

## **Social and Cultural Diversity**

### **Summary of Task Force findings on Diversity:**

There was little question from the start of the Task Force's work that UND's general education program needed to do a better job of helping students become more aware of, and more able to engage with, differing cultural and social perspectives. The Task Force agreed with findings which state that

students increasingly need to understand and work with issues arising from different dimensions of human diversity, such as age, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, language, national origin, political status, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic background [because these issues] will have important ramifications for students' personal, professional, and intellectual lives, both for the time they are students and in later life.

Despite the widespread campus (and national) support for increased attention to learning about diversity, assessment of UND's General Education program determined that the campus needed to make improvements in this area. The Longitudinal Study found that of all of the former Gen Ed goals, students felt that they were making the least progress on what was called the "World Cultures Goal." Students in the study, in fact, communicated a lot of confusion about what it would mean to have met that learning goal. The 2004 Transcript Analysis demonstrated that students took about half the number of courses addressing the cultures goal than they took addressing any other of the Gen Ed goal. These findings have been seen by faculty as particularly disheartening in the context of a campus that—for various historic and geographic reasons—may already not afford students as many opportunities to think about heterogeneity as do other college campuses.

The Task Force attempted to address these concerns by 1) Rewriting the goal to emphasize the skills, understandings, and abilities that students must develop in order to productively engage with difference. (The old "World Cultures Goal" seemed instead to understand the goal as being exposed to another culture.) 2) Adding the requirement of two special emphasis courses (6 credits): one on global diversity (G) and one on diversity in the United States (U).

The Report of the Subcommittee on Social-Cultural Diversity made these specifications to the Task Force about how these requirements should be met:

Courses validated for this requirement shall demonstrate that subject matter, themes, frameworks, content, and activities focus on social-cultural diversity. To determine a course designation, at least 50 percent of course content must focus on "U" or "G." At least 3 credits of the diversity requirement must be met in the classroom. Students may substitute 3 credits of the 6-credit ES requirement with a significant study-abroad experience that is at least four weeks or more in duration and that involves significant exposure to and interaction with the society and cultures in the area. Students may also substitute 3 credits of a significant experiential-learning academic experience that meets the definition or criteria used by the Center for Community Engagement.

## **New Essential Studies Diversity Goal:**

You should be able to demonstrate understanding of social-cultural diversity and use that understanding to address issues, solve problems, and shape civic, personal, and professional behavior.

Rationale: Because the United States is becoming a more diverse society in a multicultural world, it is important to understand and appreciate social and cultural differences; given the North Dakota Century Code designation of a special mission for UND in education about American Indian cultures and histories, it is especially appropriate for students to consider courses in that area.

You will improve your understanding of and appreciation for diversity when your ES courses ask you to practice the following:

- Use concepts like culture, difference, and diversity.
- Recognize your own diversity in relationship to the larger society, and understand and respect the social-cultural diversity of others.
- Analyze and apply knowledge about diversity to domestic and global issues.

**The following criteria are meant to help faculty members, from a variety of disciplines, design a Global Diversity (G) course or a United States Diversity (U) course. These criteria will also give the GER committee a set of standards for the purposes of validation and revalidation:**

Recognizing that the understanding of diversity is intimately tied to the concepts of culture, race, language, identity, and inter-group dynamics, as well as their applications to complex situations, Cultural Diversity courses place their focus on the theoretical discussion of these concepts as well as the in-depth analysis of complex situations through these concepts.

Culture in this context is seen as the totality of the interconnected religious, spiritual, political, economic, ecological, social, material, recreational, educational, and linguistic values and artifacts of a group of people that defines itself and is defined by others as having a distinct culture.

Assignments for Cultural Diversity courses require students to demonstrate their grasp of the theoretical concepts, but also require them to show that they can use these concepts respectfully to analyze both culture in the real world and the rhetoric about culture. Since culture has become a keyword for political stakeholders, such a critical analysis is indispensable.

To qualify as a Global Diversity class (G) or a United States Diversity class (U), the syllabus will demonstrate sustained attention to all of the following *numbered* criteria within a global framework or within the framework of the United States:

1. Clearly state the purpose of the course as the investigation of cultural diversity.

2. Demonstrate in-depth, analytical discussions about some of the following:
  - the concepts of culture: for example
    - the possibilities and difficulties in understanding other cultures
    - the differences between culture and race
    - the connections and differences between culture and identity
    - the connections and differences between culture and history and tradition
    - the differences between tolerance and respect and understanding
  - similarities and differences between cultures
  - the real-world consequences of these concepts, both historically and contemporarily, i.e., systems of power and domination, marginalization and oppression, unequal distribution of resources, colonialism, and so on.
  - global cultural interactions, or cultural interactions in the United States, both historically and contemporarily.
3. Demonstrate in-depth, focused attention to illustrating and analyzing these concepts in complex contexts, preferably including different cultural groups.
4. Demonstrate that assignments emphasize some of the following:
  - the cultural analysis of complex situations
  - the use of the theoretical concepts of culture as applied to real-world situations
  - reflexivity of the students in terms of their own culture and their position in relationship to other cultures
  - the improvement of thinking and writing skills as applied to complex problems
  - the ability of students to think through problems of cultural difference and decide when and when not such difference can be accepted.

Note: Since the discussion of culture and diversity can only be accomplished through complex discussions, courses *cannot* argue to earn a U or G designation for less than three (3) credit hours.

Courses with other special emphasis designations (O, A, Q, and C) may not qualify as diversity special emphasis courses.

Students must take 3 credit hours of U and 3 credit hours of G.

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