


# Overwhelmed and Immobilized: Raising the Consciousness of Privileged Young Adults About World Hunger and Poverty

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In this study, I compared the shifts in worldview of affluent young adults participating in a course on social justice issues to a control group of similar young adults. In this course, participating students learned about the size, scope, causes and impact of world hunger and global poverty. However, an analysis of pre- and post-survey data revealed that the young adults participating in the social justice course experienced a decline over the course of the semester in their support for humanitarian aid in comparison to the control group. Interviews with these young adults, and analyses of their student work, revealed that the manner in which they learned about world hunger and poverty led them to become overwhelmed by the size and scope of these global problems and convinced of their intractability.

**Keywords:** activism, civic engagement, world hunger, poverty, emerging adults, social justice

Perhaps the greatest human rights crises in the world today are the devastating effects of poverty and hunger in developing countries. According to Sachs (2005), more than 10 million children in the developing world die each year from diseases stemming from simple malnutrition. One in 10 children from these countries will die before reaching the age of five. This year the United States will spend approximately \$16 billion a year fighting global poverty and 30 times that amount—\$450 billion—on its defense budget (Earth Institute 2007). The \$16 billion allocated to humanitarian aid represents 0.15% of the United States' Gross National Product (GNP), a level of contribution that falls far short of the 0.7% target set by the United Nations and places the United States last among the world's wealthiest nations (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2007). In short, many would argue—and have argued—that  United States is failing to play a leading role in aiding the world's poorest countries.

One reason for this failure is likely ignorance on the part of the American people about the size and scope of the suffering faced by individuals in developing countries. In a report to the World Bank on global inequality, Milanovic (1999) argued that, "Such a high inequality is sustainable precisely because the world is not unified, and rich people do not meet, mingle, or even know the existence of the poor other than in the most abstract way" (51). Krain and Shadle (2006) concur that issues of world hunger and poverty can be hard to imagine for affluent young Americans surrounded by "an endless array of fast-food delivery services" (52).

1 In this study, I investigated the response of privileged young adults to learning  
2 about issues of world hunger and poverty. The young adults in this study were  
3 seventeen and eighteen-year-old high school seniors—in other words, individuals  
4 poised on the borderline between adolescence and emerging adulthood. As a  
5 result, the findings described in this paper can offer insights to both secondary  
6 and university-level educators about the processes by which privileged young  
7 adults develop (or fail to develop) a sense of social responsibility for populations  
8 suffering from hunger, malnutrition and preventable disease.  
9

### 10 Research Context

11  
12 In his Presidential Address to the International Studies Association in 2000,  
13 Craig Murphy called upon university educators to traverse with their students  
14 “those naturalized boundaries that keep us from knowing or caring about peo-  
15 ple in other lands” (354). Specifically, Murphy (2001) called for all college stu-  
16 dents to learn that, “The bimodal distribution of income across the globe is  
17 becoming even more distinct” and that this increasing inequity “will place ethi-  
18 cal and political demands upon them” (347, 354). As if heeding Murphy’s call,  
19 over the past decade, a number of scholars have offered their perspectives on  
20 the most effective means of educating young adults about global inequity, world  
21 hunger and social responsibility. Hall (2001) reported on the importance of  
22 teaching students about “how the privileged can be allies of the poor in their  
23 struggle” (349). Salem and Freeman (2002) described the impact of a curricu-  
24 lum in which students learn about the challenges facing developing countries by  
25 analyzing the United Nations’ annual *Human Development Report*. Krain and  
26 Shadle (2006) reported on the ability of simulations such as a “hunger ban-  
27 quet” to highlight for students the nutritional disparities that exist across the  
28 world. Finally, Scott (2001) described a number of pedagogical techniques  
29 including the use of problem themes, believing and doubting games, and  
30 evidence-finding assignments that can support students in developing a genuine  
31 understanding of world hunger and global poverty.

32 There is also scholarship from the field of education that focuses on the peda-  
33 gogy of teaching for social justice more generally. Goodman (2000a) has cited  
34 the importance of providing students with “a range of information including  
35 statistics, historical perspectives, and data about institutional and cultural oppres-  
36 sion” (45). Hoehn (1983) has emphasized the impact of personal accounts,  
37 explaining that, “The voice of the other person has to become as loud as possi-  
38 ble to drown out the blaring noises of a self-centered consciousness” (158–159).

39 There is some debate about the tone that should be adopted by educators  
40 teaching for social justice. Gutmann (1987) and Simon (2001) have emphasized  
41 the importance of instructors assuming a position of “pedagogical neutrality”  
42 when leading discussion of social justice issues. Specifically, Gutmann (1987)  
43 warned that social justice educators must not “restrict competing conceptions of  
44 the good life and the good society” (44). In contrast, Haste (2004) and Rahn  
45 and Hirshorn (1999) have reported on the role that emotions such as anger and  
46 hopefulness can play in strengthening students’ commitment to social justice.

47 Other scholars have focused on efficacy as a key factor in the development of  
48 social responsibility. Bandura (1977, 1982) found that the stronger an individ-  
49 ual’s perceived self-efficacy, the more willing he or she was to take on and expend  
50 effort to overcome a particular obstacle. Echoing Bandura’s findings are studies  
51 of college student activists, civil rights activists and Holocaust rescuers that have  
52 found these people to be highly efficacious individuals (Keniston 1968; McAdam  
53 1988; Oliner and Oliner 1992). As a result of such findings, Goodman (2000a)  
54 has asserted that effective lessons on social justice provide students with “specific  
55 ideas of how to act that they feel will make a difference” (1071).

1 With this study, I have sought to add to the existing scholarship on effective  
2 (and ineffective) pedagogical practices for deepening young adults' understand-  
3 ing and investment in international issues. As I describe in detail below, I investi-  
4 gated the impact upon student's beliefs and attitudes of an academic course  
5 that draws upon a number of the pedagogical techniques described in this litera-  
6 ture review. Rare for applied research in education, this study utilized an experi-  
7 mental design with random assignment to a treatment and control group and  
8 drew upon both quantitative and qualitative methods. As a result, I believe the  
9 findings outlined in this paper offer useful insights for helping students traverse  
10 those boundaries that can inhibit their knowledge of and respect for people in  
11 her lands (Murphy 2001).

