chance to explore critical issues of race and race relations in a safe environment. By the end of the course, we can see real change, real understanding, and real commitment towards improving interracial communication."

In fact, the course inspired five students to found an interracial communication organization on the SIUE campus called Student Union for Racial Equality (S.U.R.E.). This organization became official on July 10, 2009 and is eagerly picking up momentum as the students strive for racial equality. The organization's mission statement is, "Providing a comfortable environment for asking questions, breaking stereotypes, and bridging the gaps among races."

Through experiencing SPC 210, the founders recognized the vast breach in interracial communication and provided an environment that encouraged individuals to discuss race comfortably, openly, and productively. They also invite guest speakers to share experiences

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and traditions at the meetings. S.U.R.E. welcomes students, faculty, and the community to get involved in all organization efforts including meetings, fundraisers, and other events. The organization does not exclude anyone from joining the pursuit for racial harmony.

The content and procedures that S.U.R.E. practices provides resources for members to educate themselves and others. Through education, these individuals become better communicators. The environment enforces respect and mindfulness, as well as openness. The organization closely resembles the SPC 210 course; however S.U.R.E. establishes a goal of reaching out to communities through education and interpersonal communication. S.U.R.E. also improves students' ability to communicate in attempts to prepare them for success in a diverse business world.

So why does race seem to be a race? The bottom line is that people should think twice about comparing races and categorizing others according to color. Next time you catch yourself making an assumption about a person based on their color, consider communicating. Every day, society faces racial obstacles that portray race as a competition rather than a beautiful array of not only color, but traditions, ideas, culture, and life. Improving your ability to communicate interracially will correct your misunderstandings, prevent uncomfortable circumstances, and better the quality of life for an entire society. By showing respect, curiosity, and acceptance with every stride, together we will reach the finish line winning the most rewarding prize of all- equality.

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