

DuBois Scholars come to Princeton

Touchstones class makes complex texts accessible

"Why does Zarathustra say the soul dies before the body?"

"If there is no hell, is there no heaven?"

"What does the buffoon mean when he says, 'You are blocking the way of someone better than yourself?'"

At 8:15 A.M. on a July morning, eight teenagers are discussing Nietzsche in a dingy classroom in the basement of East Pyne. This is just the first part of their lesson; during the second half of the class, they'll be working their way through Bertrand Russell's explication of the proof that $3+2=5$.

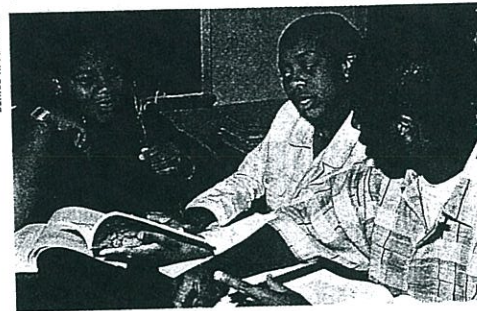
They are W. E. B. DuBois Scholars, eight of 66 gifted African- and Latino-American high school students who have come to Princeton to study leadership, business, science, computer science, and mathematics and philosophy. For five weeks this summer these students – about 90 percent from New Jersey – lived in Joline, ate in Wilcox Hall, played basketball in Dillon Gym, and, in their college-level courses, learned some of the skills that, DuBois officials hope, will enable them to lead their communities and help their neighbors out of poverty.

"The assumption has become that poverty will always be with us, that it is a problem to be managed," said DuBois Scholars Institute executive director Sherle Boone, a psychology professor at William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey. "But we say, wait. Our goal is to have the cities' brightest minds working together to solve the problem."

Learning to work together is also a goal of the Touchstones Discussion Project, a teaching method developed in 1984 by Howard Zeiderman '74 and two colleagues from St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland. A component of the DuBois Scholars Institute for the first time this year, Touchstones classes are conducted in a circle and begin with a specially selected passage read aloud. An

open-ended discussion follows, fostered, not directed, by the leader, who allows students to think about the text in terms of their own experiences.

Jonathan Beere, a Rhodes Scholar and a graduate student in philosophy at Princeton, taught the DuBois course using *Investigating Mathematics*, a textbook devised by Zeiderman. "I found it inspiring to be involved with these students," said Beere, who was teaching a Touchstones course for the first time. "Dealing with texts this way is extremely powerful for them. And the way the text



Students debated philosophy in their Touchstones class.

is presented – without much context – allows them to feel that they can pick up anything and use it."

Not only was 2000 the first year that the DuBois Scholars worked with Touchstones, it was also the first year the program was partially held at Princeton. Since its founding in 1988, classes have been conducted at William Paterson. This year, in an effort to attract students from beyond New Jersey, the Institute decided to place two-thirds of its students on Princeton's campus. "Of all the places in the area," Boone said, "we could not think of another institution that better reflects on our mission. Princeton's tradition of developing leaders on a national level meshes very well with our goals." □ By J.C.M.

ON THE WEB:

DuBois: www.wpunj.edu/cohss/psychology/dubois.htm
Touchstones: www.touchstones.org

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