



# **The Illumination Project:** **A guide to creating an interactive theater program at your college or university**

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DIFFICULT DIALOGUES  
INITIATIVE

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Jeannie LaFrance  
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# Executive Summary

## THE ILLUMINATION PROJECT

Portland Community College's Illumination Project is an innovative nationally lauded social justice and campus climate program that addresses issues of oppression through interactive theater. As a year-long hybrid student leadership/academic program, the IP promotes meaningful community dialogue and problem solving regarding social inequalities. Students in the program learn about social justice issues and interactive theater and build skills as educators, actors, activists, and leaders with the goal to educate other students, faculty and staff on (and off) campus.

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Illumination Project's mission is to:

- Advance student leadership and civic engagement
- Create an inclusive campus climate at PCC
- Educate about diversity
- Promote respectful dialogue around controversial issues
- Involve large sections of the campus in problem-solving around issues of discrimination
- Help remove barriers to higher education for people of color, women, religious minorities, L/G/B/T/Q people, poor/working class people, immigrants, and other historically underrepresented communities.

## STUDENT EDUCATORS

Each year the Illumination Project Coordinator recruits, interviews, selects, and trains 20 Student Educators. Student Educators enter the program fall term and stay with the program for a full academic year. During the year Student Educators

study the effects that oppression has on society, individuals and on the PCC campus. Concurrently, Student Educators study social change theater and then write, produce and perform interactive plays based on their course work and their own personal experiences. Students also work in committees to create accompanying posters, programs, press releases and educational materials. The academic half of the IP is housed within the sociology department and Student Educators receive 12 tuition free sociology credits for their academic work and as campus event coordinators, peer educators, student leaders and facilitators.

## THE PLAY IS THE THING

Each year the Student Educators write six distinct plays addressing issues such as racism, immigration, classism, domestic and sexual violence, homophobia, and religious oppression. The play topics focus on how these issues impact students' educational experiences. The interactive nature of the IP performances provide a venue so that large sections of the PCC community can brainstorm solutions to the problems presented in the plays. The Illumination Project focuses on two topics each year—one topic for winter term performances and a different topic for spring.

The type of theater used in the Illumination Project is known as Forum Theater, a type of Theater of the Oppressed. Theater of the Oppressed was developed by Augusto Boal, a Brazilian theater activist. In Theater of the Oppressed, plays are performed once without interruption and then again, allowing audience members to enter the scene, take on a character, and alter the outcome of the scene.

Since its inception IP Student Educators have written 43 different plays.



## PERFORMANCES

The Illumination Project performs over 30 times each year educating approximately 2000 audience members on social justice issues. The majority of Illumination Project performance occur on each of the four main PCC campuses. We also perform at high schools and colleges and local, regional and national conferences.

Between 2001-09 the Illumination Project performed 240 times to over 14,000 audience members.

### Sample Student Audience Evaluations

95% of student audiences stated that the performances dealt with real problems or issues.

47% have seen racial prejudice on campus.

31% have had issues around race affect their ability to attend or succeed in school.

87% of student audience stated that they gained skills around intervening in oppressive situations.

92% of student audiences felt the performances contributed to making PCC a more inclusive campus.

## FACULTY INVOLVEMENT

Performances are scheduled to coincide with standard class times at PCC and the majority of our audiences consist of classes brought by instructors. Faculty representing 18 different departments (including Art, Psychology, Anthropology, ESOL/ENNL, History, Spanish, Nursing, ECE, Writing,

*"I found the Illumination Project uplifting because it made me realize others have been put in similar situations as myself, and it wasn't just happening to me because of something I did or said."*

**-PCC Student, Audience Member**



**Faculty member intervenes during performance on domestic violence**

English, and Philosophy) at PCC consistently bring classes to the IP performances. Each year approximately 25 PCC instructors bring over 50 different classes to Illumination Project performances.

### Sample Participating Faculty Evaluations:

100% stated that the IP performances generated class discussion and dialogue.

90% stated the IP performances helped their students' understand the experiences of people different than themselves.

97% stated the performances enhanced students' ability to recognize oppression in themselves and others

88% stated that the performances enhanced their curriculum.

100% appreciated the IP format as an educational tool.

## RESOURCES FOR INSTRUCTORS

### Curriculum and Website

To ensure the Illumination Project educational strategies are successful we provide resource materials and curriculum for instructors to use in their classrooms both pre- and post-performance.



**Student Audience at Spring Play on Religion**

These materials may be found on our website and were authored by PCC faculty from multiple departments.

Our multi-page website (<http://www.pcc.edu/resources/illumination>) also includes performance dates, publicity materials and Student Educator applications. In the first year IP's website was active we had 9,466 "hits" and 7,446 downloads of our curriculum material.

### **Staff and Faculty In-services**

The Illumination Project works with faculty and staff to develop and present performances focusing on conflicts between staff or staff/students concerning issues of oppression. The performances are then incorporated into all campus as well as departmental in-services. Although this manual does not focus on our staff/faculty training it is a vital aspect of our program.

## **FUNDING**

The Illumination Project has been supported the past eight years through multiple sponsors both on and off the PCC campus. We have received approximately 50% of our funding from PCC through the Sociology Department, Sylvania President's office, Multicultural and Women's

Resource Centers. The other half of IP's budget has stemmed from grant funding including:

- The Hoover Family Foundation (funded 3X)
- The Equity Foundation (funded 3X)
- The Ford Foundation (funded 2X)
- The Spirit Mountain Community Fund
- Oregon Campus Compact - AmeriCorps

## **NATIONAL MODEL FOR CAMPUS DIVERSITY**

### **Replication Manual and DVD**

This replication manual and accompanying DVD are available for order through our website. The DVD and manual guide colleges and universities through the process of developing an Illumination Project on their campus.

### **Training and Consultation**

The IP provides both group training and individual consultation to institutions of higher education who are interested in creating an interactive theater program on their campus. In 2009 the IP hosted our first annual *Summer Institute: Using Interactive Theater on Your Campus*. Fifteen staff and faculty representing 11 different colleges and universities from around the nation attended the week-long program.

*"My job is to instruct non-native speakers in English language and culture. The stimulating production generated a great deal of classroom discussion when we met later in the week. Students from my class were not only able to practice listening and speaking skills, (yes, some of them did actually go up on the stage) but were eager to discuss the issues of race, ethnicity, and class structure that the Illumination Project's well-trained students presented."*

**-John Sparks, PCC ESOL Instructor**

