

Witness: Writings on Service, Spirituality and Social Justice (A student publication course)

This two-semester course will ask: How can we, members of a privileged, free society, use our voices to witness oppression? What are the ethical, moral and political dynamics of speaking for the oppressed? What are a writer's responsibilities – to both subject and to reader? How have writers – past and present – answered these ethical challenges in the name of “the good?” What are the requirements of trust and faith, hope and integrity that inhabit the story-giver/storyteller relationship?

Fall Semester

The first semester of this course will focus on the fact and the curse of silence among oppressed populations, the alternative “languages” that underground resistance communities have evolved, and the ways in which telling their stories to outsiders has enabled the oppressed to move into the power of their own significant speech. We will examine works by Jacob Riis, James Agee, Robert Coles, J. Anthony Lukas, Joan Didion, Jonathon Kozol and others, as well as poets, fiction writers, documentary photographers and artists, within the matrix of these ethical questions.

This study will provide the intellectual basis for the spring publication of a journal of student writings, Witness: A Journal of Service, Spirituality and Social Justice. Witness will be both a hard copy journal and an e-zine. Students will solicit manuscripts (and submit their own), and will write a critical essay on an aspect of witness literature.

Spring Semester

In the second semester students will study and critique current and past examples of “witness publications,” including commercial, non-profit, and underground journals. They will begin to work with contributors to edit accepted manuscripts, evolve the design and mission statement of Witness, learn and apply magazine production skills (both hard and e-zine) on a publication schedule, as well as design marketing and distribution strategies. They will plan and execute a launch event for the journal's publication in late spring.

Students who have service experience, had taken a PULSE course, or participated in a service program at Boston College (Arrupe International Programs, Appalachia, 4Boston) or other appropriate field work, are eligible to apply. Enrollment is by permission. Limited to 15.