General Education Council’s Recommendations for Changes in the Diversity Requirement

Approved 9/30/16

The General Education Council recommends revising the current diversity requirement. These revisions reflect changes to the overall language defining the diversity requirement, including guidance on the content and pedagogy expected of courses meeting the diversity requirement and a structural change in how students fulfill the diversity requirement. In this document we first present the context and rationale for our recommendations and then outline the proposed changes.

Context and Rationale

The General Education Curriculum has maintained a strong commitment to diversity that can be traced back to the original discussions in 1983 outlining a General Education curriculum that would be organized around themes reflecting “Breadth of Knowledge” (1983, Final Report of the Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee on General Education). Within these initial discussions the focus on diversity was distributed across and integrated within the six Breadth of Knowledge themes with the understanding that diversity was an aspect that all General Education courses should address, including courses within the Physical and Biological World as well as those within the Social World. However, the final form of the General Education Curriculum moved towards more of a designation system with diversity formally centered only within the Social World area (Sen. Doc. No. 85-005). In this model, students would meet their Social and Cultural Diversity requirement by taking two courses within the Social World that held a primary designation as Literature (AL), Arts (AT), Historical Studies (HS), or Social and Behavioral Sciences (SB) and an additional designation as Human and Cultural Diversity (now referred to as Social and Cultural Diversity). As the campus began to adopt this model and move through the approval process to identify courses that met the various Social World designations, the GEC identified significant implementation and student accessibility issues associated with the Human and Cultural Diversity courses. At that time, though a sufficient number of courses were available that met the primary Social World designations, GEC was finding that faculty had challenges in designing courses that also met the diversity requirement (for example, in the review process GEC found that courses met the requirements for Diversity but did not meet the requirements for their primary Social World designation). These challenges led to a limitation in the number of courses available for students that met their diversity requirements. In an effort to address these challenges, GEC recommended and Faculty Senate approved (1989, Sen. Doc. No. 90.015) that in addition to the dual-designation diversity courses, students would also be able to meet their diversity requirement through courses identified as meeting a single or stand-alone “Diversity” designation. This single diversity designation was modified as part of a general review of the General Education Curriculum conducted in 2001 (Sen. Doc. 01-035) with the requirement that students take two courses in Human and Cultural Diversity changed to one course with a focus on the United States (U) and one course with a focus on the Global context (G).
While there have been changes to the General Education curriculum as a whole, notably the 3-to-4-credit conversion process and the addition of the Integrative Experience requirement, there have been no further structural changes in the diversity requirement. However, there have been continual concerns about the diversity requirement. While the 1989 amendment solved the short-term issue of student access to diversity courses, it did not address the underlying challenge that faculty have had in developing and teaching dual-designation courses. As part of the preparation of the General Education Task Force Report (2009), GEC reviewed data on the implementation of the diversity requirement ("General Education Diversity Courses: Syllabus Analysis prepared by OAPA, 2007), which noted that the course syllabi typically did not indicate that the course met either a U or a G diversity designation and inconsistently included course goals, outcomes, or assignments that aligned with the diversity requirement. GEC has tried to address these issues through the quinquennial review and the new course approval process; however, many challenges have remained, including the lack of specific language guiding the U and G courses and the challenging instructional demands related to our dual-designation system.

Current Diversity Requirement

The current diversity requirement is outlined in Sen. Doc. No. 84-024B (2005):

*Social and Cultural Diversity Component*

*Within the six courses of the Social World requirement, students must take two courses devoted to specific study of diversity in human cultures and societies. It is important that General Education address the complex ways in which societies and cultures differ from one another. Educated individuals should be guided by attitudes which value cultural differences. Their perspectives on and communication with people of different cultures, both within their own society and in other societies, should emanate from an understanding of cultural diversity rather than from applying ethnocentric stereotypes. More specifically, the purposes of the requirement are: (1) to emphasize the need for educated citizens to understand that different cultures and societies provide unique contexts for human experience; (2) to analyze and appreciate the ways in which norms and values differ across cultures and societies; and (3) to encourage pluralistic perspectives.*

