Overview:

This module was designed specifically for Learning Fellows working in sociology and service learning courses. However, it may apply to Learning Fellows more generally; many Learning Fellows seek out the position because they want to make positive changes to their communities. When discussing social or community issues, Learning Fellows may find their own ideas in conflict with those of other students. They may desire to change students' minds in productive ways. This activity helps Learning Fellows develop ways to teach students the skills they need to make informed decisions, and moves attention away from directly teaching students how to think or feel about social issues.

Learning Objectives:

● Promote a set of skills that can help students make informed decisions.
● Evaluate the differences and similarities between “teaching,” “civic engagement,” and “activism.”
● Share ways that Learning Fellows can help promote civic engagement in the classroom.

Reading:


continued on the next page
More inspiration:


Activity:

- Allow the Learning Fellows time to read the abstract and introduction of the paper. (An instructor’s guide to key points is on page 2.
- Ask the Learning Fellows how they view the differences and similarities between “teaching,” “civic engagement,” and “activism.” Is there overlap among the three concepts? Clear separations? Should Learning Fellows engage with any of these concepts? All of them?
- Using the think-pair-share technique, ask the Learning Fellows how they might help students achieve each of the five objectives outlined in the paper (*Think*: Learning Fellows explore this topic on their own. *Pair*: Learning Fellows share their ideas with a partner. *Share*: Learning Fellows share their ideas with the whole huddle.)
- Ask the Learning Fellows to read the two activities listed in the appendices of the paper. Then, ask the Learning Fellows to critique these activities or propose new ones.

Overview of the material included in Lowry (2016):

Quotes from the introduction:

“I present a pedagogical framework of social problems literacy, one that provides a structured but flexible approach to teaching social problems in a way that supports student and scholar activism. Importantly, this framework also provides a clear set of competencies that are amenable to assessment of student learning.”

“Social problems literacy can be presented to students as a set of skills that are relevant not only for present daily life but for a future that will inevitably include new, unforeseen social problems.”

“Importantly, the set of skills subsumed under social problems literacy also goes beyond evaluation of information to include tools with which to analyze societal dynamics, arrive at reasoned arguments and commitments, and present those arguments in a compelling way to an audience.”
Overview of the material, continued:

The five objectives of social problems literacy:

1. Identify and locate information about troubling societal conditions.
2. Evaluate form and, as feasible, content of claims about troubling conditions.
3. Recognize multiple and complex social processes, patterns, and dynamics through which conditions become and are widely recognized as problematic.
4. Begin formulation of one’s own view of a troubling condition including its causes, consequences, and potential resolutions.
5. Publicly, compellingly, and with integrity, present one’s sociological understanding of a troubling societal condition and potential solutions.

Summary of the two activities in the appendices:

Appendix A: The “Documentary Analysis Exercise” requires students to view a documentary. Students describe their pre-existing knowledge and research the makers of the documentary before viewing it. Then, students describe the main themes of the documentary and critically analyze its credibility.

Appendix B: The “Claims-making Video Assignment” asks students to create their own 2-3 minute video, describing a social condition. Students must use the video assignment to try to persuade an audience, and they must deliberately include a questionable statistic or logical statement. Students provide an analysis of their process in creating the video, and student audiences write reflections of each other’s work.