New program will allow students to learn from students next semester

By Nichole Rota
SUMMIT STAFF

A Stonehill College sociology professor and student are preparing a program for Spring 2013 in which students will create their own courses and teach them to other students.

The program SPES, which is Latin for “hope,” is modeled after other experimental colleges and democratic education programs that began during social movements in the 1960s to address issues ranging from gay rights to feminism to the Vietnam War.

Now Stonehill is looking to implement this new teaching style from which future classes will benefit.

Student teachers will enroll in the three-credit course SOC 353B: Democratic Education. Eight students can participate in each course and students can enroll in one SPES course each semester.

These students will register for the one-credit course APL 090 and will be graded on a pass/fail basis. To address scheduling conflicts and classroom availability, teachers will hold the classes on weekends or at night for about two or three hours each week.

The courses will run for the middle 13 weeks of the spring semester to avoid periods when students have heavy workloads from their regular courses.

They ultimately want to “fill a hole in the Stonehill curriculum,” said sociology Professor Christopher Wetzel.

Wetzel finished a doctoral degree at the University of California Berkeley in 2007 and was familiar with the success of the experimental college there. When Wetzel came to Stonehill in 2009, he felt an absence of student activism.

In Wetzel’s course, Introduction to Sociology, senior Hailey Chalhoub from Plymouth, shared her experiences with the Mindful Living Community at Stonehill. The Mindful Living Community is a special interest housing group of about 50 students in the Orleans and Plymouth towhouses of the Commonwealth Courts at Stonehill. The residents undertake environmental and social action and community-building projects.

Wetzel talked to Chalhoub more about the lack of activism on campus and together they decided to start a democratic education program.

Chalhoub and Wetzel contacted students they thought might be interested and capable of teaching a course. They met with a group of about 25 in the late summer and voiced their opinions about the lack of interest in applying knowledge outside of the classroom.

To address this issue, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Katie Conboy approved the pilot program for student taught classes this summer. On Oct. 3, the faculty senate unanimously approved it, but questioned the logistics of reserving classrooms, potential scheduling conflicts, and whether the student-taught classes would replace regular classes.

Student teachers are working with faculty advisors; Wetzel, and peers this fall to prepare syllabi, activities, and discussion topics. The classes are designed to supplement and complement current curriculums.

“The purpose is to intellectually challenge students,” said student/teacher Prithak Chowdhury, 19, from Agartala, India.

Chowdhury plans to teach “Stereotypes and Multicultural Encounters,” in which he hopes to discuss stereotypic SPES
Students teaching SPES courses will focus on discussion and participation

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Phrases such as similarity, life, movies, and current events. He said he wants to pull examples from personal experiences and work with students to learn how to address stereotypes. Student teacher Gabby Cole, 20, from Nashua, N.H., and other student teachers plan to emphasize discussion and activity style classes. They will focus on classroom participation and attendance when grading students.

There are no prerequisites for the classes besides interest in the subject. All classes are open to students regardless of major.

The student leaders will hold two open houses in the Commons during activity periods on Dec. 10 and Jan. 14 to encourage students to participate in SPES. Students can enroll in these courses in January.

Questions about SPES can be directed to Wetzel (cwetzel@stonehill.edu) or Chalhoub (hchalhoub@students.stonehill.edu).

Just a few SPES courses being taught in the Spring 2013:

“Nerd Culture: The Historical and Sociological Relevance of Comics and Video Games”

Laura Dzgoeva and Samantha Smith

This class will study the history of comic and video game industries and their impact on society. They will explore the nerd subculture and how its members label themselves and perceive others. The class will also discuss how pop culture mirrors the interests, habits, and mental states of the authors and game makers.

“Stereotypes and Multicultural Encounters”

Prithak Chowdhury, Noah Dunn, and Kristen Kennedy

This course will focus on identifying stereotypes and discussing their origins, roles in society, and how people handle them. The class will discuss stereotypes in current events, in movies, and locally. The students will further understand their own cultures and learn about cultures in the Brockton area.

“If I Were In Charge...”

Anthony Borzaro

This course will compare and contrast different governmental systems and methods of response to crisis. The class will simulate countries faced with crises and will make policy decisions to solve them. Readings and activities will allow students to better understand global decision-making and crisis management.