

CEPP Motion to revise the Culture-Centered Inquiry Requirement, Spring 2012

Motion

CEPP moves to expand the types of courses offered in the Culture-Centered Inquiry requirement by replacing the existing two categories of courses (“Non-Western” and “Cultural Diversity”) with one new category: “Considering Difference.” This new category (DF) will apply beginning with the class of 2017. The Culture-Centered Inquiry Requirement will continue to include one course in Foreign Language. Class years prior to 2017 can fulfill the CCI requirement with one Foreign Language course and one course which meets NW, CD, or DF.

Rationale

The Goals for Student Learning and Development, endorsed by the faculty in 2009, call for 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.” The Strategic Plan articulates related goals: we want our students to “[interact] with persons whose backgrounds are different from theirs - seeing difference as a positive feature and knowing how to forge relationships that span what once might have constituted divides within the human community”. Diverse sources of information, including exit interviews with graduating seniors, longitudinal data from NSSE and CHAS surveys, and a 2009 report from Director of Intercultural Studies, strongly suggest that these goals must be addressed more effectively. Redefining the Culture-Centered Inquiry requirement (“to acquire the perspective available through the study of unfamiliar cultural systems”) enables faculty to reaffirm and strengthen their commitment to the rigorous study of social and cultural difference. It ensures that every student grapples, in at least one course, with the profound intellectual and personal challenges that studying difference entails, and it provides a broader range of contexts in which this important learning can take place.

The current Culture-Centered Inquiry requirement is satisfied when students take one semester of a foreign language and one semester of either (a) a non-western course where they will study "culture(s) markedly different from their own" or (b) a cultural diversity course where they compare two markedly different cultures, one of which must be non-western in origin. This framework is unnecessarily restrictive. It excludes many aspects of cultural difference that cannot be understood in terms of a west / non-west dichotomy, and it suggests that the modes of difference most worthy of examination are those with no relation to the student’s own experience. It thereby fails to address the spirit of our new Learning Goals, which call for students to rigorously examine the self as well as the other.

This motion asks faculty to consider how Culture-Centered Inquiry courses can most effectively address our newly articulated educational aspirations. Many courses that currently fulfill the requirement will undoubtedly continue to do so, and many more will likely be introduced. The proposed review by Curriculum Committee is intended to ensure clarity, fairness and consistency.

Criteria

To acquire the perspective available through the study of unfamiliar cultural systems or positions, each student must, prior to graduation, successfully complete one course in Foreign Languages

and Literatures plus one course designated by the Curriculum Committee as satisfying the Considering Difference (DF) requirement.

To support the pursuit of an understanding of social and cultural difference, a DF course will require that students interrogate how the values of one or more groups may be situated in relation to those of other groups, across social or cultural differences, in national or international contexts, and from contemporary or historical perspectives. Courses that meet the requirement address any of these social identity variables: class, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation.

A DF course must challenge students to:

- Undertake a sustained, rigorous examination of difference in at least one specific social or cultural context
- Examine how difference is understood and expressed relationally (within a group or between groups)
- Understand how difference is maintained and/or questioned
- Question their own assumptions about difference
- Consider how their deepened understanding of difference might be applied in other academic and/or personal contexts

Implementation

CEPP recommends a phased implementation of the revised criteria. Faculty teaching existing NW and CD courses will have until December 15th, 2013, to submit their courses (as-is or revised) to the Curriculum Committee for consideration under the new criteria. The new requirement will apply beginning with the class of 2017. Class years prior to 2017 can fulfill the CCI requirement with one Foreign Language course and one course which meets NW, CD, or DF.

Faculty may submit any course for inclusion in the Considering Difference (DF) category under the new criteria with the customary deadlines for the Curriculum Committee (September 15th, 2012, for Spring 2013; December 15th, 2012, for Fall 2013). CEPP recommends that faculty begin to prepare such proposals at the first opportunity. CEPP will consult with CC and the DOF/VPAA during the 2012/3 academic year on the progress of this implementation.

After December 15th, 2013, any course intended to fulfill the DF requirement must meet the revised criteria articulated above. CEPP recommends that proposals for DF courses include an explicit statement addressing how the course meets any of the criteria for student learning articulated above if this is not readily apparent in the elements of the syllabus (topics, goals, pedagogy, experiences, assignments, etc.).

Timeline

May 2009 The Director of Intercultural Studies (Winston Grady-Willis) shares a “Survey and Analysis of Cultural Diversity Courses at Skidmore College,” recommending a revision of the Cultural Diversity requirement.

- Fall 2009 Curriculum Committee (chaired by Tim Harper) draws attention to the inconsistency between the CCI criteria and the spirit of the requirement.
- Spring 2011 CEPP and Curriculum Committee form a subcommittee to draft a revision to the Cultural Diversity portion of the Culture-Centered Inquiry requirement.
- Spring 2011 CEPP and FEC co-host a faculty forum on the proposed revision.
- June 2011 CEPP shares a revised draft with department chairs and program directors.
- August 2011 CEPP shares a revised draft with Academic Staff.
- Fall 2011 CEPP consults with the chairs and directors of departments and programs most likely to be affected by an increase in the number of requirements.
CEPP hosts a faculty forum on the second draft.
CEPP consults with all chairs and directors regarding strategies to fulfill the spirit of the requirement.
- Spring 2012 CEPP forms a new subcommittee to compose a new draft to respond to the faculty's concerns.
- Feb. 2012 CEPP shares a motion, rationale, criteria and implementation scheme at the faculty meeting.
- March 2012 CEPP hosts a faculty forum on the proposed revision.
- April 2012 CEPP presents a revised motion, rationale, criteria and implementation scheme at the faculty meeting.
- May 2012 CEPP consults with Academic Staff (pending).
- May 2012 Faculty vote (pending).