

# How can you still be a successful student and make time for Identity Politics, Cultural Activism, and Community Service?

*A few suggestions from the Director of Academic Development for combining your "Academic Selves" with your activism, and for increasing faculty involvement in your cultural & political projects.*

1. **Independent Study.** Many of the issues and questions raised when exploring cultural identity, space, community politics, etc. can be formulated into independent study research projects. For example, if you're interested in strengthening the ALANA cultural organizations on campus as spaces and communities that support excellence in academic work, you might consider doing an independent study on the history, culture, and politics of:
  - a. Student cultural organizations at liberal arts colleges.
  - b. Gender relations within cultural organizations.
  - c. Caring forms of labor in cultural organizations and its effect on student performance.
  - d. Ethnographic or racial identity development analyses of student involvement in cultural organizations.
  - e. Comparative studies of student movements and student cultural organizations across time and space (e.g., Student monks and social protest in Myanmar; the role of women in student protest movements against Occupation in the Middle East; student protest in Togo, or China, or Pakistan, etc.).
2. **The Cultural Economy of Race, Class, Gender, Sexual Orientation—Identity.** Any question or issue that emerges in the discussions around campus climate always/already contains philosophical, political, economic, scientific, environmental, historical, and ethical presuppositions. Probe your question or issue in a way that permits you to uncover thinkers, theorists, novelists—*inherited intellectual traditions*—which inform your question or issue. Theories of human nature, theories of gender relations, models of the workplace or of campus community relations, narratives of social justice, the Constitutional basis of ..., the interpretation of art in a particular period or school and its relationship to social change or literature or politics in the same or a different time, the uses and misuses of immigrant stories of achievement in the US, a Foucaultian or Marxist or feminist or environmental analysis of guilt/innocence in interpersonal relations.....all these questions, issues and many many more can be raised as a result of engagement around campus climate matters. Use your educational opportunity at MHC to **cultivate the habit of asking questions of your experience** in ways that expand, rather than reduce, your curiosity. Figure out what you need to remain open and aware and work toward that with faculty/staff mentors.

3. **The Weed and MHC Summer Research Fellowships** are programs that fund well-conceived, faculty-sponsored, individual research projects by students for a full summer. Fellows present their work during Family and Friends Weekend the following fall semester. Fellows may also continue that work in the form of a senior thesis.
4. **The Multicultural Perspectives Requirement at MHC.** The entire educational enterprise at MHC is for students. It's yours!! Make it what you want/need it to be, in all its parts and wholes. For example, What is the multicultural perspectives requirement at MHC? Why does it exist? Are such requirements at other schools that have distribution requirements or general education expectations? What goal(s) does the MPR meet? What goals "should" it meet? Why? What is the version of a MPR at other institutions? What theories of human community and human experience are endorsed in the administration of MHC's MPR? What subject areas count—or don't count—toward the requirement at MHC? How does this list compare with that at other institutions?
5. **Learning Communities.** Students can form collectives or groups that define a substantive research question (What are utopian forms of college campuses and how do we make MHC the kind of place we imagine it to be?) and spend a semester—as a group—researching and writing about it. Students can "purchase" faculty time and expertise on a rotating basis, but the course (or project) is a creative intellectual project of students.
6. **Reach out to Alums.** We have a large and involved alumni association. Students could organize to do primary oral interviews with alums about campus climate issues in earlier periods of MHC. What has changed? What hasn't? Why?
7. **Be Innovative.** Create multi-disciplinary faculty teams for your independent study. Use the emerging Nexus model of interdisciplinary study to create space for your intellectual interests.
8. **Strengthen all Student Organizations.** What do members of student organizations need from faculty and staff to do their jobs better? Do you have a faculty or staff advisor with knowledge relevant to your org missions? Are you working with them on a regular basis?
9. **Group Skills and Leadership.** Issues like the one that has brought students together this month are also occasions to practice individual and group management skills. Learn how to facilitate. Learn the power of words, tone-setting, language phrasing. Learn the difference between effective and ineffective strategies for achieving organizational or personal (including interpersonal) objectives. Be aware, as you go through this process, that, as Dean Moore has reminded us, "conversation without transformation" is not enough. Be aware of how you invest in, and are changed by, these processes.
10. **Time Allocation.** Be sure to spend only as much time on issues as they warrant. Also, make sure that the quality of time you devote to *your* interests—whatever they are—helps you feel empowered and responsible in *your* life, not disillusioned and alienated from your life.
11. **Student Led Teach-In.** Organize and execute a forum by students *for* faculty on campus climate issues and challenges.

*Suggestions provided by Lucas Wilson, Director of Academic Development*  
Skinner Hall, Room 114 ~ lbwilson@mtholyoke.edu