
In Fall 2010, over 150 students signed up for 40 seats in my new course, Mathematics for a Just World. Clearly I struck a chord in the catalog description: “Do you want to change the world and make it a better place? Do you see mathematics as a collection of disconnected, arbitrary rules that you memorize for a test and then promptly forget? This course teaches quantitative literacy, critical thinking and problem solving skills in a socially relevant context. We use mathematics as a powerful analytic framework for understanding and developing realistic solutions to issues of social, political and economic injustice. At the end of this course, you should be able to answer for yourself the question: why do I have to know this?”

The course includes a service learning requirement, tutoring math at an after-school program. Topics covered include: the wealth gap; unemployment; cost-benefit analysis; the relationship between poverty and school achievement; racial profiling; and tax cuts. In this paper I share sample lesson plans, tips on integrating the service learning component, successes and challenges in teaching the course, and a list of resources for others to use. (Received August 01, 2011)