Academic Matters Council’s comments on proposed revisions to the Diversity requirement
Summary of Discussion on 12 October 2016

1. What is the difference between a DIV course and a G or U course?

Secretary Peterson (substituting for Professor Claire Hamilton, chair of the General Education Council who was unable to attend) explained that for diversity courses – the emphasis focuses on issues, topics, & content of diversity first and foremost (diversity 1st, content 2nd)
For G&U courses – emphasis on content first (content 1st, diversity 2nd)

U & G designations can be combined with a disciplinary Gen Ed (e.g. HS G or SB U, etc.), DIVs are being conceived as stand-alone courses, not as combined with another Gen Ed designation.

One member noted that this has huge implications for whether or how easily existing classes could be converted, especially as doing so would in many cases mean sacrificing an existing disciplinary designation; instituting this requirement will likely require the creation of far more new classes than easy conversion of existing ones. That member said it would be useful to see the numbers on how many Us or Gs are currently stand-alone.

2. What about transfer students and the Massachusetts Compact?

One member noted that because DIVs are also aimed at first-year students, with the idea that U and G may be taken subsequently, we need clarification on how this requirement will work for transfer students.

Vice Provost Barr and other council members said that these points are being worked out; there is time since most students covered by the changed requirement would not be coming in for a year or two afterward.

3. Will there be some funding for course development? What support will there be for off-setting the work that developing the new courses will entail?

See response under 6.

4. Where will courses come from? Do we have enough courses?

Secretary Peterson said that they might be new courses, or they might be conversions of current courses to be diversity courses or to hold G or U designation. A special committee including members of the General Education Council and the Academic Matters Council will be formed to review courses for the DIV designation. Vice Provost Barr indicated that she believes enough courses will be available.

5. Comments on the Learning Objectives for the DIV course

One member suggested that the four learning objectives on page 5 should be revisited. Learning objectives - those demonstrable outcomes that are most essential for our undergraduate students to know, understand and/or be able to do by the end of their DIV course - are key to the success of the course and around which all learning activities and assessment should be organized.
That member suggested that the General Education Council should consider adding additional active language to the first learning objective, i.e. beyond living, learning, and working - something like students will contribute to the promotion of a just and inclusive community. In the 2nd learning objective - perhaps alter/remove the term “acceptance” and replace with “appreciation” and/or “respect” for difference. In the third objective...consider replacing “be active bystanders” with something more descriptive and core to the concept of diversity, or remove altogether. And for the 4th objective: perhaps add a clause on the end of the existing phrase that says something like...“promote principles of democracy (including diversity, justice, equity) by actively engaging in the civic life of your local, national, and/or global community”

The same member also made a “big picture” suggestion to consider developing a single course syllabus for the Diversity requirement and offer many, many sections that faculty could apply to teach, and be trained to teach. This would be instead of having individual faculty submit ideas for the DIV course, which could lead to a host of issues related to quality, opportunity to learn, etc.

A member mentioned the resources of Teaching Tolerance - a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center – would be very useful in the teaching of diversity, inclusion, etc. I used these materials when I was a high school teacher years ago. Their resources may prove useful to those working to develop and teach DIV courses in the foreseeable future. They can be accessed through this link:

http://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources

6. **Will there be training in diversity for faculty?**

One member stated that all Faculty should be trained in diversity. Faculty should be experts on diversity.

Vice Provost Barr noted that the Teaching Excellence & Faculty Development Institute (ex Center for Teaching and Faculty Development) will have training/workshops for faculty.

7. **How will courses be selected for diversity designation? Who will monitor that? Will the faculty decide that?**

Secretary Peterson said that in the immediate term this would be done by the special committee modeled along the lines of GERICO. Later the General Education Council would perform these functions

8. **Will there be more TA funding?**

The member asking this question noted that this will be largest grouping of courses that all students must take (except writing and math)

Vice Provost Barr said that TA allocation will be revisited.

9. **This involves a change in academic regulations, so cannot go forward without AMC approval. Have other concerned constituencies and committees also seen the proposed revisions?**
Secretary Peterson explained that the proposal is currently out for SGA comments (to be presented at their Senate meeting on 10/24 with Carol Barr and Claire Hamilton to provide overview to members). SGA has been involved every step of the way. The Faculty Senate’s Program and Budget, Status of Diversity, and Undergraduate Education Councils are also reviewing it. The Faculty Senate will also discuss it in Committee of the Whole on November 10th.

10. *Won’t there be a tremendous bottleneck for first year students trying to get into a DIV course?*

Vice Provost Barr noted that currently students are recommended to take a GenEd course in their first year, but not told a specific type of GenEd. Often the course chosen is one that they can get into and that doesn’t conflict with their other classes.

11. *How will this impact students in RAPs?*

A member noted that these students might be more constrained in their ability to take a DIV course their first year.