### 12 13 14 **Research Design and Methodology**

15 Here, I provide detailed descriptions of the site and participants involved in this  
16 study as well as the data collection and data analytic methods employed.

#### 17 18 19 *Site*

20 Glennview, Massachusetts<sup>1</sup> is an upper-middle class suburban community located  
21 approximately 15 miles southwest of Boston with a population of just under  
22 14,000 people (Glennview 2007). The median family income in Glennview is  
23 \$98,600; the median home value is \$670,800; and the public school system  
24 spends more than \$9,000 per student per year (Glennview 2007). In terms of  
25 racial demographics, Glennview is 96% White, 3% Asian, and 0.5% Black  
26 (Glennview 2007). In 2005, a national magazine ranked Glennview thirteenth on  
27 a list of the "100 Best Places to Live in America."<sup>2</sup>

28 Glennview High School enrolls approximately 750 students. More than 90% of  
29 these students will go on to enroll in four year colleges. Glennview's MCAS scores—  
30 the state mandated standardized tests given to all tenth grade students—routinely  
31 place Glennview among the top twenty communities in the state.

32 Seniors at Glennview High School fulfill their English/Language Arts require-  
33 ment by choosing two semester-long courses from among the English depart-  
34 ment's five course offerings: Creative Writing, Humanities, Youth in  
35 Contemporary Literature, African-American Literature, and Literature and  
36 Justice. Students are randomly assigned to take one of their selected courses  
37 during the fall semester and the other during the spring semester. Each of these  
38 courses contains 20–30 students and is taught by a member of the Glennview  
39 High English department.

#### 40 41 42 *Literature and Justice*

43 The Glennview High School course catalog offers the following description of  
44 the Literature and Justice course:

45  
46 In this course students will examine the question, "How do we determine what  
47 is just and unjust in the world in which we live?" Topics will include prison pol-  
48 icy, juvenile justice, issues of poverty such as homelessness and hunger, and ille-  
49 gal immigration...Books read and discussed may include *Nickel and Dimed*, *Living*  
50 *at the Edge of the World*, *New Jack*, *There Are No Children Here*, and *Coyotes*. (Glenn-  
51 view 2007)

52  
53  
54 <sup>1</sup>A pseudonym.

55 <sup>2</sup>Name of publication withheld to protect identity of Glennview.

1 As is evident in the course description above, Literature and Justice includes  
 2 units on criminal justice, homelessness, immigration, domestic poverty and  
 3 global poverty. The Literature and Justice instructor, Nancy Allington,<sup>3</sup> explains  
 4 that, in addition to her academic goals for her students, she aspires to motivate  
 5 her students “to take action in their lives, whether it’s some service or donating  
 6 time or donating money or standing up for injustice, whether it’s personal injus-  
 7 tice or a collective injustice.” A syllabus for the Literature and Justice course can  
 8 be found on-line as Appendix C at [http://scottseider.blogspot.com/over-](http://scottseider.blogspot.com/overwhelmed.doc)  
 9 [whelmed.doc](http://scottseider.blogspot.com/overwhelmed.doc).

10 This paper focuses on students’ shifts in attitude towards issues of global pov-  
 11 erty and humanitarian aid; as a result, the primary unit of the Literature and  
 12 Justice course upon which this paper focuses is the unit on World Hunger and  
 13 Global Poverty. However, it is important to acknowledge that the Glennview  
 14 seniors described in this study were learning about issues of international hun-  
 15 ger and poverty in the context of a course in which they *also* learned about  
 16 significant domestic challenges such as homelessness and illegal immigration.  
 17 Such a context is potentially quite different—and could lead to students experi-  
 18 encing different shifts in attitude—than an academic course focused *exclusively*  
 19 on international social issues.<sup>4</sup>

#### 20 21 *World Hunger and Global Poverty Unit*

22  
23 As noted above, one unit of Literature and Justice focuses on issues of world  
 24 hunger and global poverty. Participating students took part in several activities  
 25 through which they learned more about the size and scope of global poverty as  
 26 well as steps currently being taken to address these challenges. Specifically,  
 27 Glennview seniors in Literature and Justice participated in two activities  
 28 designed by *World Hunger Year* in which they compared the infant mortality rates  
 29 of various countries around the world and then studied the “hunger profiles”  
 30 of several different nations contending with hunger problems. Students also  
 31 watched and discussed a documentary entitled “40,000 A Day” in which *60*  
 32 *Minutes* correspondent Mike Wallace visits Tanzania and reports on the tremen-  
 33 dous poverty he encounters there. Through both the documentary film and  
 34 “hunger profiles,” students learned about different factors that contribute to  
 35 global hunger and poverty. Students also learned about efforts to combat world  
 36 hunger through a guided exploration of the website of an innovative hunger  
 37 relief organization called Heifer International. Finally, students read and dis-  
 38 cussed several ethical dilemmas developed by philosopher Peter Unger (1996)  
 39 that pushed them to articulate their beliefs about the responsibility of affluent  
 40 citizens for those struggling with hunger and poverty abroad.

41 In addition to participating in these in-class activities, students also completed  
 42 the following readings over the course of the World Hunger and Global Poverty  
 43 unit.

44  
45 “The Aid Debate: Helping Hand or Hardly Helping” by Michael Weinstein  
 46 (2002)

47  
48 “Harvard Economist Urges Aid for Poor” by Jenna Russell (2002)

49  
50 “World Needs to Pay More Attention to Poor Nations” by Muhammad Ali  
 51 (2001)

52  
53  
54 <sup>3</sup>A pseudonym.

55 <sup>4</sup>Many thanks to an anonymous ISP referee for emphasizing this important point about curricular context.

