



# Civil Rights Pilgrimage Immersion Experience

Dean of Students Office, University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire

Faculty Mentors: Jodi Thesing-Ritter, Kirby Harless

Student Researchers: Elsa Kraus, Nicholas Severson, Sarah Tweedale, Mary Wolf

IRB Approval Number: 2010-2011-062

## INTRODUCTION

The Civil Rights Pilgrimage domestic-intercultural immersion experience provides an opportunity for University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire students to learn about key individuals, events, and other aspects surrounding the American Civil Rights Movement on a national basis. In the winter and spring of 2011, students spent ten days immersed in the Deep South to learn about the Movement, visit major sites of significance to the Movement from the 1950s to the 1970s, and hear firsthand accounts of experiences from people who were active in the Civil Rights Movement.

A Women's Studies course focused on women in the American Civil Rights Movement was offered during both the Winterim 2011 and Spring 2011 academic terms. Students had the option of choosing to take this course concurrently with the Civil Rights Pilgrimage.

These were the sixth and seventh Civil Rights Pilgrimages. One of the key goals of the Pilgrimage is to provide students with an opportunity to enhance their multicultural competence and experience diversity in ways not naturally fostered by the community make-up of Eau Claire and the Chippewa Valley. The data collected in this study will become part of a longitudinal research project on the long-term impact of the Civil Rights Pilgrimage on students.

**Hypothesis 1:** Participants in the class and the trip will show decreased levels of racism, sexism, and changes in attitudes relating to white privilege.

**Hypothesis 2:** Participants in the class will show stronger attitude changes relating to sexism than participants not in the class.



Photo courtesy of Jodi Thesing-Ritter. Used with permission.

## METHODS

To conduct research assessing the impacts of both the class and the trip, both pre-surveys and post-surveys were conducted. The surveys were administered to the class before the first class and after the last class; surveys were given to the trip participants before departing for the trip and after returning from the trip. The surveys were sent out via email, and participation in the research was completely voluntary, with no incentive given to encourage participation.

The survey was broken up into four major components: demographic information, The Modern Sexism Scale, The Modern Racism Scale, and The White Privilege Attitudes Scale. The demographic information is essential to understand the group of students we are studying, both in terms of their racial background and their experiences with people of other cultures. By comparing the pre- and post-surveys and participants' responses on the three scales the research seeks to establish whether or not significant change in people's views on sexism, racism, and white privilege occurred.

## SCALES

1. Modern Racism Scale (McConahay, 1986), using a 5-point Likert Scale
2. Modern Sexism Scale (Swim et al., 1995), using a 5-point Likert Scale
3. The White Privilege Attitudes Scale (Pinterits et al., 2009), which consists of four subscales: confronting white privilege, anticipated costs, white privilege awareness, and white privilege remorse; this uses a 6-point Likert Scale

## RESULTS

Statistically significant results were found for the winter and spring Civil Rights Pilgrimage trip for participants in the class and on the trip. The chart below shows paired-samples number of participants' scores and statistically significant p values.

As shown below, Hypothesis 1 was supported, representing change in participants' attitudes toward sexism, racism, and white privilege.

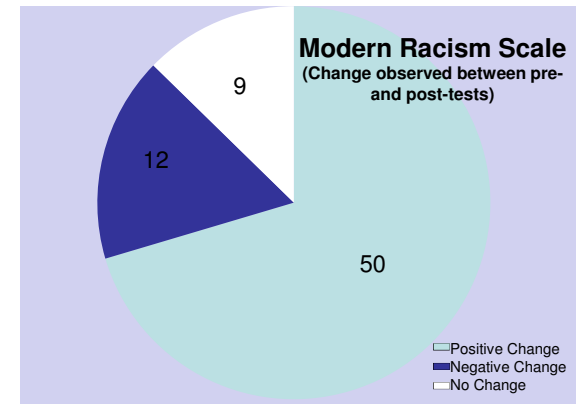
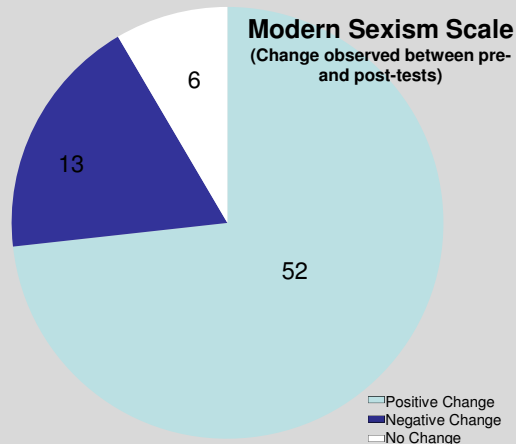
Statistically significant change supporting Hypothesis 2 was found only for the winter class in comparison with the winter trip. Statistically significant change over time was equal for the Spring class and trip.

