

Notre Dame's 'White Privilege Seminar': Indoctrination or education?

by [Husna Haq](#)

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([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) For a select group of students at the University of Notre Dame, a typical course load may include Human Biology 101, Introduction to Statistics, 19th century Russian Literature—and the White Privilege Seminar.

The last course, a new offering by the university in South Bend, Indiana, is getting plenty of attention from critics who say it indoctrinates students and shames white people.

Sociology 25280, or White Privilege Seminar: An Introduction to the Intersections of Privilege, is a one-credit, six-week preparatory sociology class designed to educate and train ten carefully selected students on the definitions of and causes and effects of white privilege, according to the course description.

“The nature of living in contemporary culture indicates that people consciously and unconsciously simultaneously participate in and are affected by systems of oppression; however, since these behaviors can be learned, they can also be unlearned,” it reads. As such, the main objective for the course, it continues, is “personal transformation: to leave the class and conference more aware of injustices and better equipped with tools to disrupt personal, institutional, and worldwide systems of oppression.”

The class culminates with a trip to the White Privilege Conference, paid for by the university.

The class is getting special attention in the wake of the grand jury decisions in the cases of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, two unarmed black men fatally killed by white police officers, both of which resulted in non-indictments. News of the grand jury decisions has led to increased racial polarization and renewed attention to the issues of racial injustice and police brutality.

But for some on the political right, the class is an example of liberal education gone too far.

"More Progressive Indoctrination: Notre Dame to Teach White Students That They are Inherently Racist," trumpeted a Tea Party News Network headline.

The Young Conservatives website states, "Major University Decides Students Are Racist, Now Offers A Class Called "White . . . ."

Mark Gianfalla, a Notre Dame student and conservative campus activist told the Daily Caller, "The problem I see with this course is that it is teaching a flawed and inherently racist sociological theory as fact."

Turning his focus on the course professor, Iris Outlaw, Gianfalla continued, "This is a faculty member who helped organize protests against the College Republicans' hosting of Ann Coulter on campus last year under the premise that Ann was a perpetrator of racial 'hate speech.' Nothing is stopping her, however, from spewing the idea of white privilege and consequently white guilt in a University sanctioned course."

Referring to the White Privilege Conference students attend after the seminar, Gianfalla said that "anyone would be able to tell that it is far from academic . . . . This isn't multicultural; it's an opportunity to bias students towards the shaming of one culture and ethnicity."

In an interview with Campus Reform, Professor Outlaw addressed the controversy.

"This is not going to be like a white bashing or anything like that," she said. "It's just to help people understand the basis of privilege as well because we all have different privileges depending on who we are."

So while the seminar is named after white privilege, the class, in fact, will take a look at a variety of other privileges such as gender and disabilities, in addition to race, she said.

"We're actually going to identify and talk about white privilege and other systems of oppression and how they've evolved," she told Campus Reform. "We're going to be looking at the historical context of privilege and oppression. We're also going to be looking at social, political, and economic systems through the lens of white supremacy and how that's played out."