1  “The Singer Solution to World Poverty” by Peter Singer (1999)

2  
3  “Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor” by Garrett Hardin (1974)

4  
5  “The Virtue of Selfishness” by Ayn Rand (1961)

6  
7 As is evident from the list above, the readings that accompanied the World  
8 Hunger and Global Poverty unit represented a diverse set of viewpoints penned  
9 by philosophers, economists, journalists and even a champion athlete. Singer,  
10 Ali and Russell argue for increased humanitarian aid to combat world hunger  
11 and poverty while Hardin, Rand and Weinstein argue that such aid can be coun-  
12 terproductive.  
13

#### 14 *Sample/Participants*

15  
16 This study’s sample consisted of 83 Glennview High seniors: 40 in the treatment  
17 group and 43 in the control group. The 40 students in the treatment group  
18 were the Glennview High seniors enrolled in Literature and Justice for the fall  
19 semester of the 2006–07 school year. The 43 students in the control group were  
20 the Glennview High seniors who also elected to participate in Literature and  
21 Justice but were randomly assigned to take the course during the spring semes-  
22 ter of the 2006–07 school year. During the fall semester, these 43 members of  
23 the control group were enrolled in three other senior English courses: Human-  
24 ities, African-American Literature and Creative Writing.


25 The students in the treatment and control groups were highly similar in  
26 terms of gender, race, religion, class status and academic performance. Specifi-  
27 cally, the treatment group was composed of 21 males and 19 females while  
28 the control group was composed of 23 males and 20 females. All 40 members  
29 of the treatment group identified as white while the control group included  
30 one student who identified as African-American and two students who identi-  
31 fied as Lebanese-American. In both the treatment and control groups, there  
32 were two students who identified as “upper class” while the rest identified as  
33 either “middle class” or “upper middle class.” Finally, 25 members of the  
34 treatment group and 26 members of the control group identified as Catholic,  
35 with the rest of the students in each group identifying as Protestant, Jewish,  
36 Muslim and unaffiliated in similar proportions. All of these demographics are  
37 representative of Glennview High School as well as the larger community of  
38 Glennview.

39 All 83 students in the study filled out initial and follow-up surveys. Addition-  
40 ally, I selected a “purposeful” sub-set of 21 students—10 from the treatment  
41 group and 11 from the control group—to participate in interviews at the begin-  
42 ning and conclusion of the fall semester (Maxwell 1996). In selecting these 21  
43 students, I strove to construct an interview pool in which the two groups were  
44 highly similar to one another as well as representative of the larger sample in  
45 terms of gender, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation and class status (Maykut and  
46 Morehouse 1994). More detailed information about this study’s sample can be  
47 found on-line as Appendix D at [http://!\[\]\(8bba887393ca45b761e5cb49e755e762\_img.jpg\)tseider.googlepages.com/over-](http://tseider.googlepages.com/overwhelmed.doc)  
48 [whelmed.doc](http://tseider.googlepages.com/overwhelmed.doc).  
49


#### 50 *Data Collection*

51  
52 I surveyed all 83 Glennview High School seniors participating in this study at  
53 the start of the fall semester in mid-September and again at the conclusion of  
54 the fall semester in late January. The survey consisted of demographic ques-  
55 tions as well as questions intended to ascertain students’ attitudes on the



1 various social issues covered in the Literature and Justice curriculum: criminal  
2 justice, homelessness, domestic poverty, humanitarian aid and immigration. Each  
3 of these topics constituted one section of the survey. The survey also included  
4 sections on environmental and educational issues in order to consider the abil-  
5 ity of Literature and Justice to influence students' beliefs about issues not  
6 explicitly covered in the course. Finally, the survey tool included an eighth  
7 section in which students responded to more general prompts about their  
8 personal values. Each of the survey items utilized Likert scales in which a "1"  
9 represents strong disagreement with the given statement and a "7" represents  
10 strong agreement with the given statement. The survey items themselves were  
11 adapted from items on more than 15 existing surveys including the American  
12 Values Survey (Center for American Values, 2006); World Values Survey Ques-  
13 nnaire (Institute for Social Research 1999); Americans on Foreign Aid and  
14 Hunger [Program on International and Policy Attitudes (PIPA) 2001]; and  
15 International IEA Civic Education Study (IEA 1999). A copy of the survey is  
16 available on-line at <http://scottseider.googlepages.com/overwhelmed.doc> as  
17 Appendix E.

18 This paper focuses on students' shifts in attitude about humanitarian aid.  
19 (c.f. see Seider 2008a,b for analyses of Glennview seniors' shifts in attitude on  
20 the issues of homelessness and education, the other two social issues for which  
21 significant findings emerged). The "Humanitarian Aid" section of the survey  
22 consisted of six survey items adapted from items on three earlier surveys devel-  
23 oped by the PIPA (2001, 2005) and the Institute for Social Research (1999)  
24 that focus on issues of global poverty and humanitarian aid. To consider the  
25 core underlying construct tapped by these items, I conducted a Principal Com-  
26 ponents Analysis (PCA) on this study's pre-treatment survey data regarding  
27 humanitarian aid. The PCA indicated that one key construct appeared to be  
28 measured by these items, the first component accounting for 62% of the stan-  
29 dardized units of variance (eigenvalue = 3.08). Because the loadings for each  
30 factor were nearly identical across items, I determined composite scores for  
31 this study's participants by summing their responses on the "Humanitarian  
32 Aid" items included in the PCA and dividing this total by the number of  
33 items. The composite showed good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's  
34  $\alpha = 0.84$ ).

35 I also selected a diverse group of 21 students from the treatment and con-  
36 trol groups to participate in in-depth interviews. I interviewed each student  
37 twice in order to allow for "prolonged engagement" with each subject (May-  
38 kut and Morehouse 1994). The first interview took place at the start of the  
39 fall semester in mid-September, and the second interview took place at the  
40 conclusion of the Fall semester in late January. Each interview lasted approxi-  
41 mately one hour. For both interviews, the protocol was sufficiently structured  
42 to ensure that questions posed to the students in the sample were open-  
43 ended, clear, and not overly complex (Maykut and Morehouse 1994).  
44 However, the protocol also allowed the flexibility to pose what Patton (1990)  
45 refers to as probes or follow-up questions. A copy of the interview protocol  
46 can be found on-line as Appendix F at [http://scottseider.googlepages.com/](http://scottseider.googlepages.com/overwhelmed.doc)  
47 verwhelmed.doc.

48 I also collected copies of all written assignments completed by students partici-  
49 pating in the fall semester Literature and Justice course and conducted observa-  
50 tions of three of the four senior English courses offered at Glennview High  
51 School during the fall semester. I conducted five observations of the Creative  
52 Writing class, seven observations of the Humanities class, and thirteen observa-  
53 tions of the Literature and Justice class. I was unable to conduct observations of  
54 the African-American Literature course because the course's instructor declined  
55 my request to observe the class in session.

