To: Faculty Senate  
From: Daniel (Dan) Gordon, Professor of History  
Comments on the Proposed Revision to the Diversity Requirement

I have four reservations about the proposal to create a new diversity requirement.

1. Three diversity courses is too many.  
2. Eliminating the Interdisciplinary side of Gen Ed is contrary to the spirit of the Gen Ed program.  
3. The qualifications of the Gen Ed Council are not ideal.  
4. The proposal has ideological implications that need to be debated.

1. Three course requirements in Diversity is too much. If the current two are not working, they should be fixed, or abolished and replaced with one or two others. But adding a third means that too much of Gen Ed is devoted to Diversity. It gives the impression that we solve problems in Gen Ed by superimposing additional requirements and not by authoritatively fixing and streamlining the system.

Another point with regards to "three is too many" is that there are several fundamental learning objectives that aren't addressed through Gen Ed requirements at all. And having three requirements organized around a specific goal, diversity, creates too great an imbalance between what is there and what is not there. Many would argue, for example, that a required course on current global problems would be a fine addition to Gen Ed. Or, a required course in sustainability. Note that we don't even have a required course in writing--many students test out. Yet, the Gen Ed Council thinks that diversity is so important that we should have three? This suggests that when the Council made the proposal, all they were thinking about was diversity--not Gen Ed as a whole.

2. I am concerned about eliminating the opportunity to take Interdisciplinary courses. In the original Gen Ed plan of the 1980s, students could use three Interdisciplinary courses. Over time, it has been reduced to one. Now we would totally abolish one of the founding principles of Gen Ed--to encourage interdisciplinary learning--for the sake of a third, arguably superfluous, diversity requirement? It suggests that diversity is pushing out other lens through which to view the world--which is not really diversity.

3. I have reservations about the composition of the Gen Ed Council--I have drawn attention to this issue in the faculty senate before. Thirteen of the twenty members are lecturers. There is no other faculty senate council that has anything close to a majority of lecturers. Moreover, there was no task force that would have included people from outside the Council. The proposal was simply created by a subset of this Council, which I would characterize as under-qualified for its task. And it was done over the summer, a time when faculty input from non-council members could not have been substantial. The minutes of the Council suggest to me that the proposal was never vigorously debated among the Council members.

4. There is too much emphasis, with regards to the proposed first-year requirement, on "oppression," "marginalization," etc. This appears to reflect Marxist and post-colonial theory;
the language is not extremely radical but it does lean clearly toward the view that what diversity means, above all, is the study of minority group identities and social inequalities. This orientation does not promote a wide enough range of perspectives on society and history.

Above all, we need to encourage our students to think about what makes us human; they should be familiar with important texts that articulate the concept of human commonality. I doubt very much that we can create a greater spirit of openness in our campus and in the world by focusing only on what makes us different from each other.

I appreciate the efforts of the Gen Ed Council to stimulate discussion of our Gen Ed program. I think a task force of highly experienced scholars from our university should be assigned to rethink the program as a whole.

I would like to add that I have co-authored, with the sociologist Peter Baehr, an article (14,000 words) called "Paradoxes of Diversity." It will be published in The Sage Handbook of Political Sociology.