

UO's Multicultural Requirement: A Proposal for Change

Alison Gash, Political Science

Michael Hames-García, Ethnic Studies

Avinnash Tiwari, English and Composition

Current Policy, in place since **1994**

Students select courses from **two of three categories...**

American Cultures	Courses study race and ethnicity in the United States from a historical and comparative perspective.	~59 courses
Identity, Pluralism, & Tolerance	Courses explore how group identities are formed based on ethnicity, class, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or other characteristics.	~154 courses
International Cultures	Courses examine world cultures by focusing on how they create group identities and approach tolerance or by analyzing a particular culture that differs significantly from more familiar cultures in contemporary America. Can be fulfilled by study abroad.	~229 courses

Fall 2015: The **UO Black Student Task Force** released a **list of demands** meant to achieve greater faculty and student diversity and equity as a matter of urgency and improve the social and intellectual climate on campus for students and faculty of color. Demands included making **Ethnic Studies 101 a graduation requirement.**

The new “requirement will require students to learn about the **importance of United States history** in the **context of social inequality and injustice**, while emphasizing the often overlooked histories of African-American as well as the histories of other underrepresented sub-groups in the United States.

Offer students “***skills to navigate the diversifying world.***”

—*Black Student Task Force Memo,*
17 November 2015

Examining Body	Key Findings	Recommendations
<p>Joint Committee Undergraduate Council and University of Oregon Committee on Courses</p> <p><i>Winter 2016</i></p>	<p>Expressed “dissatisfaction with the current categories and structure” of the multicultural requirement.</p> <p>Identified a “diluting of the purpose and coherence of the requirement.”</p>	<p>Update the multicultural requirement category titles and descriptions to reflect <i>“current scholarship in the field of critical multicultural education”</i> & address an <i>“imbalance in the categories”</i> that means most UO students do not take American Cultures (AC) courses and, thus, <i>“are not exposed to the critical conversations occurring in AC courses addressing a critical analysis of students’ cultural context and assumptions.”</i></p>

Examining Body	Key Findings	Recommendations
<p>Ethnic Studies 101 Working Group</p> <p><i>Winter, Spring 2016</i></p>	<p>“The current MCR does not embody [a] coherent institutional commitment” and fails to adequately articulate student learning outcomes.</p>	<p>Require a U.S. focused course on “<i>difference, power, discrimination & resistance.</i>”</p> <p><i>Share its teaching across</i> the university’s <i>schools and colleges.</i></p>

Examining Body	Key Findings	Recommendations
<p>Faculty Working Group on Intercultural and Inclusive Teaching</p> <p><i>AY 2016-2017</i></p>	<p>The teaching of MCR courses has distinctive challenges.</p> <p>A shared core of content, transferrable capacities students are developing, and optimal classroom culture for teaching and learning should provide coherence to these courses.</p>	<p>Faculty should be offered ongoing <i>teaching development and support</i> activities, and <i>leadership roles</i>, related to the <i>teaching of difference, power, and agency across the curriculum</i>.</p> <p>University systems around this teaching—like course evaluations—needs attention.</p>



- ***Simplify*** the structure.
- ***Require*** sites of focus: 1) United States, 2) Global contexts.
- ***Be transparent*** about the relevance of these courses.
- ***Articulate*** valuable and transferrable skills/capacities, especially around:
 - listening,
 - self reflection, and
 - civil participation in cross-perspective dialogue.
- ***Develop***: Give meaningful opportunities for faculty teaching development and leadership across disciplines—let this be a model for other core education initiatives.
- ***Cohere, Update***: Articulate a clear, shared set of student learning outcomes and rationale statement that can be used on syllabi and updated periodically.

“In the class, we discussed power, inequality, and race. It was a valuable course because it ***directly addressed the world that we live in.*** We explored differences and tried to understand experiences that many of the students in the class had never lived. The class ***broadened my perspective...*** An essential part of college is ***learning how to think.*** Our discussions ... improved my ability to think critically and consider different perspectives and sides to a problem.”

—Student Course Evaluation, Writing 123, Winter 2017

Models

- Foreground relevance, transferrable skills/capacities;
- Attention to pedagogy and faculty support;
- Rich community-based and co-curricular experiences

UMassAmherst

FIU | FLORIDA
INTERNATIONAL
UNIVERSITY

UC San Diego



The University of Vermont



Pitzer College



Oregon State
University

Working Group on Intercultural and Inclusive Teaching:

12-person group including faculty from Arts and Administration; Biology; Disability Studies; Education Studies; English; Ethnic Studies; History; Human Physiology; Philosophy; Political Science; Romance Languages

‘Difference, Power, Agency’ CAIT (Faculty Learning Community):

16-person group including faculty from Anthropology; Dance; English; Ethnic Studies; International Studies; Journalism; Landscape Architecture; Law/Legal Studies; Planning, Public Policy, and Management; Political Science; Women’s and Gender Studies

Faculty Feedback Sessions:

6 in Winter including specialists in critical multicultural education, the Provost’s Teaching Academy, departmental diversity committees, international scholars, and an open-session (~90 faculty participated in person or with email feedback)

Other presentations and consultations including to Undergraduate Council, Dean’s Council, Provost and President, Senate President and Vice President

“...An *essential part of college is learning how to think*. Our discussions of power and difference improved my ability to think critically and consider different perspectives and sides to a problem...”