*Courses satisfying this requirement shall reach beyond the perspectives of mainstream American culture and the Western tradition. They may focus on the peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the Middle East; the descendants of those peoples living in North America; other minorities in Western industrial societies; and Native Americans. Since a sensitivity to social and cultural diversity is advanced by an understanding of the dynamics of power in modern societies, courses that focus on the differential life experiences of women outside the mainstream of American culture, minorities outside the mainstream of American culture, and the poor also come within the scope of this requirement.*
The current diversity requirement is also guided by a revision to the General Education requirements outlined in Sen.Doc. 01-035 (2001) stipulating that:

*Of the two diversity courses that students must complete, one focus on diversity in the United States, and one on diversity outside the United States. We would designate these as “Domestic Diversity” and “Global Diversity” requirement to be in effect for those entering 2002.*

Recommendations

The General Education Council recommends that diversity requirement be amended to more specifically address the expectations for courses meeting the US and Global diversity requirement, and that the overall language guiding the learning outcomes and expectations for the diversity requirement be revised to reflect more contemporary and current understandings of diversity. The Council values the learning opportunities afforded to students through the dual-designation system and the system whereby students explore issues related to diversity within specific disciplinary contexts. However, the Council also proposes that students be provided with a more focused and in-depth exploration of diversity issues within the context of a formative, credited, stand-alone diversity course.

This proposed General Education Diversity requirement is consistent with the University’s mission to support students in developing the “knowledge, habits of mind, and tools necessary for a rewarding and productive life,” “to develop their cultural competence,” and does so by “draw[ing] from students’ diverse experiences and perspectives...and challeng[ing] them to demonstrate their inclusiveness and mutual respect” ("What defines a UMass Education" available http://www.umass.edu/chancellor/strategic-planning/phase-ii-planning).

In reviewing the current requirement and in responding to the concerns voiced by multiple constituencies on campus, the General Education Council proposes that the Diversity requirement be amended to include an additional 4-credit course requirement taken by students in their first year on campus (referred to as the “Diversity [DIV] Course”). The purpose of this course is to serve as a formative experience shared by all students that would allow them to develop an understanding of their own diverse experiences and perspectives, as well as the perspectives of others, and would provide students with a framework to apply this understanding within different disciplinary contexts.

Currently students meet their General Education requirements, in part, by taking 16 credits within Social World (4 credits in AL/AT, 4 credits in HS, 4 credits in SB, and an additional 4 credits in either AL, AT, SB, I, or SI). GEC proposes that the Social World requirements be revised to include 4 credits in AL/AT, 4 credits in HS, 4 credits in SB, and 4 credits in Diversity (i.e., the DIV Course). The 4-credit DIV requirement would replace the current fourth (or “wildcard”) course in Social World and so would not lead to an increase in the number of credits students would be required to take to meet their General Education requirements. The Council views this as offering a benefit to students; however, we also
recognize that, as an unintended consequence Interdisciplinary (I) and Science Interdisciplinary (SI) courses would no longer meet the fourth course required within the Social World area. Several I and SI courses hold dual designations (e.g., IU or IG) and would continue to be an option for meeting the Diversity requirement. Departments that offer courses with a single I or SI designation may wish to consider converting these courses to a different Social World designation. Students are still required to take two courses in Social and Cultural Diversity, one that focuses on issues related to the United States, and a second that focuses on issues related to a Global context. While a small number of courses exist that hold only a U or G designation, students typically fulfill this requirement by taking a 4-credit course that holds a joint designation (e.g., HSG or ALU). The current G and U course requirements would remain in effect.

Proposed Learning Outcomes for the Diversity Requirement

The Diversity Requirement prepares students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to appreciate, understand and interact effectively with people from different cultures and backgrounds and is designed to provide students with the experiences needed to meet the following learning outcomes:

1. Appreciate, value, and respect diverse social, cultural, and political perspectives.

2. Demonstrate an understanding of and critically analyze how the legacies of marginalization, prejudice, and discrimination impact current power relations and the life circumstances of people often marginalized by society because of race, ethnicity, language, religion, class, ability, sexuality, and gender.

3. Critically analyze their own perspectives and identities, develop an awareness of implicit biases, and understand how these perspectives and biases have been shaped by power relations within social and institutional contexts.

4. Demonstrate an understanding of identity differences and engage in conversations based on those differences.

5. Explore and construct questions that reflect multiple identity perspectives to develop a more complex understanding of the world.

These learning outcomes will be supported through the DIV Course, required of all entering students, and the U and G courses currently offered as part of the General Education curriculum.

