

Proposed Changes to the Cultural Diversity Component of the Culture-Centered Inquiry Requirement

Motion

To expand the definition of, and thus the number of courses fulfilling, the Cultural Diversity component of the Culture-Centered Inquiry requirement.

Rationale

The Goals for Student Learning and Development call for our students to “understand social and cultural diversity in national and global contexts,” to “interact effectively and collaboratively with individuals and across social identities,” and to “interrogate one’s own values in relation to those of others, across social and cultural differences.” NSSE data has identified areas of concern in the degree to which we pursue these goals within the curriculum. For example, when students responded to question (1e) “Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments,” the answers revealed perceived decreases in that content over time (between student cohorts in 2003 and 2010), and increasing divergence in the experiences reported by seniors at Skidmore and peer institutions.

Currently, students take two courses to complete the Culture-Centered Inquiry requirement: one course in a foreign language or literature, and one course from either the “Non-Western Cultures” or “Cultural Diversity” cluster. There has been discussion in some quarters of expanding the current Culture-Centered Inquiry Requirement for several years, and CIGU has endorsed “A Survey and Analysis of Cultural Diversity Courses at Skidmore College,” a December 2009 report that urged CEPP to consider a proposal expanding the requirement. We can accomplish this goal more effectively if students confront these issues explicitly in a general education requirement that provides greater depth of exploration and offers sufficient curricular flexibility. Courses that meet the current CD/NW requirement, when coupled with current courses in the curriculum that address other issues of diversity, will offer students a deeper opportunity to engage issues of difference from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

We believe the aforementioned Goals will be better supported when diversity is more broadly defined. The guiding principle behind the creation of the existing Cultural Diversity courses was straightforward: “In completing a Cultural Diversity course students are encouraged to compare at least two markedly different cultures, one of which must be non-Western in origin”; however, the emphasis placed on non-Western culture(s), or on a Western/non-Western binary, are only two satisfactory ways to determine whether a course should be provided the “Cultural Diversity” designation. There are both historical and contemporary examples of two or more fundamentally Non-Western groups that may see one another as “markedly different.” Contemporary and increasingly transnational scholarship and pedagogy also call for revisiting this principle. Several fields (including Africana Studies, Caribbean Studies, and Latin American Studies) illuminate intra-group tensions along fault lines of class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality that run as deep as those that cross racial lines. Further, a survey of existing Cultural Diversity courses suggests that *race* and *ethnicity* are synonymous with societal difference; however, issues of societal difference also can be analyzed in terms of (*dis*)*ability*, *ethnicity*, *gender*, *nationality*, *race*, *religion*, *sexuality*, and/or *socio-economic class*, both in national and international contexts. The proposed revision to the Culture-Centered Inquiry guidelines should reflect this fact, both by preserving the Non-Western components of the requirement and by including the growing number of courses that apply an intersectional analytical frame that explicitly interrogates relationships among gender, race, class, sexuality, religion and other variables.

Proposed Changes to the Cultural Diversity Component of the Culture-Centered Inquiry Requirement

Proposed language for the Culture-Centered Inquiry Requirement

Students fulfill this requirement by completing one course in a foreign language plus a second course designated as Cultural Diversity.

- Foreign Literature and Language: All students must choose one course at the appropriate level in a foreign language or foreign literature in its non-translated form.
- Cultural Diversity: Students must fulfill the requirement by successfully completing one 3- or 4-credit course designated as Cultural Diversity (CD) by the end of the junior year.

Proposed language for the Cultural Diversity cluster of courses

To complete a Cultural Diversity course, students are required to **examine** a range of social identities in order to develop a greater appreciation for and understanding of differences between and among social groups, to interact effectively across social identities, to **grapple with** their own values across social and cultural differences, and to operate as citizens in a diverse and interconnected world. Students are required to choose a course from one of the following categories, which shall