Possible conclusions for non-significant values for the White Privilege Attitudes scale during the winter trip and class may be because of the demographics of the group. A greater proportion of students were from diverse backgrounds in the winter; therefore, some students were not in a position to answer questions related to white privilege.

\*Significance:  $p < .05$

	Modern Racism	Modern Sexism	Confronting White Privilege	Anticipated Costs of Addressing	Awareness of White Privilege	White Privilege Remorse
Winter Class (N=12)	p=.14	<b>p=.016</b>	p=.474	p=.788	p=.349	p=.257
Winter Trip (N=16)	<b>p=.003</b>	<b>p&lt;.001</b>	<b>p=.001</b>	p=.278	<b>p&lt;.001</b>	p=.061
Spring Class (N=18)	p=.236	p=.551	<b>p=.006</b>	p=.073	p=.553	p=.845
Spring Trip (N=25)	<b>p&lt;.005</b>	<b>p&lt;.001</b>	p=.098	p=.798	<b>p=.036</b>	<b>p=.040</b>

## MOVEMENT OF TRIP PARTICIPANTS



## ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

"It is widely recognized among contemporary social scientists that racial prejudice is expressed more covertly in American society today than it was before the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s" (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999; Sears, 1988). Immersion experience class research has been on the rise due to the impact it has on the students. The participation has proven to have a positive impact on the students' learning, and the results have shown that their level of cultural awareness and sensitivity has increased (Canfield, 2006; Seaman, 2001). The research also correlates to the effect of multicultural courses. Not only can they heighten the students' awareness of social problems (e.g. to confronting minorities), they can promote more of an open attitude (Hill & Augoustinos, 2001; Smith, Roberts, & Smith, 1997). Current numbers indicate that most universities require a diversity course. Fifty-eight percent of universities require a specific course and 42% require at least two or more (Arredondo, 2009).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to offer the Civil Rights Pilgrimage as a high-impact intercultural-domestic immersion experience at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
- Expand this data set through a continuance of data collection in the longitudinal study.
- Explore additional options with potential to provide students with domestic-intercultural immersion experiences with a focus on social justice issues and appreciation and awareness of diversity.

## WORKS CITED

- Arredondo, P. (2006). Using professional leadership to promote multicultural understanding and social justice. *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology* 2(1), 13-17. Retrieved March 25, 2010.
- Canfield, B.S., Low, L., & Hovesladd, A. (2009). Cultural immersion as a learning method for expanding intercultural competencies. *The Family Journal* 17 (4), 318-322. Retrieved March 25, 2010.
- Hogan, D., Mallott, M. (2005). Changing racial prejudice through diversity education. *Journal of College Student Development* 46 (2), 115-125. Retrieved March 25, 2010.
- McConahay, J. B. (1986). Modern racism, ambivalence, and the modern racism scale. In J. F. Dovidio & S. L. Gaertner (Eds.), *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism* (pp. 91-126). New York: Academic Press.
- Melnick, S.L., Zeichner, K.M. (1998). Teacher educators responsibility to address diversity issues: Enhancing institutional capacity. *Theory into Practice* 37 (2), 88-95. Retrieved March 25, 2010.
- Pinterits, E., Potrat, V., & Spanierman, L. (2009). The White Privilege Attitudes Scale: Development and Initial Validation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56(3), 417-429. doi:10.1037/a0016274.
- Plante, T.G., Lackey, K. & Hwang, J.Y. (2009). The impact of immersion trips on development of compassion among college students. *Journal of Experimental Education* 32 (1), 28-43. Retrieved March 25, 2010.
- Seaman, J., Beighez, J., Shilila, P., & Crawford, B. (2009). Contact theory as a framework for experiential activities as diversity education: An exploratory study. *Journal of Experimental Education* 32 (3), 207-225. Retrieved March 24, 2010.
- Swim, J. K., Aikin, K. J., Hall, W. S., & Hunter, B. A. (1995). Sexism and Racism: Old-Fashioned and Modern Prejudices. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 68(2), 199-214. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Support for this project came from student differential tuition funds through the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Faculty/Student Research Collaboration Differential Tuition Program.