### Quantitative Data Analysis

I began my quantitative analysis by fitting a taxonomy of multiple regression models to consider the impact of the treatment (Literature and Justice) upon Glennview seniors' beliefs about global poverty and humanitarian aid. Specifically, I first specified a baseline covariate model to control for any confounding effects of students' gender (GENDER), religiosity (RELIGIOUS), class status (CLASS), academic achievement (GRADES), participation in community service as a high school student (HICOMSER), and parents' participation in community service (PARCOMSER). Given the statistically null findings for my control variables on the outcome, I removed them for parsimony in subsequent models. I then specified a "residual change" model by adding pre-treatment scores (PREATTITUDE) as a predictor, along with the treatment variable (LITANDJUS). It is a model of "change" in that the treatment variable (LITANDJUS) is predicting only outcome variance not accounted for by the pre-test (PREATTITUDE). I determined the effect size of the treatment variable (LITANDJUS) using Cohen's  $d$ .<sup>5</sup> The taxonomies of fitted models for the humanitarian aid composite and two of the humanitarian aid survey items can be found in Appendix B and are discussed in detail in this paper's *Results*.

### Qualitative Data Analysis

The transcripts from all 21 interviews with Glennview High seniors were coded using etic and emic codes drawn from the scholarship on adolescent development, emerging adulthood, civic engagement and social justice education. The codebook for this study can also be found online as Appendix G at <http://www.scottseider.googlepages.com/overwhelmed>. I checked the reliability of my codebook and coding process by enlisting a colleague from the Harvard Graduate School of Education trained in qualitative methods to code 20% of the student interviews. In comparing our inter-rater reliability, we achieved a Cohen's Kappa (unweighted) of 0.85, which is considered to be a "very good" strength of agreement (Fleiss 1981).

Upon completing the coding and categorizing of the transcribed interviews, I constructed matrices that juxtaposed the themes and patterns emerging from the data with the relevant scholarship (Miles and Huberman 1994). I also developed narrative profiles for all 21 students who participated in qualitative interviews, in which I sought to consider the experiences of each student in the context of the study's quantitative findings (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Similar to the analysis of student interviews, relevant pieces of student work and field notes from classroom observations were coded using etic and emic codes and then grouped into categories in order to allow patterns, themes, and analytic questions to emerge (Maxwell 1996). I then constructed matrices that juxtaposed the themes and patterns emerging from the student work and field notes to prior research on identity development and social justice education.

## Results

An analysis of the Glennview seniors' post-treatment attitudes towards humanitarian aid revealed that the students enrolled in Literature and Justice experienced statistically significant *declines* over the course of the semester in their support for humanitarian aid. I report below on the two survey items about humanitarian aid which revealed statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) relationships

<sup>5</sup>Cohen's  $d = (\text{Mean}_{\text{treatment}} - \text{Mean}_{\text{control}}) / \text{Std Dev}_{\text{control}}$

1 between the treatment (Literature and Justice) and students' post-semester atti-  
2 tudes. I also report below on students' shifts in attitude on the composite of the  
3 humanitarian aid survey items. The summary statistics for these survey items and  
4 composite can be found in Appendix A. The taxonomies of fitted models for all  
5 three items can be found in Appendix B. Following my presentation of the findings  
6 for these three items, I draw upon this study's qualitative data—student inter-  
7 views, classroom observations and student work—to interpret these quantitative  
8 findings.

#### 10 *Focus of U.S. Aid*

11  
12 One “Humanitarian Aid” survey item offered students the following prompt:  
13 “We should only send aid to the parts of the world where the United States has  
14 military or economic interests.” As can be seen in the summary statistics  
15 reported in Appendix A, the control group described little change over the  
16 course of the semester in their beliefs about the appropriate recipients of U.S.  
17 foreign aid. Specifically, the students in the control group began and concluded  
18 the semester with a mean attitude on this survey item that fell in between  
19 “Somewhat Disagree” and “Neutral.” In contrast, the students enrolled in Liter-  
20 ature and Justice became more convinced over the course of the semester that  
21 the United States should limit its foreign aid to economic and military allies.  
22 Specifically, the Literature and Justice students began the semester with a mean  
23 attitude on this survey item that fell between “Somewhat Disagree” and “Neu-  
24 tral” and concluded the semester with a mean attitude that fell between “Neu-  
25 tral” and “Somewhat Agree.”

26 Conducting Ordinary Least Squares Regression on the outcome variable (POST-  
27 ATTITUDE) against participation in Literature and Justice (and controlling for  
28 PREATTITUDE) revealed a statistically significant difference between the treat-  
29 ment and control groups on this survey item ( $\beta_{\text{treatment}} = 0.81, p = .021$ ). Using  
30 Cohen's *d*, I then determined a small-to-medium effect size of 0.47 (Cohen 1988).  
31 Since this study involved random assignment, it is highly likely that these differ-  
32 ences between the treatment and control groups can be attributed to the effects of  
33 the treatment. In short then, over the course of the fall semester, the students in  
34 Literature and Justice strengthened their belief that the United States should  
35 focus its foreign aid efforts on military and economic allies rather than countries  
36 in need of humanitarian support.

#### 38 *Reducing World Hunger and Poverty*

39  
40 A second “Humanitarian Aid” survey item asked students to state their level of  
41 agreement or disagreement with the following prompt: “Some people say it is  
42 unrealistic to try to significantly reduce world hunger.” Again, as made evident  
43 by the summary statistics in Appendix A, the control group demonstrated little  
44 change over the course of the semester in their beliefs about the feasibility of  
45 combating world hunger. Specifically, the students in the control group both  
46 began and concluded the semester with a mean attitude on this survey item that  
47 fell in between “Somewhat Disagree” and “Neutral.” The Glennview seniors  
48 enrolled in Literature and Justice, however, became more doubtful over the  
49 course of the semester about the feasibility of reducing world hunger. Specifi-  
50 cally, the mean attitude of Literature and Justice participants shifted from in  
51 between “Somewhat Disagree” and “Neutral” to one that was in between “Neu-  
52 tral” and “Somewhat Agree.”

