

Diversity CORE Courses Recommendations

I. Introduction

Interestingly, the timing for this review corresponds relatively closely with the recent fiftieth anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case which ruled educational segregation illegal nationwide. As a result, I am increasingly convinced that the context for re-conceptualizing Core Diversity requirements for our students today should involve three considerations; (a) the particular history and current status of this state and institution regarding school segregation, (b) the university's mandate and responsibilities as a land-grant institution to serve its citizens, (c) the institution's unique contributions to diversity in higher education today.

My recommendations for changes in Core Diversity requirements represent a modest attempt to build on our strengths and to enhance student learning by conveying the relationships between historical legacy and contemporary issues in ways that will better prepare our students to be knowledgeable, critical and engaged citizens in addressing the challenges of the future. My expectation is that these recommendations will also assist all students at the UNLV to realize the educational benefits of membership in a diverse campus community.

II. Overview of Recommendations

I offer six recommendations to enhance undergraduate students' understanding of Diversity. These recommendations affect:

1. General education program (CORE) diversity course requirement
2. Process for implementing course requirement change
3. Course review process for CORE diversity courses
4. Senior-year assessment of diversity experiences
5. Faculty development
6. Diversity Themed Living and Learning Program

III. General Education Program (CORE) Diversity Course Requirement Recommendations

I have concluded that the Diversity course requirement in the undergraduate general education program (CORE) should be revised in the following ways:

- *Students should successfully complete two three-credit Diversity courses instead of one, for a total of six credits.*
- *There should be two categories of courses, (a) Racial-Ethnic Studies & Race Relations in the United States and (b) Perspectives on Cultural Diversity. Students should successfully complete one course in each category.*
- *Students should successfully complete this two-course requirement by taking one Diversity course at the lower-level and one at the upper-level.*

Discussion:

As I suggested in the introduction to this document, the understanding of diversity has expanded dramatically in higher education institutions across the country since the initiation of the CORE diversity requirement at UNLV. At that time, the phrase "Cultural Diversity" permitted students to learn about people and cultures not then represented in many courses, and the one-course requirement was a reasonable addition to a general education curriculum that had no prior requirement. Years later, however, I believe that neither the phrasing nor the one-course requirement is adequate. I do not believe that two courses will insure that students can adequately navigate our multicultural world, either on campus or off after they graduate. Yet, the addition of a course to the general education requirement, along with the senior-year assessment presented later, does increase the possibility that students will encounter and examine dimensions of difference and identity not likely in a single course, and it should not be cost-prohibitive.

Precisely because I understand diversity to be complex, I have defined the foci of the two categories of courses in ways that will encourage student learning about the multiple layers and dimensions of diversity.

Category 1. Racial-Ethnic Studies & Race Relations in the United States.

The particular mandate of the University to serve the citizens of this state through its land-grant status challenge us to equip our students with a knowledge of the specific histories that have shaped human relations in the state and continue to play a role in its social, economic, and cultural life. These factors encourage me to recommend that one course be devoted to learning about racial and ethnic experiences, cultures, and relations in the United States. By requiring one course in this category I do not dismiss the existence and importance of other forms of human diversity. Rather, I acknowledge that in this nation, and particularly this state and this campus at this time, race and ethnicity remain profound dimensions of difference. I am convinced that students at this University should be asked to think knowledgeably and creatively about such issues in order to contribute to the well-being of the state and of the society at large. Courses in this category will:

- Explore the specific histories, cultures, and socio-political contexts of the core groups racialized in the United States history: African Americans, Asian Americans, Chicanos and Latinos, and Native American Indians
- Examine these issues either within single groups or in a comparative context with each other, or within American or transnational contexts.
- Examine constructions of race, racialization and race relations in the historical and/or contemporary experiences of racial-ethnic groups in the United States;
- Explore historical and/or contemporary debates and controversies over these constructions and experiences.

Category 2. Perspectives on Cultural Diversity.

Because understandings of diversity have grown rapidly over the last 10 -15 years, our conceptualization of diversity needs both greater depth and specificity. Courses in

this category will reflect the expansive scholarship and theory of recent years that (a) recognizes the complexity of diversity, (b) accepts the importance of exploring the relations among categories of human difference, and (c) acknowledges that forms of social and cultural difference are not neutral and involve relations of power and privilege among individuals and groups. They will explore one or more of the following dimensions of experience and/or analysis and attend to the dynamics of power that mediate relations among social groups constituted by racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, class, national, gender, sexual, religious, linguistic, familial, ability-oriented, and appearance-oriented heritages, practices, beliefs, and/or social attitudes.