- a) focus on culture(s) that are neither European, nor derived from European culture, concerning the civilizations of Asia, Africa, Oceania or the indigenous pre-European cultures of Australia and the Western Hemisphere. Students may focus on a single dimension of the culture as an organizing principle by comparing it to the area's broader cultural context. In a comparative course, students must study the non-Western society in depth; in a historical course, the central focus should neither be on civilizations from which Western culture is derived, nor on those primarily influenced by the West; or,
- b) compare at least two cultures, one of which must be non-Western in origin, such as the cultures of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the indigenous, pre-European cultures of Australia and of the Western Hemisphere. Courses concerning areas with both Western and non-Western elements such as the Near East or the Western Hemisphere must include a significant focus on non-Western culture or cultures, e.g., American Indians in the case of the Western Hemisphere, or Muslim peoples in the case of the Near East. These courses may focus on diversity in the United States or on intercultural relations in other contexts; however, at least one of the groups examined will have non-Western origins. Students can concentrate on interactions between culturally distinct people in a socio-political context, including non-Western diasporic populations. There may also be a focus on the cross-cultural influences between Western and non-Western peoples; or,
- c) address **as the primary focus of the course** one or more of these social identity variables in historical or contemporary contexts: (dis)ability, ethnicity, gender, nationality, race, religion, sexuality, and/or socio-economic class. Courses might focus on a single group or might undertake comparisons in either a national or international context.

Students can satisfy the requirement through any courses recognized by the Registrar as Cultural Diversity, including courses in approved study-abroad programs. All courses approved as counting towards the current Non-Western and Cultural Diversity requirement as of the fall 2012 semester will continue to count towards the requirement.

Proposed Changes to the Cultural Diversity Component of the Culture-Centered Inquiry Requirement

Current language for the Culture-Centered Inquiry Requirement

Students fulfill this requirement by completing one course in a foreign language plus a second course designated as either non-Western culture or cultural diversity study.

- Foreign Literature and Language: All students must choose one course at the appropriate level in a foreign language or foreign literature in its non-translated form.
- Non-Western Culture: Students may fulfill the requirement by successfully completing one 3- or 4-credit course designated as Non-Western (NW).
- Cultural Diversity Study: Students may fulfill the requirement by successfully completing one 3- or 4-credit course designated as Cultural Diversity (CD).

Current language for the Non-Western Cultures cluster of courses:

In completing a Non-Western Cultures course students are required to study culture(s) that are neither European, nor derived from European culture.

- a. The students may focus on a particular dimension of a culture or culture-area (e.g., social institutions, artistic productions, religious beliefs, historical experiences) as an organizing principle, but that dimension must be continuously placed in reference to others that also significantly shape the culture(s) in question;
- b. If the context for these courses is comparative and cross-cultural in nature the students must study in depth a culture, cultures, or culture area; such comparative courses will be focused on a small number of cultures;
- c. The NW course will normally include the cultures of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the indigenous, pre-European cultures of Australia and of the Western Hemisphere. Courses concerning areas with both Western and non-Western elements such as the Near East or the Western Hemisphere must include a significant focus on non-Western culture or cultures, e.g., American Indians in the case of the Western Hemisphere, or Muslim peoples in the case of the Near East;
- d. If the context for the course material is historical in nature, the students will not deal primarily with cultures from which Western culture is derived, e.g., ancient Greece or ancient Israel, nor with cultures that are primarily influenced by Western culture, e.g., modern Israeli, Brazilian, or Afro-American culture history, unless such a course meets criterion "c" above.

Current language for the Cultural Diversity cluster of courses:

In completing a Cultural Diversity course students are encouraged to compare at least two markedly different cultures, one of which must be non-Western in origin:

- a. Students investigate the interaction of peoples from culturally distinct origins within a given socio-political context. These courses may focus on diversity in the United States or on inter-cultural relations in other contexts. However, at least one of the groups examined will have non-Western origins;
- b. Students examine the non-Western cultural forces that are manifest in the interaction of peoples of non-Western origin with peoples of Western backgrounds, and they pay particular attention to the cross-cultural influences that shape such interactions. These forces and influences will be examined from the perspectives of the peoples involved;
- c. The socio-political context for the interaction between the groups studied need not be non-Western. Students study interactions between two populations, one of which must be non-Western in origin. These may include diasporic populations that are not traditionally considered to be Western in origin (e.g., African-Americans, Asian-Americans, South African Indians) as well as commonly included non-Western populations.