53 Conducting OLS regression on the outcome variable (POSTATTITUDE)  
54 against participation in Literature and Justice (and controlling for PREATTI-  
55 TUDE) revealed there to be a statistically significant difference between the



1 Literature and Justice students and control group students on this survey item  
2 ( $\beta_{\text{treatment}} = 0.90, p = .01$ ) as well as a medium effect size of 0.54 (Cohen 1988).  
3 In short, then, the Literature and Justice students demonstrated a heightened  
4 belief at the end of the semester that combating world hunger is an unrealistic  
5 aspiration while the control group students demonstrated a small shift in the  
6 opposite direction.

#### 7 8 9 *The Humanitarian Aid Composite*

10 The shifts in attitude of Glennview seniors on the Humanitarian Aid composite  
11 also revealed a statistically significant *negative* relationship between the treatment  
12 (LITANDJUS) and students' post-semester attitudes about humanitarian aid  
13 (POSTATTITUDE). However, fitting multiple regression models to the Humanitarian  
14 Aid composite additionally revealed an interaction between the treatment  
15 (LITANDJUS) and Glennview seniors' pre-treatment attitudes towards humani-  
16 tarian aid (PREATTITUDE).

17 As noted in the summary statistics in Appendix A, the Glennview seniors in  
18 this study's control group described a small decrease of 0.14 units on the  
19 Humanitarian Aid composite while the Glennview seniors in Literature and  
20 Justice described a more substantial decrease of 0.4 units. In other words, the  
21 decrease in support for humanitarian aid demonstrated by Literature and  
22 Justice participants was almost four times that of the students in the control  
23 group.

24 Conducting Ordinary Least Squares regression on the outcome variable (POS-  
25 TATTITUDE) against participation in Literature and Justice (and controlling for  
26 PREATTITUDE) revealed there to be a statistically significant difference  
27 between the Literature and Justice students and control group students  
28 ( $\beta_{\text{treatment}} = -1.85, p = .03$ ). In other words, Literature and Justice students  
29 described a significant decline in their support for humanitarian aid over the  
30 course of the semester in comparison to their peers in the control group. How-  
31 ever, the presence of an interaction variable (LITANDJUSxPREATTITUDE) in  
32 the final fitted model for the Humanitarian Aid composite provided additional  
33 insight into the impact of the treatment (Literature and Justice) upon Glenn-  
34 view seniors' attitudes towards humanitarian aid.

35 An analysis of this interaction variable revealed that Glennview seniors who  
36 entered Literature and Justice with high levels of support for humanitarian aid  
37 were impacted differently by the course than participants who entered with low  
38 levels of support for humanitarian aid. Specifically, the beliefs of Literature and  
39 Justice participants who began the semester highly supportive of humanitarian  
40 aid (mean attitude = 5.6 units, 75th percentile for the sample) did not seem to  
41 be impacted by the Literature and Justice course. These students demonstrated  
42 the same shifts in attitude towards humanitarian aid over the course of the  
43 semester as their classmates in the control group who expressed strong initial  
44 support for humanitarian aid. Both groups showed a mean decrease of 0.55  
45 units over the course of the semester in their support for humanitarian aid.  
46 In contrast, the Glennview seniors who began Literature and Justice with a low level  
47 of support for humanitarian aid (mean attitude = 4.0 units, 25th percentile for  
48 the sample) demonstrated a deeper decline in their support for humanitarian  
49 aid than did their counterparts in the control group. Specifically, the Glennview  
50 seniors in Literature and Justice who expressed low initial support for humani-  
51 tarian aid demonstrated a mean decrease of 1.38 units in their support for  
52 humanitarian aid while their counterparts in the control group demonstrated a  
53 mean decrease of only 0.85 units.

54 In short, an analysis of the fitted model for the Humanitarian Aid composite  
55 suggests that Literature and Justice had a stronger (negative) impact upon

1 Glennview seniors who began the course with low levels of support for humani-  
2 tarian aid than upon the Glennview seniors who began with high levels of sup-  
3 port for humanitarian aid. This additional insight into the impact of Literature  
4 and Justice will be raised in the *Discussion* that follows.

5  
6  
7 *An Eye Opening Experience*

8 Recall that a sub-set of 21 students—10 from Literature and Justice and 11 from  
9 the control group—participated in in-depth interviews during the opening week  
10 of the school year and then again at the conclusion of the fall semester. In their  
11 follow-up interviews, two Literature and Justice students explicitly referenced  
12 issues of hunger and poverty. Kathryn explained that she came away from the  
13 course “just knowing how much hunger and poverty is out there.” Likewise,  
14 Michelle explained that Literature and Justice impacted her conception of  
15 “maybe like poverty in Africa, and I guess I just didn’t realize the statistics...I  
16 guess I always knew, but I didn’t realize it was so bad.”

17 Five other Literature and Justice students credited the course with opening  
18 their eyes to previously unconsidered issues as well. For example, Dan offered  
19 the following explanation of the course’s impact upon him:

21 Now I realize that things are different outside of America...There’s people living  
22 different ways and in different situations who don’t have these opportunities that  
23 we have. I don’t know. It just opened my eyes...Maybe the other seniors, they  
24 don’t realize like what’s going on in these other countries and in America.  
25 I think they’re like missing out on that.

26  
27 In these words, Dan described the way in which the Literature and Justice  
28 course heightened his awareness of the challenges facing people in countries  
29 less affluent than the United States. Other students echoed Dan’s perspective as  
30 well. Jonny explained that, “The class itself has just opened my eyes to like how  
31 the world is different than what I maybe previously thought.” Andrew added  
32 that the class “kind of put things on the radar that like I never even thought  
33 about.” Finally, Annie explained that, “There are some kids who live in the bub-  
34 ble of Glennview and have no idea what’s going on in the world. And if they  
35 took Lit and Justice, it would have taught them a lot.”

