



University of Michigan Provost's Teaching Innovation Prize

2017 WINNER



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Detroiters Speak: Building Community Classrooms

Innovation Description

A keystone of the Semester In Detroit (SID) project, the “Detroiters Speak” series creates a unique public space for dialogue around several contemporary debates through an innovative one-credit course. Classes are public events open to everyone and anyone who might be interested in the semester’s theme. People from in/around the city of Detroit are “community students,” and are joined by U-M students and alumni who live and work in or near Detroit. All materials for the class are posted on a publicly accessible web portal, and the events are recorded and archived for later viewing.

Where and how gatherings occur is as crucial to the success of the events as the content being discussed. Events are held in the Cass Corridor Commons, a community organizational hub and gathering space that stands as an alternative to the growing tides of gentrification. The regular offering of a light dinner has been crucial in welcoming local residents and creating a nurturing environment to engage in intense and often heated discussions about Detroit. The ongoing nature of the project has not only grown attendance for the events but built opportunities for all types of students to learn together and be challenged intellectually and socially in community classrooms.

semesterindetroit.com

Student Comments

“The beauty of this class in this community classroom setting is that it breaks norms and allows for so much more productive discussion, flexibility, and learning.”

“It broadens our ideas of who is a student, who is a teacher, what is a classroom, and who is our community.”

“I left session one feeling really excited about the general education structure of the class. I can already tell that this class will challenge me intellectually and socially in ways that my other classes have not. Moving forward, I am excited to learn from both the speakers and the attendees at the sessions.”

“This class is unique in the way that the classroom changes to fit the topic and to provide the most inclusive experience for the students—University or community—to understand and learn.”

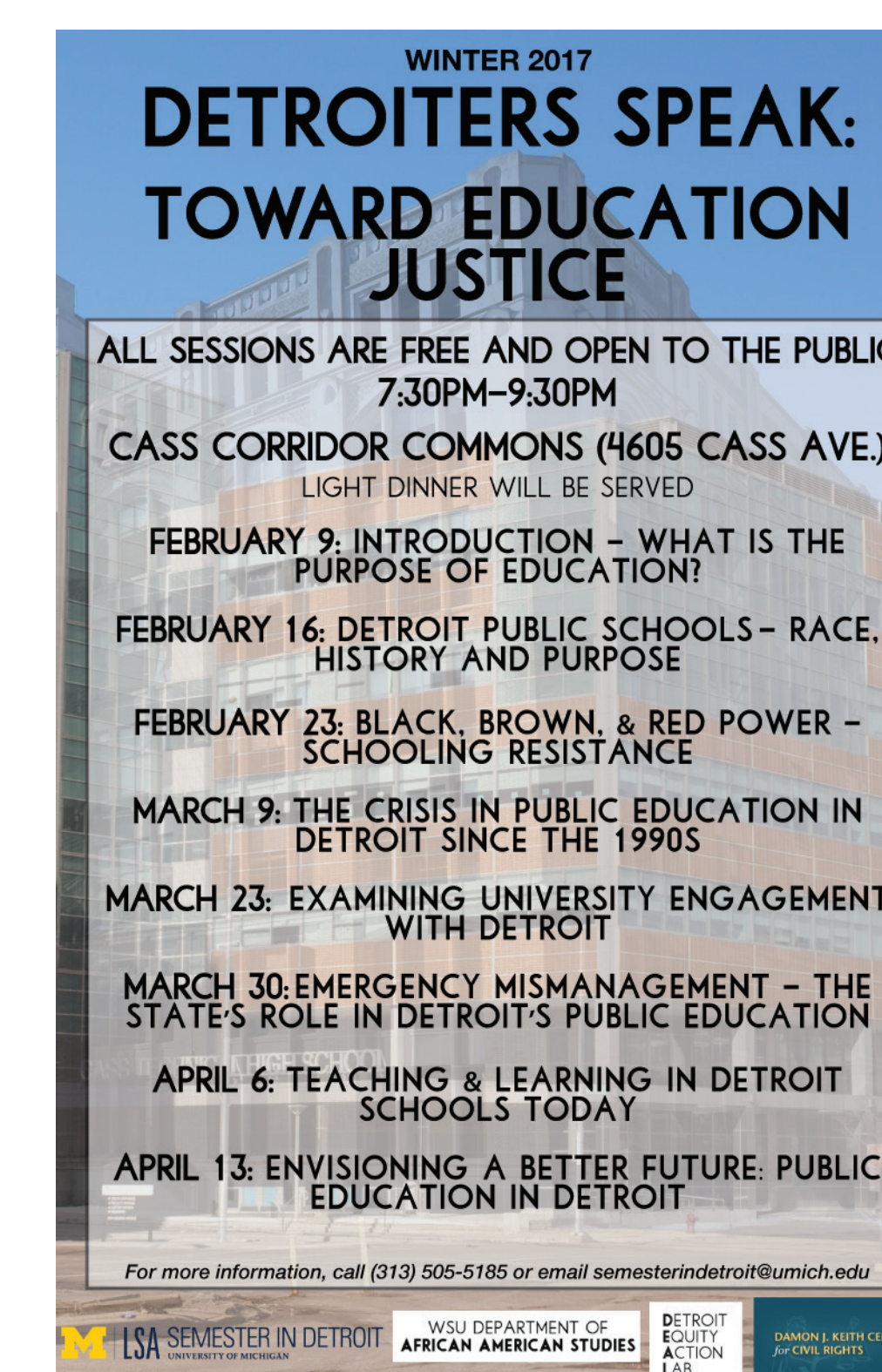
“The class does not just provide information for you to look over, to later be tested on; it really forces you to ask the big questions about How and Why.”

“‘The Detroiters Speak’ series has given so many students a deeper insight into issues that they may have known nothing about. It provides an environment to think more deeply and critically about real community experiences.”

Examples of Teaching Innovation



The “Detroiters Speak” model was first launched in the fall 2013 semester and has since run 1-2 times per academic year. Last year, SID joined forces with Wayne State University’s Detroit Equity Action Lab, and this semester, the collaborative effort has regularly attracted 100-125 people, including both undergraduate and graduate WSU students.



Events are publicized well in advance so that community members and students alike can plan for them.



The shared community learning space enables contributions from and conversation among all participants.