

To: Chris LaLonde, Director of General Education
From: Department of Political Science
Date: October 1, 2020
Re: Alternative proposal for the DEI general education course

The Political Science department met to discuss the DEI general education category and its proposed learning outcomes that were distributed at Faculty Assembly. We have a number of concerns with the learning outcomes and in general that summarize our departmental discussion on this (detailed below). I'd like to clarify that the concerns/critiques touch on several topics. As faculty who teach and research the politics of identity, we have some concerns about our learning outcomes potentially essentializing or reifying identity. Our concerns also in part address what students and system think might be the result of including a GE category, and the challenge of structural transformation in the absence of resources.

We also include two alternatives. The first alternative may look familiar. We proposed something similar in 2014 during the last round of general education revision. At the time I think FA supported the idea in principle, but it was clear that there were no resources to allocate to the proposal. Since then however, our campus (with some new leadership) has allocated resources to a first-year seminar program and to DEI.

What this proposal is:

- Good faith attempt--thank you for putting this on our agenda!

Our concern is that this proposal is not:

- Systemically and/or structurally transformative
 - o Zero funding allocated = no material commitment to realize vision
 - o *Real equity costs*
- Culturally transformative
 - o "Hoops" versus "horizons"
 - § Paper certifications will never address deep-seated problems
- Demonstrably aware of extant curricular programming and faculty commitments
 - o No acknowledgement of unevenly distributed faculty expertise on DEI
 - § Research, teaching, mentorship
 - o No acknowledgement of unevenly distributed *visible* faculty labor on DEI
 - § Research, teaching, mentorship
 - o No acknowledgement of unevenly distributed *invisible* faculty labor on DEI
 - § Mentorship especially, which translates into research and teaching
- Rooted in scholarship
 - o Stated learning objectives show little grasp of relevant knowledge
 - § LO 1 vastly oversimplifies the politics of identity. This doesn't affirm difference, but rather creates a framework of binary opposition that is likely to perpetuate racism and discrimination as the "other" of a normalized liberal toleration. The emphasis on "analysis" is meant to imply critique; however, that doesn't need to be true

§ LO 2 essentializes identity. What about difference and contestation within identity groups? What about struggles against identity as such, or at least to make it more malleable, plural and fluid? In addition, the language of “marginalized groups” can be problematic. Can a *student* fulfill the DISJ requirement through white grievance of a marginalized group like the Oath Keepers? Could an *instructor* design their course that way?

- o Unprofessional at best, actually harmful at worst
 - § Loosely structured definitions of “identity” and “diversity” create conditions contradicting the spirit of the proposal

- Implementable or outcome-based
 - o Dispersed responsibility is unfocused and counterproductive
 - § Treating DEI like a dorm-room appliance – when it’s *everyone’s* job to care for it, it’s *no one’s* job to care for it

What we propose as an alternative:

Option A: First year seminar | Transfer seminar

We propose the addition of a three-credit general education seminar to be taken by first year and transfer students during their first year on campus. This course will not (or need not) be housed in the student’s major. The course goal is to introduce students to theoretical and intellectual inquiry on practical, real-world issues and themes. The interdisciplinary seminar will address issues of diversity, equity and inclusion from multiple perspectives and using the tools and lenses of multiple disciplines.

Practicalities:

- Eighty 19-person sections would serve 1,520 students over the course of a year
- These courses could be team-developed so that there are “master” modules that can be incorporated into each of the courses taught in multiple modalities.
- The courses could also be team-taught, where one faculty member teaches the same three-week module, e.g., in a variety of sections over the course of a semester

Student Learning Outcomes

LO 1: Be able to describe the legal, cultural, political, and historical practices by which identities are socially constructed and enacted

LO 2: Be able to demonstrate an understanding of the ways that power differentials operate, are experienced, are reinforced, and are contested, at individual, group, community, institutional, and global levels

Option B: Revised Learning Outcomes

LO 1: Be able to describe the legal, cultural, political, and historical practices by which identities are socially constructed and enacted

LO 2: Be able to demonstrate an understanding of the ways that power differentials operate, are experienced, are reinforced, and are contested, at individual, group, community, institutional, and global levels