36 In their follow-up interviews, Literature and Justice participants also described  
37 specific lessons the course had taught them about world hunger and global pov-  
38 erty. Richie explained that, “We read about Tanzania, and we watched a video  
39 about Tanzania. And they have a problem over there with their hospitals. I  
40 didn’t know that.” Referencing this same documentary, Brendan recalled that,  
41 “The kids were so skinny because they don’t have anything to eat,” and Dan  
42 added that, “They showed these graphics with these kids like starving on the  
43 streets. I don’t know. The class just showed that.” In describing another of the  
44 activities from the World Hunger and Global Poverty unit, Annie explained,  
45 “We looked at causes of world hunger—like countries that are entirely in pov-  
46 erty and stuff. Like each country had its own story, kind of. We looked at little  
47 profiles of different places, and I thought it was really interesting.” Finally,  
48 Frank added that, “We were talking about child mortality rates...It’s like one in  
49 five children die somewhere in Haiti or Angola, I think it was, versus like some-  
50 thing like one or two, three, maybe seven out of a thousand that die here.” In  
51 these words, one can see that Literature and Justice served as an eye-opening  
52 experience for the majority of its participants. To borrow phrases from two of  
53 the Literature and Justice students, the course put some harsh realities “on the  
54 radar screen” that most of the young adults living “in the Glennview bubble”  
55 had never previously considered.

*Knowledge can be Overwhelming*

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In their follow-up interviews, five Literature and Justice participants described themselves as feeling overwhelmed by the size and scope of global poverty. For example, Brendan explained that, “Those hungry people [we learned about]—you feel bad for them, but there’s not a whole lot you can do. You can donate your money. But it’s going to go on.” Here, Brendan expresses empathy for the plight of the individuals about whom he has learned but also describes their suffering as inevitable.

Four other Literature and Justice participants expressed similar viewpoints. In his follow-up interview, Dan offered the following perspective on global inequities: “It’s just the way life is, I guess. Like some people are just more fortunate than others. But I don’t know. Sometimes there’s something you can do; sometimes there isn’t.” In these words, Dan expressed his belief that some people in the world face misfortune about which nothing can be done. Another student, Frank, offered a nearly identical perspective with his explanation that, “A lot of times the way things are is unjust. And people sort of have to come to terms with things that some people will be better off than others. And that’s sort of the way it’s always been.” In their comments, neither Dan nor Frank sought to defend the inequity that exists in the world nor to blame those less fortunate countries for their challenges. However, both expressed the viewpoint that little can be done in the face of such enormous challenges.

Two other students—Liza and Kathryn—expressed similar sentiments in their interviews. Liza described the problem of world hunger as “a huge issue” but also classifies world hunger as “something that’s uncontrollable.” She explained that, “I think we can do as much as we can to try to donate money and give money, but I think there never will be enough money to give to all these people.” Likewise, Kathryn declared that the United States “should be helping other countries” but also expressed her belief that such efforts “could [only] help a little bit.” In other words, these students, too, described themselves as overwhelmed by the size and scope of the challenges in the world to which they have been exposed.

**Discussion**

This study’s primary finding was that Literature and Justice had the effect of decreasing its participants’ support for directing humanitarian aid to the developing world. Such an outcome was unexpected for a course that details the challenges faced by individuals and populations in developing countries and whose instructor describes one of her primary objectives for the course as encouraging students “to take action in their lives...[by] standing up for injustice.” However, I would argue that a number of this study’s key findings shed light upon the surprising impact of Literature and Justice. In this *Discussion*, I offer what amounts to a three-part argument based upon this study’s quantitative and qualitative results: 1) that Literature and Justice raised Glennview students’ awareness of previously unconsidered (or little considered) issues of world hunger and poverty; 2) that many of the Glennview students participating in Literature and Justice became overwhelmed by the size and scope of these social problems; and 3) that Glennview students reacted to feeling overwhelmed by deciding that such problems are intractable and unsolvable. In the paragraphs that follow, I develop each of these points in greater detail and draw upon scholarship from political science, sociology and psychology that speak directly to these contentions.

First, this study’s qualitative interviews suggest that the majority of Glennview seniors in Literature and Justice had not previously encountered the daunting

1 statistics about world hunger and global poverty raised by the course's curricu-  
2 lum. As a result, seven of the 10 Literature and Justice students who participated  
3 in qualitative interviews described the course as an eye-opening experience. This  
4 finding is underscored by Kenny's (2000) characterization of an affluent suburb  
5 such as Glennview as "an insular community that doesn't see too far beyond its  
6 present conditions and boundaries" (p5). Putnam (2000) concurs that suburban  
7 life reinforces a culture of "atomized isolation" (p210). Likewise, Lasch (1995)  
8 has described affluent suburban communities as encouraging their inhabitants  
9 to limit "their acknowledgement of civic obligations... [to] their own immediate  
10 neighborhood" (p47). For most of the Glennview seniors in Literature and  
11 Justice, then, the challenges faced by populations in the developing world were  
12 simply not on their radar screens when they stepped into Literature and Justice  
13 on the first day of school.

14 I also contend that, in learning about world hunger and poverty, Glennview  
15 students became overwhelmed by the size and scope of these social problems  
16 and convinced of their intractability. These contentions are supported by the  
17 quantitative finding that Glennview seniors in Literature and Justice became *more*  
18 doubtful over the course of the semester (and in comparison to the control  
19 group) about the feasibility of combating world hunger. These contentions are  
20 also supported by the qualitative finding that five Literature and Justice partici-  
21 pants described themselves in follow-up interviews as feeling like "there's not a  
22 whole lot you can do" to address these "huge issues." While such a reaction was  
23 not anticipated at the outset of this study, both White (1981) and Goodman  
24 (2000a) have reported that individuals deluged with information about human  
25 suffering can become "immobilized" by their own "feelings of powerlessness"  
26 (Goodman 2000a: 150). In other words, when individuals feel incapable of allevi-  
27 ating another's suffering, one response is simply to give up altogether (Bandura  
28 1977, 1982). In Goodman (2000a) words, "People may feel it is useless to try to  
29 change things or that there is little they can do" (p164). Recall that several of  
30 the Literature and Justice participants expressed precisely this sentiment in their  
31 follow-up interviews, and in fact such feelings of inefficacy may be one of the pri-  
32 mary challenges facing educators committed to raising awareness of issues such  
33 as global poverty.