—Student Course Evaluation, Writing 123, Winter 2017

I support this proposal because... students have an opportunity to *intellectually struggle* with complex histories full of contradictions and unknowns...

...students also have an opportunity to bear witness to and learn from those, both of the academy and of the larger world, that struggle against inequality, also with their intellect—at times their lives, and with their hearts and imagination...

In these *manifestations of agency*, students can grow their own capacity for creativity. *Creativity grounded in critical analysis opens spaces for students to imagine and then create the world they want to live in.*

—Avinnash Tiwari, Career Instructor,
Department of English and Composition Program

I support this proposal because... when ***we are explicit that the purpose of the class is to examine and unpack difference and inequality, it becomes a collective enterprise.*** All students are responsible for the work, and relieves the burden on students and professors of color to speak their truths.

This is a huge shift in a majority white institution. My students have been more engaged and committed to the classroom and to locating themselves in systems of power and difference when I am clear that this is the work we're doing together.

—Michelle McKinley, Professor of Law,
Director Center for the Study of Women in Society

I support this proposal because... I'm excited about the opportunity to update some of our courses that fit into the framework of *Global Perspectives*, and also to create a few new ones that participate in the project of *US: Difference, Inequality, Agency...*

...We look forward to ***joining with colleagues across campus to innovate within and renew this part of the curriculum.*** In fact, we've already started!

—Leah Middlebrook, Associate Professor and Director of Pedagogy,
Department of Comparative Literature; Associate Professor, Romance Languages

I support this proposal because... I think it's important that people know how to discuss topics they disagree on through civil conversation.

—Student in Priscilla Yamin's Political Science 109 course

I support this proposal because... it would simplify an already complex curriculum.

—FIG Program peer leader

I support this proposal because... Given the complexity and scope of the social, economic, political and environmental challenges that we currently face...fail[ing] to address the forces that contribute to power imbalances...would be a failure in our ***responsibility as educators.***

—Jennifer Webster, Instructor, PPPM

I support this proposal because... it responds
to calls I hear every day from students to be better
prepared for ***understanding the increasing diversity***
in the workplace and in their communities.

– Dyana Mason, Assistant Professor, PPPM

I support this proposal because... it's a clear step toward a core curriculum that supports the ***university's proclaimed values of equity and inclusion by teaching students to use the tools of ethical dialogue, self-reflection, and critical inquiry*** to learn about one's own multiple identities and those across our global community.

These courses lay the ground work for students to engage more purposefully with their own and other's beliefs and meanings that have shaped the foundations of inequality and oppression. As an institution claiming to 'educate the whole person, and to foster the next generation of transformational leaders and informed participants in the global community' (tense modified from UO purpose statement), I believe this is an essential first step in the right direction.

—Kassia Dellabough, Director, College of Design Student Service

I support this proposal because... as a student affairs professional on this campus I see the pain that comes from ***students clashing with each other about social issues*** without having the knowledge base and dialogue skills to grasp the impact of their arguments.

These classes can help to foster more ***genuine intellectual exchange*** and less divisiveness.

—Abigail Leeder, Office of the Dean of Students

I support this proposal because... Advisors are challenged with explaining the value of meeting the current multicultural requirement because of the selection from only two of three categories. This seems to undermine the purpose of the requirement (are we saying that one category ultimately isn't important to the student?). Terms like 'Tolerance' and 'Pluralism' feel dated and are, thus, difficult to explain—and, with the plethora of options across all three categories, it is easy to become a *checkbox instead of a cohesive general education requirement*.

In addition, with more students directed to the U.S. category, UO is closer to meeting the principles underlining the Black Student Task Force demand of requiring 'all students to learn about the importance of United States history in the context of social inequality and injustice...'

—Kimberly Johnson, Assistant Vice Provost for Advising,
Director of the Office of Academic Advising and CMAE Advising

I support this proposal because... it creates opportunities for faculty across disciplines to engage in ***meaningful pedagogical professional development*** to collectively support our students' development as thoughtful and engaged citizens.

– Elly Vandegrift, Associate Director of the Science Literacy Program,
Senior Instructor, Biology

I support this proposal because... I work in retention of Oregon students of diverse background, helping them think critically and analytically about their lives and differences, and relationship to interconnected, complex systems and hierarchies so as to begin to ***realize the agency of their own distinct voices***. The entire University community will benefit from a course requirement that supports such work with all students.

—Michael Copperman, Center for Multicultural Academic Excellence Writing Teacher, Senior Career Instructor, Department of English and Composition Program

I support this proposal because... I truly believe a more holistic and authentic education is capable of changing racist norms, and I believe a baseline of cultural competency will inherently benefit everyone.

—Maria Gallegos, Associated Students of the
University of Oregon President-Elect

“I felt encouraged to engage throughout the class without pressure and I feel that everyone else did as well.

Students who may not engage in other classes were challenged to do so in this class without facing repercussions that they may in other environments.”

—Student Course Evaluation,
Ethnic Studies 254,
Winter 2018

I support this proposal because... our university exists in a city, state, and nation that are indelibly marked by ongoing legacies of power and inequality, as well as individual and collective responses to those legacies. As educators, ***we owe it to our students, our society, and our history to facilitate constructive conversations on how to move forward.*** We have to figure out how to be responsible to a shared past and present while building a better future.

—Michael Hames-García, Professor of Ethnic Studies,
Chair for Equity and Diversity of United Academics,
and Vice-President of Membership and Organizing for AAUP-Oregon