- Issues of personal and social identity, explored in depth as constituted within particular social groups or constituencies;
- Comparative study of the experiences, cultures, and/or contributions of two or more social groups or constituencies, within a single society or across societies, and within a single historical time frame or across historical time frames;
- Intersectional analysis of dimensions of difference, that is, explorations of the ways in which such aspects of identity and social structure as race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age, religion, nationality, disability and so on intersect with one another in constituting identity, experience, and social formations.

Finally, the recommendation for both a lower-level and an upper-level course is to provide students the opportunity to deepen their understandings of this subject and to encourage departments and colleges to develop courses for their majors that examine these issues in relationship to their particular field of study. Lower level courses will be introductory in nature, providing an overview of issues of personal identity and experience, definitions of concepts and terminology, and identifying the relevance of issues in the course to both self and society. Upper level courses will involve more focused, in-depth and complex analysis; will be have more demanding reading and writing assignments that require integrating, synthesizing and building on previous knowledge; and may also require more thoughtful and involved explorations of the relationship between theory and application.

Diversity course requirement language for Undergraduate Catalog:

Proposed: There are two categories of Diversity Courses. *Racial Ethnic Studies and Race Relations in the United States* courses focus primarily on constructions of race, racialization and race relations in the historical and/or contemporary experiences of racial-ethnic groups in the United States; and/or historical and/or contemporary debates and controversies over these constructions and experiences in the United States context. *Perspectives on Cultural Diversity* courses focus on either issues of identity; a comparative study of two or more social groups within a single society or historical time period or across societies or historical periods; or an intersectional analysis of dimensions of difference. Courses in both categories are offered at both the lower and upper division levels.

IV. Process for Implementing Course Requirement Change Recommendations

I offer three recommendations for implementing the revised Diversity course requirement and the senior-year assessment:

- *Begin implementation for incoming freshmen in Fall semester 2008. Students who enter prior to that time would be covered under previous requirements.*
- *All Existing courses would remain as currently developed and approved until their current approval has expired (assuming expiration dates exist in the general education arena), at which time they can be resubmitted, with revisions as necessary to meet the new requirements.*
- *The existing CORE Diversity course approval entity should be charged with the responsibility for developing criteria for and reviewing courses submitted for the revised requirement. This entity should also make final determinations of course-category fit.*
- *I also recommend that the upper level course that a student takes to meet the proposed CORE requirement be allowed to satisfy any Advanced Studies requirement that may also exist under general education.*

Discussion:

Given the state of the budget and the likely disruption to departments' planning, I do not expect that all departments will be able to develop new courses overnight; consequently, the overall implementation of the revised requirement will be gradual. Ideally, faculty who teach current diversity courses will revise them to meet the goals of the new categories in time for their renewal. In addition, allowing the upper level CORE diversity course to qualify as an Advanced Studies course under the general education requirements will help diminish the perception that the addition diversity course will be unduly burdensome.

V. Course Review Process Recommendation

I recommend that:

- *All Colleges engage in a collaborative review of CORE Diversity courses within their departments in a way that involves full-time faculty at all levels of the assessment process.*
- *Relevant concerns in this review include the content and pedagogy of Diversity courses as redefined in this document, the extent to which Diversity courses are taught by full-time faculty, and the role of Diversity courses in both general education and major requirements.*

Ideally, the college assessment process will lead to the creation of new Diversity courses at the upper level within all colleges, oriented toward the intellectual mission of the particular departments and/or colleges.

VI. Senior-Year Assessment of Diversity Experiences Recommendation

I believe that the larger goals of equipping students to understand the implications of diversity and to participate fully in a diverse society cannot be achieved with only

two courses. I also recognize that the University provides many other opportunities for students to engage these issues inside the classroom and outside the classroom in residence life, and University programming, etc. I recognize the importance of doing regular, on-going assessment in forwarding the institution's efforts to understand the nature of students' diversity-related experiences as well as the impact that these experiences have on other important educational outcomes. I therefore recommend that:

- *These larger goals be assessed as part of an on-going assessment process that employs mixed methods in exploring these important questions.*
- *These assessments should involve quantitative longitudinal assessment activities (through surveys, etc.) that will help us to understand the nature of students experiences and their educational development at the time that they enter college, the nature of their experiences and educational development at regular intervals throughout their college experience, and the role that students' experiences with diversity while at UNLV have in enhancing these important outcomes.*
- *While quantitatively oriented studies yield important information about how engagement with diversity in college adds value to the educational experiences and outcomes of students, they are limited in how much information they can provide about the nature of students' experiences and the meaning that students give to these experiences. These important research questions are best explored through qualitative assessment activities (i.e., focus groups, individual interviews, ethnographies).*
- *I believe that these assessment activities can (and should) be included as part of a comprehensive and integrated program of assessment that focuses on the undergraduate experience at UNLV.*

Discussion:

The campus should be encouraged to design and administer, through Institutional Research, an assessment of student perceptions of diversity experiences on campus that includes examining the impact of diversity courses and involves full-time faculty at all levels of the assessment process. The senior year assessment also provides an opportunity for colleges to develop a way to assess their graduates' preparation to engage these issues in relationship to work settings or in the substantive content in their field of specialization. I encourage colleges to find creative ways in senior seminars, internships, capstone courses, etc. to help students examine issues of diversity specifically as it applies to their major field of study. The information gathered through this process should inform the CORE approval process, academic and co-curricular programming, the deliberations of senior level administrators and our knowledge of the tangible educational benefits of our diversity for all students.