34 Goodman (2000a) recommends that educators reduce students' feelings of  
35 inefficacy by offering concrete actions students can take to address the injusti-  
36 ces they are studying. She suggests providing students with the opportunity  
37 to conduct letter-writing campaigns, participate in boycotts, sign petitions, or  
38 perform volunteer work. Another suggestion involves assigning students to  
39 "read or research people from their dominant social group who have worked  
40 for social justice" (Goodman 2000b, p87). Such opportunities hold the poten-  
41 tial to offer students a sense of success and also to combat the feelings of  
42 inefficacy described by Literature and Justice participants earlier in this  
43 paper.

44 Offering different *types* of ways in which students can combat injustice is cru-  
45 cial for accommodating the range of students within a particular class in terms  
46 of their complex thinking skills. Cognitive scientists such as Fischer and Bidell  
47 (1998) have reported that adolescents and emerging adults go through a series  
48 of steps in which they increase their ability to think abstractly and understand  
49 complex representational systems. Because young people progress through these  
50 mini-stages at different rates, there will be students in every instructor's course  
51 who fully understand the role that writing a letter to a congressman can play in  
52 combating global poverty as well as students for whom such an act is too abstract  
53 to feel meaningful. For the latter type of student, the experience of donating  
54 food to the developing world through an organization such as Heifer Interna-  
55 tional may be far more powerful.

1 Finally, two studies on the role of emotionality and social responsibility  
2 seem to offer additional insight into the reaction of Literature and Justice  
3 participants. Haste (2004) reported that anger can be an important tool in  
4 developing a commitment to social justice. In other words, if an individual  
5 becomes angry about a social issue such as global poverty, he or she may be  
6 motivated to work for change on this issue. Rahn and Hirshorn (1999) cor-  
7 roborated this finding with a study that suggested both positive emotions such  
8 as hopefulness *and* negative emotions such as anger can strengthen an individ-  
9 ual's commitment to social action. However, when Rahn and Hirshorn (1999)  
10 focused on the role of efficacy in their study, they discovered that positive  
11 emotions could mobilize individuals with *either* a high or low sense of political  
12 efficacy; in contrast, negative emotions such as outrage, anger or sadness only  
13 mobilized those individuals who already possessed high levels of political effi-  
14 cacy. For those individuals with low levels of political efficacy, experiencing  
15 negative emotions actually served to weaken their commitment to the particu-  
16 lar issue at hand. In light of this finding, Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Ste-  
17 phens (2003) have observed that educators passionate about a particular social  
18 justice issue may be surprised to find that the same statistics, stories and  
19 lessons that inspire them to action do not provoke a similar response in their  
20 students.

21 Such a scenario may well have played out in the Literature and Justice  
22 course. The course's instructor, Mrs. Allington, expected her students to  
23 respond to the course's unit on world hunger and global poverty with indigna-  
24 tion and outrage. However, unless these students conceived of themselves as  
25 politically efficacious, Rahn and Hirshorn's (1999) work suggests that the  
26 opposite reaction was far more likely. And that, of course, is precisely what  
27 occurred. The majority of Literature and Justice participants responded to the  
28 course's content on world hunger and global poverty by becoming over-  
29 whelmed at the prospect of trying to combat such problems and convinced of  
30 their intractability.

31 Ideally, a construct measuring students' levels of political efficacy would have  
32 been included in the survey that Glennview seniors completed in early Septem-  
33 ber and late January. Unfortunately, no such construct was included in this  
34 study's survey design, in part because the reaction of Glennview seniors to learn-  
35 ing about world hunger and global poverty was neither expected nor anticipated  
36 at the outset of this study. Thus, additional research will be necessary to investi-  
37 gate the hypothesis put forth here that students' low levels of efficacy contrib-  
38 uted to their overwhelmed reaction to learning about world hunger and global  
39 poverty. That said, this claim does seem to receive support from the finding  
40 reported earlier that Literature and Justice had a more powerful (and negative)  
41 impact upon the Glennview seniors who demonstrated low initial support for  
42 humanitarian aid than upon the Glennview seniors who demonstrated high  
43 initial support for humanitarian aid. It would seem that, similar to Rahn and  
44 Hirshorn's (1999) findings regarding efficacy, the Glennview seniors who dem-  
45 onstrated low levels of support for humanitarian aid at the outset of Literature  
46 and Justice were more prone to become overwhelmed by the size and scope of  
47 global poverty than were their classmates who began Literature and Justice with  
48 a more favorable attitude towards humanitarian aid. Such a claim cannot be  
49 made conclusively from this study but seems unquestionably worthy of further  
50 research.

### 52 Conclusion

54 While additional research is necessary to confirm this study's findings, there do  
55 seem to be some important implications here for educators committed to raising



1 their students' consciousness about inequity and suffering across the globe. Spe-  
 2 cifically, the synthesis of this study's findings with literature from psychology,  
 3 education and political science reveals the importance of designing curricula  
 4 that offer students hope about the potential for alleviating world hunger and  
 5 global poverty as well as opportunities to play a concrete role in addressing these  
 6 issues. Such findings do not mean that students should be shielded from the  
 7 harsh inequities faced by populations both in the United States and abroad.  
 8 However, in courses seeking to educate young adults about social justice issues  
 9 such as world hunger and global poverty, it is all too easy to deluge students  
 10 with statistics, stories and sermons about all that is wrong with the current distri-  
 11 bution of wealth, health and resources across the globe. What I argue in this  
 12 paper is that it is crucial to students' development that they experience opti-  
 13 mism, hope and inspiration in learning about world hunger and poverty as well.  
 14 These young men and women need help envisioning what solutions to these  
 15 problems look like as well as how they can be a part of such solutions.

16 Helen Keller once wrote that, "The world is moved along, not only by the  
 17 mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each  
 18 honest worker" (Hubbard 2002: 10–11). I believe that deepening privileged  
 19 young adults' commitment to combating world hunger and poverty across the  
 20 globe must come about through the aggregate tiny pushes of many committed  
 21 educators at both the secondary and university levels. With this study, I have  
 22 sought to provide some important insights to these educators about how (and  
 23 how not) to push.

