

Proposal for a Diversity Course Requirement
Approved by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee on May 6, 2003;
Approved by the Senate on March 23, 2004

The notion that Loyola undergraduates should take at least one course focused on human diversity is in ways so consistent with the basic values of Loyola that it seems as though the decision to implement such a requirement should be straightforward. Indeed, not only has the institution adopted as an educational mission the need to challenge students to “learn, lead, and serve in a diverse and changing world,” but also it has made a formal commitment to promoting among students an “awareness of and sensitivity toward” human differences related to a wide variety of sociodemographic categories in its diversity statement. Courses focused on the complexities of human diversity provide students with the sustained, focused, and intellectually rigorous experiences necessary to deepen their understanding of cultural and individual differences. Members of the Loyola community have argued that knowledge in this area is a prerequisite to effective and ethical participation in local, national, and global affairs. The potential value of a diversity course requirement is further reflected in the widespread adoption of such a requirement in outstanding colleges and universities across the United States, including a majority of the College’s benchmark institutions. In fact, a recent study conducted by the American Association of Colleges and Universities found that 24% of the 543 colleges and universities surveyed required students to take not one but *two* diversity-related courses (Humphreys, 2000). This trend speaks to both the growing need for citizens who can think about human differences in a mature and sophisticated manner, and, on a more practical level, the feasibility of adding such a requirement to undergraduate curricula.

Although these arguments would seem to make the adoption of a diversity course requirement at Loyola uncontroversial, they do not address two interrelated questions on which diverse members of the Loyola community have had difficulty agreeing: (1) What do we mean when we refer to “diversity”? (2) What are the educational goals that we hope to achieve through a diversity course requirement? The lack of consensus regarding these questions likely reflects a number of variables, including academic discipline and scholarly interests. However, despite disagreements on this issue, many faculty, administrators, and students believe that a diversity course requirement could significantly further the realization of College educational aspirations. The purpose of this proposal is to articulate a vision of the diversity requirement that is sufficiently general to accommodate a variety of academic disciplines yet sufficiently specific to reflect the diversity-related values and educational aims espoused by the College.

A proposed definition of “diversity” for a course requirement

Members of the Loyola community have noted that fundamental aspects of human diversity, such as diversity of ideas, are at the center of the liberal arts. There is no question that the undergraduate curriculum as a whole exposes all Loyola students to this type of diversity. What components of human diversity merit an additional course requirement, then? To answer this question, it is critical to identify the broad diversity-related values and educational aims that have been articulated by the College. The following passages from the diversity sections of the Loyola Core Values Statement are very useful in this regard:

The College is of course committed to challenging and repudiating prejudice in all its forms, and to encouraging global and international awareness, both within and outside of its curricula (p. 4)

Educationally, Loyola strives to foster global awareness, as well as a sense of solidarity with and care for all who struggle for justice (p. 5).

In addition, the Loyola College Undergraduate Educational Aims include the following:

- recognition of the inherent value and dignity of each person, and therefore an awareness of, sensitivity toward, and respect for the differences of race, gender, ethnicity, national origin, culture, sexual orientation, religion, age, and disabilities;
- awareness of the structural sources, consequences, and responsibilities of privilege;
- awareness of the global context of citizenship and an informed sensitivity to the experiences of peoples outside of the United States;
- awareness of the multiplicity of perspectives that bear on the human experience, and the importance of historical, global and cultural context in determining the way we see the world.

These statements make clear that we strive to increase students' interest in and understanding of three aspects of human diversity: diversity related to differences across nations and world cultures, diversity related to issues of justice, injustice, and oppression, and domestic diversity related to the experiences of minority groups in the United States. These three aspects of diversity appear to be fundamental to the values articulated by the College, yet steps have not yet been taken to ensure that all Loyola students are challenged to think about these aspects of diversity in the classroom. Accordingly, it is proposed that students be required to take a course focusing on at least one of the three following aspects of human diversity:

1. Global Awareness Courses related to this aspect of diversity seek to increase students' awareness and understanding of cultures and nations that are often excluded in a traditional liberal arts education. The current core curriculum requires students to acquire knowledge about the worldviews, social practices, social structures, history, spiritual practices, and arts of Western cultures past and present including cultures and nations outside of the United States. However, students are not required to take courses that include substantial exposure to cultures and nations that fall outside of this Western tradition. Global awareness courses would foster in students the globally comprehensive perspective that is described as a characteristic of excellence in the Loyola Core Values Statement. These courses will focus on cultures that fall outside of the boundaries of a liberal arts education in the Western intellectual tradition, including, but not limited to, those in Asia, Pacific Islands, Africa, Central/Latin America, and Australia/New Zealand. Global awareness courses can also focus on the interaction between these cultures and Western cultures.¹
2. Justice Awareness Courses related to this aspect of human diversity seek to increase students' awareness and understanding of justice and injustice. The Core Values Statement at Loyola states that the "pursuit of justice continues to form and shape both the educational mission and daily dealings of life in Jesuit institutions" (p.5). Justice awareness courses would serve the cause of justice by fostering in students the ability to think in a sophisticated manner about the distinctive life and thought of those subject to injustice, and/or by addressing issues of injustice through the examination of oppression, discrimination, prejudice, stigmatization, and privilege.