VII. Faculty Development Recommendations

I recognize that revising existing courses and creating new courses that fulfill these requirements is a time-consuming process that merits recognition and support for participating faculty. I also acknowledge that many new pedagogic strategies for teaching of diversity issues have emerged in recent years, from intergroup dialogues to

new electronic technologies. Accordingly, I strongly recommend that:

- *Groups such as the Teaching and Learning Center; the new Research Center for Race, Class and Social Justice and Institute for Multicultural Education and Diversity Training; and the Office of the Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion receive support from the University to collaborate in developing effective faculty development experiences specifically oriented toward the revision of old courses and the creation of new ones to meet these new requirements.*
- *Special attention be paid to the development of courses at the upper division level.*

VIII. Diversity Themed Living Learning Program

I recommend that the general education review committee undertake the development of a four-semester, living-learning community entitled, Leadership in a Diverse U.S. Society, (LEAD-US).

The purpose of the program is to prepare UNLV students to work, live and lead in an increasingly diverse workplace, country and world. This four-semester experience, focused on the many aspects of leadership and diversity in the United States will use the general education curriculum as building blocks for three-fourths of its academic requirements. The residential component of the program will allow students to engage in academic and community activities, which will significantly enhance their experiences and growth. Deliberately structured cross group living arrangements will complement and enhance the classroom experiences of students in the program.

Leadership in a Diverse U.S. Society will focus on upper-level native students (sophomore/ junior year and higher) and transfer students who will be entering the University in the junior year. There will be 50 (approximately 25 returning and 25 transfer) students in each class/cohort. Given that there will be two cohorts, the program would cap at 100 students. In order to insure that all the students in the program realize the benefits of participating in this diverse learning community, racial, ethnic and gender diversity will be important factors in selecting students for the LEAD-US program.

The program will focus on an upper level experience because:

- Students are more academically and emotionally prepared at that time to deal with the opportunities and challenges presented by living in a diversity themed residential community. The transition from high school to college is complete and students have spent several years in a university setting dealing with diverse student populations.
- The LEAD-US program will link its core components with upper level academic experiences in the various academic departments, mentoring opportunities and career planning and placement.

I realize that several significant hurdles will have to be overcome to make this program a reality. The residential facility--ideally centrally located on campus--should provide

lounge, community and seminar space for the program's 100 students. Space should also be provided for unique cultural demands on these students, e.g. private and safe community prayer space for participating Muslim students, for example. Ideally, this space could be part of a **Transfer Center** to which all transfer students can gravitate to for transcript articulation, transfer orientation and other related matters. The University will also have to revise its housing policy to give priority to the 25 transfer students who would enroll in the program each year.

Why Leadership in a Diverse U.S. Society?

- Recent collaborative initiatives from Academic and Student Affairs are focusing on the related issue of civic engagement.
- The College of Education has expertise and existing curricula in the area of leadership and diversity.
- The Campus has a responsibility to produce leaders of tomorrow with the skills to respond to the ever-increasing diversity of the State of Nevada and the nation.
- A focus on preparing UNLV students for leadership in a diverse U.S. society will complement the proposed new element of the CORE Diversity Requirement: to focus on the constructions of race, racialization and race relations United States; and/the historical and/or contemporary debates and controversies over these constructions and experiences in the United States context.

Why Transfer Students?

- Transfer students significantly contribute to the diversity of the undergraduate student body.
- Transfer students merit outreach and programs that allow them to connect with the campus to become life-long contributors to the campus as valuable alumni
- LEAD-US will help improve retention and degree completion rates for transfer students by making them part of a cohort of students who will be connected to each other and move through the program in a structured, coordinated fashion.
- The program will enable the University to reach out to the diversity immediately around us, particularly in the CCSD.
- The program will provide an important link to students at CSN and NSC, especially students of color.

An additional benefit of the Leadership in a Diverse Society program is that diversity related programs could be piloted through LEAD-US prior to being launched to the campus at large. LEAD-US students can also serve as a focus group for the University's faculty and administration on transfer and diversity issues.

Finally, this would be a unique model, worthy of emulation at other institutions and a source of potential external resources.