I am writing to raise some concerns about the DIV proposal as a replacement for the “free choice” in our general education curriculum. Our strong preference in WGSS would be that we keep the current gen ed requirements and do not add the DIV course. We have grave reservations about the way this new requirement is currently framed. We offer our expertise as scholars from a field that has since its inception devoted itself to questions of diversity. Our recommendations include insights from scholarship on curricular innovations that have worked and those that have failed. Indeed, the proposed changes are precisely what the wealth of scholarship on diverse curricula suggests we should NOT do - i.e, teach diversity while evacuating it of any content related to inequality or politics. Indeed, we have spent the past five years overhauling our general education curriculum to respond to the last revision of the gen ed requirements--not an easy or agile process--and would ask for it to stay consistent long enough to integrate those collectively established changes over time.

Specifically, we are concerned about:

1. **Incorporating Diversity in the Curriculum:** The changes to General Education requirements over the last six years have seriously impacted student education, reducing exposure to interdisciplinary scholarship and making it possible for students to graduate from this university without taking a single literature course. Under the most recent revision, we’ve seen WGSS gen ed enrollment halved because of the more limited role of interdisciplinary education in general education. Under the new DIV proposal, students will lose the option even to take an interdisciplinary science studies course--at a time when political debates about climate change and basic science research are coming to the fore. For WGSS, as one of the primary departments on campus promoting interdisciplinary science studies and other interdisciplinary curriculum, we are deeply concerned about the elimination of SI courses in particular and the further diminution of the role of I courses. Although the gen ed committee suggests that perhaps the SI gen eds could be converted to DIV courses, there is no good fit between the learning goals. How much science can we teach, for example, under a description that we are teaching “an understanding of identity differences”? We teach Biology of Difference (an SI, U), for example, and this proposal would mean canceling that course because we are not actually doing that. On the contrary, we are asking how these identities are being produced through scientific narratives about race, sexuality, or gender. In a nation in which science is increasingly viewed in binary terms as legitimate/illegitimate, how can we not educate our students to its historical and political complexities?

2. **Operationalizing Diversity:** This opens up our wider concern: these learning goals are extremely narrow in the kinds of knowledges they index. “Identity differences,” “diverse perspectives,” “prejudice,” “multiple identities,” “microaggressions,” and “implicit bias” are, we would argue, ways of teaching terminology without politics. They are decidedly biased in how they teach the issues--promoting an individual model of managing diversity. These tools don’t allow students to understand why for example a
Trump presidency might be different from someone else—i.e., what are the structural changes that can be institutionalized through the executive, legislative and judicial branches that profoundly impact the rights and responsibilities of its citizens? They also lend themselves to vague interpretations of “tolerance” that do not ultimately shift the campus climate or culture in ways that might better meet the intentions of such goals. They offer a vocabulary for thinking about differences in race, gender, class, sexuality, gender identity, disability and the like that are decidedly sociological/psychological in epistemology, and are not amenable to other approaches to these questions. These ways of understanding difference exclude the great and wide-ranging debates on racial capitalism, settler colonialism, the carceral imaginary, epistemologies of the nonhuman, or gender as a category of analysis (rather than an identity) to the left of this formation, as well as others to their right. Our general educational curriculum does not benefit from narrow prescriptions about the kinds of conversations about race, gender, etc. to which we will introduce students.

3. **Evaluating Student Learning:** Finally and perhaps most seriously, there are significant slippages in these learning goals from intellectual work to managing students’ feelings and attitudes. There are no measurable ways to determine whether students “appreciate, value and respect diverse social perspectives.” Even if there were, there are strong intellectual and political grounds on which to reject this task. Rather than introduce students to the history of political movements, say, or vigorous intellectual debates or contested forms of analysis about the past or present, this learning goal asks us to evaluate how they feel. This disrespects our students as intellectuals and is more than a little coercive. It also threatens to encourage the false performance of liberal acceptance and tolerance at the expense of more substantive dialogue and understanding of how, and to what ends, difference is produced. Do we demand that they produce essays on whether they feel warmly about people who are different from them, or facilitate conversations about how they can be respectful to others? This—alongside the goal of producing active bystanders—seems to be very much the work of student affairs, not the academic side of the house.