### Appendix A: Summary Statistics for Mean Attitudes on Humanitarian Aid

TABLE A1. Summary Statistics for Mean Attitudes of Literature and Justice Students on Humanitarian Aid Composite and Survey Items ( $n = 40$ )

	<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>		
	<i>Initial M (SD)</i>	<i>Follow-up M (SD)</i>	<i>Change</i>
Focus on military or economic interests	3.23 (1.56)	4.30 (1.62)	1.07
Reducing world hunger is unrealistic	3.48 (1.48)	4.18 (1.72)	0.70
Humanitarian aid composite	4.60 (1.03)	4.20 (1.26)	-0.40

TABLE A2. Summary Statistics for Mean Attitudes of Control Group Students on Humanitarian Aid Composite and Survey Items ( $n = 40$ )

	<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>		
	<i>Initial M (SD)</i>	<i>Follow-up M (SD)</i>	<i>Change</i>
Focus on military or economic interests	3.58 (2.05)	3.63 (1.95)	0.05
Reducing world hunger is unrealistic	3.58 (1.75)	3.32 (1.74)	-0.26
Humanitarian aid composite	4.75 (1.40)	4.61 (1.27)	-0.14

## Appendix B: Taxonomy of Regression Models Regarding Issues of Humanitarian Aid

TABLE B1. Taxonomy of Regression Models Describing the Relationship Between a Students' Post-Semester Beliefs About Focusing American Foreign Aid on Military and Economic Allies and Participation in Literature and Justice ( $n = 83$ )

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3*	Model 4
Intercept	5.93***	2.70***	3.86***	3.83**
GENDER	-0.33	-0.43		
CLASS	-0.52			
RELIGIOUS	0.003			
GRADES	0.24			
HICOMSER	0.25			
PARCOMSER	0.43			
LITANDJUS			0.81*	0.79
PREATTTITUDE		0.37***	0.39***	0.40
LITANDJUS × PREATTTITUDE				-0.005

~.10, \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

TABLE B2. Taxonomy of Regression Models Describing the Relationship Between a Students' Post-Semester Beliefs About the Challenge of Reducing World Hunger and Poverty and Participation in Literature and Justice ( $n = 83$ )

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3*	Model 4
Intercept	3.89*	2.54**	3.33***	2.94*
GENDER	-0.94*	-0.28		
CLASS	-0.28			
RELIGIOUS	0.25			
GRADES	0.10			
HICOMSER	0.06			
PARCOMSER	0.09			
LITANDJUS			0.90**	0.66
PREATTTITUDE		0.45***	0.50***	0.61~
LITANDJUS × PREATTTITUDE				-0.07

~ $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

TABLE B3. Taxonomy of Regression Models Describing the Relationship Between a Students' Post-Semester Beliefs on the Humanitarian Aid Composite and Participation in Literature and Justice ( $n = 83$ )

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4*
Intercept	3.40**	1.37**	0.94~	2.08***
GENDER	-0.53~			
CLASS	0.13			
RELIGIOUS	0.11			
GRADES	0.10			
HICOMSER	0.02			
PARCOMSER	0.05			
LITANDJUS			-0.31	-1.85*
PREATTTITUDE		0.65***	0.64***	0.53***
LITANDJUS × PREATTTITUDE				0.33~

~ $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## Coding for Predictor Variables

Variable	"0"	"1"	"2"	"3"
GENDER	Male	Female		
CLASS	Middle Class	Upper Class		
RELIGIOUS	Not Religious	Somewhat Religious	Religious	Very Religious
GRADES	D's and F's	C's	B's	A's and B's
HICOMSER	No	Yes		
PARCOMSER	No	Yes		
LITANDJUS	Control	Treatment		

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5	<b>Au: Murphy, 2000 has been changed to Murphy 2001 so that this citation matches the list.</b>	
6	<b>Au: Singer (1999) not found in the list. Please provide publication details.</b>	
7	<b>Au: Hardin (1974) not found in the list. Please provide publication details.</b>	
8	<b>Au: Rand (1961) not found in the list. Please provide publication details.</b>	
9	<b>Au: Institute for Social Research, 2002 has been changed to Institute for Social Research 1999 so that this citation matches the list.</b>	
10	<b>Au: Please provide footnote link to ‘~’ in the table body of Table B1.</b>	



11	Au: Chan and Treacy (1996) not cited. Please cite reference in text or delete from the list.	
12	Au: Please provide book title for Earth Institute at Columbia University (2007).	
13	Au: Please provide book title for Glennview (2007).	
14	Au: Lerner (1980) not cited. Please cite reference in text or delete from the list.	
15	Au: Please provide publisher location for Milanovic (1999).	
16	Au: Please provide book title for Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2007).	
17	Au: Please provide forename for authors in Strange and Leung (1999), and also this reference is not cited. Please cite reference in text or delete from the list.	
18	Au: Stuber (2006) not cited. Please cite reference in text or delete from the list.	
19	Au: Weiner (1980) not cited. Please cite reference in text or delete from the list.	

# Proof Correction Marks

Please correct and return your proofs using the proof correction marks below. For a more detailed look at using these marks please reference the most recent edition of The Chicago Manual of Style and visit them on the Web at: <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

<i>Instruction to typesetter</i>	<i>Textual mark</i>	<i>Marginal mark</i>
Leave unchanged	... under matter to remain	<u>stet</u>
Insert in text the matter indicated in the margin	^	^ followed by new matter
Delete	ƒ through single character, rule or underline or ƒ through all characters to be deleted	ƒ
Substitute character or substitute part of one or more word(s)	ƒ through letter or  —  through characters	new character ƒ or new characters ƒ
Change to italics	— under matter to be changed	<u>ital</u>
Change to capitals	≡≡≡ under matter to be changed	<u>Caps</u>
Change to small capitals	≡≡ under matter to be changed	<u>sc</u>
Change to bold type	~ under matter to be changed	<u>bf</u>
Change to bold italic	~ under matter to be changed	<u>bf+ital</u>
Change to lower case	ƒ	<u>lc</u>
Insert superscript	∨	∨ under character e.g. ∨
Insert subscript	^	^ over character e.g. ^
Insert full stop	⊙	⊙
Insert comma	↗	↗
Insert single quotation marks	↙ ↘	↙ ↘
Insert double quotation marks	↖ ↗	↖ ↗
Insert hyphen	=	=
Start new paragraph	¶	¶
Transpose	┌┐	┌┐
Close up	linking ○ characters	○
Insert or substitute space between characters or words	#	#
Reduce space between characters or words	⌒	⌒