These courses can explore themes of justice and injustice from any number of perspectives, including, but not limited to, historical, philosophical, theological, literary, psychological, sociological, political, economic, and legal. Such courses can focus on diverse areas of inquiry, including investigation of the meaning of justice and injustice, the effects of justice and injustice, processes through which justice and injustice are maintained, and factors related to past and present social change efforts.

3. Domestic Diversity Awareness Courses related to this aspect of human diversity seek to increase students' cultural awareness and/or competency in relation to the experiences of minority groups in the United States. A minority group can be defined as a distinct segment of the population with all of the following characteristics: (a) occupying a non-dominant position in society; (b) having certain characteristics (identity), or culture (ethnic, religious, linguistic) which distinguishes it from the rest of the population; and (c) possessing a sense of solidarity or will to safeguard these characteristics.² Courses fulfilling this requirement will consider the political, cultural, economic, and social significance of class, gender, sexuality, religion, disability, age, or race, or ethnicity, and will explore the process by which distinctive American cultures have been created and either are or are not sustained.

Which courses would satisfy the diversity requirement?

Decisions about which courses fulfill the diversity requirement would be based on the degree to which course content focuses on global awareness, justice awareness, or domestic diversity awareness. It is proposed that these decisions be made by a subcommittee of the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC) with faculty representatives from each of the four curricular areas in the College and, in a nonvoting advisory capacity, the ex officio student member of the UCC and the Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs and Diversity. What follows are procedures for making such determinations.

1. The department through which the course is offered will submit the course syllabus and supporting materials to the UCC subcommittee (UCCS). These materials should indicate that the course features a *substantial* focus on global, justice, or domestic diversity awareness, as defined above.
 - The focus on global, justice, or domestic diversity awareness should not be merely a small component of the course (e.g., two lectures) but should be present throughout more than one-half of the course.
 - This focus should be reflected in the course description, assignments, evaluation methods, readings, and weekly topics.
 - It is important to provide evidence that the course truly requires students to reflect on and demonstrate understanding of issues related to at least one of the three aspects of diversity described above.
2. Members of the UCCS will evaluate the course materials and make a preliminary determination.
 - If, in the judgment of the UCCS, the course meets the criteria for counting as a diversity course, then this positive evaluation will be sent to the Department Chair (and other parties as necessary).

- If a negative judgment is made, then an explanation and recommendation will be sent to the Department Chair (and other parties as necessary). Courses receiving a negative decision will be reconsidered if feedback from the UCCS is incorporated into the course design.

How should this diversity requirement be implemented?

A decision process will be established to determine whether the College is prepared to offer sufficient diversity requirement courses to accommodate the undergraduate student body. It is proposed that the UCCS work with departments to fulfill the following criteria:

1. In the first semester of implementation, a sufficient number of sections of diversity requirement courses must be offered to accommodate 15% of all students to whom the requirement applies. Of these sections, there must be a sufficient number that satisfy a core requirement to accommodate 10% of all students to whom the diversity requirement applies.
2. A similar level of availability of diversity requirement courses must be ensured in subsequent semesters through the efforts of the UCCS in collaboration with department chairs, the Records Office, the Center for Academic Services and Support, and the Deans.
3. Diversity requirement courses must be offered by a minimum of six departments, each offering at least one such course per year.

When the UCCS has determined that it is possible to meet these criteria, a diversity requirement will be established requiring every Loyola undergraduate student to complete at least one global awareness, justice awareness, or domestic diversity awareness course. Courses fulfilling the diversity requirement could also count toward core or major requirements.

Three years after the start of the implementation of the diversity requirement the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will undertake a review of the implementation of this requirement and report to the Senate.

Five years after a course has been approved, the UCCS will review course materials and assessment data relating to the extent that the course meets the objectives of the diversity requirement, and recertify the course for another five-year period.

References

Humphreys, D. (2000, October). National survey finds diversity requirements common around the country. *Diversity Digest*. Retrieved from www.diversityweb.org/Digest/F00/survey.html.

//

¹ Some examples may help to clarify the nature of the Global Awareness definition. A course focusing on the interaction of European and Slavic influences on Russia might well count as a Global Awareness course, but one focusing on Russia as a Western nation would be unlikely to count. Similarly, a course focusing on the Middle East might well count if it were on Islamic culture but probably would not count if it were on the Old Testament (which plays a major role in the Western intellectual tradition). Consistent with the emphasis on *global* awareness, subcultures in the United States (e.g., African Americans) would not be covered under this global awareness requirement unless there was a substantial focus on connections to cultures of origin (e.g., African cultures).

² From the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) 1995 "Global Cultural Diversity Conference", 26-28 April, Sydney, Australia.