DIV Course

GEC recognizes that the learning objectives associated with the proposed 4-credit DIV course may be addressed through diverse content and disciplines, and encourages course proposals from any academic unit. Given that this course is foundational, it is expected that
the content should provide a critical analysis of diversity issues as they relate to students’ lives. Regardless of the disciplinary content, DIV courses should utilize pedagogical structures that:

1. Support student discussion and collaboration within small group contexts in order to provide opportunities for students to listen to and learn from each other and voice their concerns and experiences.

2. Provide opportunities to engage in self-reflection with a particular focus on formative experiences, one’s personal history as it relates to social history, and an awareness of one’s relationship to others.

3. Facilitate ongoing engagement with content that reflects diverse perspectives and challenges stereotypes.

4. Develop written and oral communication skills by requiring a minimum of 10 pages of writing, ideally occurring throughout the semester rather than as a final research paper, and structured opportunities for oral presentations and discussions.

The 4-credit DIV course should provide an in-depth focus on the Diversity learning outcomes in an effort to facilitate entering students’ understanding of the contexts for diversity at UMass Amherst and to provide them with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to:

• Live, learn, and work within an inclusive community
• Promote and encourage the acceptance of difference
• Be active bystanders
• Diminish the perpetuation of discrimination and oppression

Within the DIV course, issues related to diversity and the overall diversity learning outcomes will be at the forefront. The disciplinary content will provide a structure to address diversity-related issues.

**G and U Courses**

In addition to the 4-credit DIV course, the proposed diversity guidelines will retain the current structure for the uncredited U and G course requirements. As noted above, the majority of U and G courses also hold a second General Education designation. In these courses, students’ learning is expanded as they address diversity-related issues across different disciplinary areas (e.g., SB, HS, AL, and AT, among others) and within content that reflects either a focus on the United States or a Global context. This requirement supports the overall diversity learning outcomes for our students, provides a structure that diversifies the General Education curriculum, and reflects contemporary contexts. This approach allows students to apply their understanding of diversity-related issues to specific cases and content within a disciplinary area.
Given the shared formative experience provided by the DIV course, students in the U and G courses are able to explore issues related to diversity more deeply within specific content areas.

Both the G and U courses should:

1. Provoke key General Education skills of communication, critical thinking, and social perspective-taking on issues of social and cultural diversity.

2. Develop written and oral communication skills by requiring a minimum of 10 pages of writing, ideally occurring throughout the semester rather than as a final research paper, and structured opportunities for oral presentations and discussions.

3. Ensure that structures (enrollment capacity, teaching assistants, or technology) are in place to support the feedback, evaluation, and grading of writing assignments, and of assignments designed to promote critical thinking.

4. Provide activities and assignments that support critical and analytic thinking in relation to how the legacies of marginalization, prejudice, and discrimination impact current power relations and contexts for questioning the larger society and the individual’s relation to it.

5. Explore the dynamics that shape human experience, produce inequality, and inform social group differences.

Both the U and G courses are expected to support the overall learning outcomes of the diversity requirement and building on the skills and knowledge attained in the DIV course and expand students’ knowledge and skills.

The U and G designations reflect differing contexts and populations of interest:

**U Diversity Courses**

The U Diversity courses focus primarily on the timeframe and geographical locations generally understood to be “United States,” with topics not limited to a single US narrative. Questions of diversity that may be particularly relevant in the “U” focus are those of US women and people living outside gender or heterosexual norms, US groups racialized as peoples of color and/or immigrant or linguistically diverse peoples, Native American and indigenous peoples, and/or peoples who experience disadvantage based on their social/economic class, ability, religion, and/or other social groups or backgrounds marginalized by US-dominant social and cultural norms. Courses that address U are primarily (but not exclusively) focused on diversity within the US.

**G Diversity Courses**
The G Diversity courses focus primarily on global/transnational cultures and populations, and do not limit themselves to a single narrative. Issues of diversity particularly relevant to the "G" focus are those derived from experiences of global imperialism and colonialism, diaspora and migration, religious identity and conflict, cultural diffusion, the role of patriarchy and gender/sexual identity and non-conformity, economic globalization and marginalization, unequal resource allocation, ability, other social groups or backgrounds marginalized on a global basis, and challenges to global sustainability. Courses that address "G" are primarily (but not exclusively) focused on diversity outside a US framework.