Change By Degrees

Can theatre for social change be taught? Here’s a roundup of theatre-studies programs where arts activism is on the syllabus.

By Lonnie Firestone

Brandeis University’s International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life Minor in Creativity, the Arts and Social Transformation

Within Brandeis’s International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life is a groundbreaking program called Peacebuilding and the Arts. A leader in social justice programming among university campuses, Brandeis created Peacebuilding and the Arts to give artists working in conflict zones a toolkit for enacting positive change. Students are encouraged to document their work and share their productions with colleagues and peers. The school’s new minor (Creativity, the Arts and Social Transformation) offers students a multivalent education across the arts, humanities and social sciences, combined with internship opportunities with a variety of organizations.

Students in Brandeis’s Peacebuilding in the Arts program. (Photo by David Weinstein)

As professor Cynthia Cohen, the program’s director, sees it, art can be as effective as diplomacy. “The arts are wellsuited to peace-building because they can reach beneath people’s defenses, and encourage people to open their minds to new ideas and their hearts to people who have been adversaries.” She adds, “Through their beauty and their composition, the arts support us to face circumstances that might otherwise be impossible to countenance.”

http://www.americantheatre.org/2014/12/11/change-by-degrees/view-all/