

Bridge Experience: Power and Justice

(1 course)

Students will take a course that interrogates the nature of power and justice—with a focus that may be historical, sociological, literary, anthropological, political, psychological, comparative, contemporary, philosophical, or all or some of these. The course will focus on power and justice through the lens of identity, (dis)ability, ethnicity, gender, nationality, race, religion, sexuality, and/or socio-economic class, and may also look at artistic expression and organized political action. Students should reflect on their own circumstances and how they influence knowledge acquisition and understanding. Students should interrogate their own assumptions and place them in relation to distinct cultural frameworks of power and justice. Ideally, students will take a Bridge Experience course in their second or third year.

CEPP COMMENT:

Our [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,” to “interrogate one’s own values in relation to those of others, across social and cultural differences,” and to “embrace intellectual integrity, humility, and courage.” The [Strategic Plan](#) echoes these goals in its calls for inclusive excellence. Multiple assessment tools strongly indicate these goals are not sufficiently being met, including the NSSE Reports (2010, 2013, and 2016), the Alumni Learning Census (2010, 2012, and 2015), the 2012 CIGU Report: Graduating Students of Color Exit Interviews, 2012 HEDS Alumni Survey, the 2009 Survey & Analysis of Cultural Diversity Courses at Skidmore, and the 2013 Campus Climate Assessment. For example, Skidmore students responded on the 2016 NSSE survey to “having discussions with diverse others” less often than selected peers. Seniors on the same survey indicated the institutional “emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds” also happened less often than at selected peer institutions. Intercultural knowledge and competence was an area of concern flagged from the 2012 HEDS Alumni Survey. Similarly, working with people of different cultures has been flagged as an area of concern in the Alumni Learning Census (2010, 2012, and 2015).

Coursework that addresses diversity has been shown to result in positive learning gains. Such courses have been shown to reduce racial bias in students (Denson, 2009; Chang, 2002; You and Matteo, 2013; Neville, *et al.*, 2014), especially when students took additional coursework and or workshops on diversity (Neville, *et al.* 2014). Diversity courses are associated with gains in the critical thinking skills of students as well as their ability for complex thought (Bowman, 2010). Exposure to diversity in the curriculum has been shown to increase the ability of students to understand the perspective of others, to be open to having their views

challenged, to be tolerant of differing beliefs, and to work with diverse groups of people (Gurin, Nagda, and Lopez, 2004; Hurtado, Ruiz, and Whang, 2012; Engberg and Porter, 2013). Evidence suggests the impact of diversity in the curriculum lasts well after students graduate from college (Bowman, Brandenberger, Hill, and Lapsley, 2011).

Under our current curriculum as part of the Culture-Centered Inquiry requirement, students take one course from either the Non-Western or Cultural Diversity clusters. For the graduating classes of 2013-2016, 46.0% of the graduates did not take a Cultural Diversity course during their college education and 33.5% did not take a Non-Western course. Of the 2013-2016 graduates, 59.4% took only one course combined from the Non-Western or Cultural Diversity clusters during their time at the College.

Given the assessment data and research on the impact of courses addressing diversity, we believe the Bridge Experience: Power and Justice requirement in the curriculum, along with a separate Global Cultural Perspectives requirement, will better support the aforementioned student learning goals.

Criteria for Bridge Experience

Bridge Experience courses study how unequal distributions of power affect individuals, groups, and communities. Through both overt and covert forms of discrimination, rights and privileges are not always allocated fairly. In scrutinizing the resulting inequalities, students in Bridge Experience courses examine different constructions of identity—of others and of self—and reflect upon their own positions, in their respective communities and on campus. Introspection leads to dialogue, as students work together to articulate a shared vocabulary for addressing contemporary inequality in the United States.

In order to create a truly integrated learning experience, Bridge Experience assignments require students to connect their study of identity, power, and justice to other areas of their education; e.g., their majors, their previous coursework, or their plans for the future. Projects and assignments in Bridge Experience courses require students to demonstrate an understanding of power and justice, moving from theory to application. Therefore projects and assignments will engage a public audience and may include (but are certainly not limited to):

Events/Performances

- Symposium
- Mock trials or debates

Civic Engagement

- Making a proposal-pitch-solutions-recommendations

Making/Creating

- Blogs
- Children's book
- Board game

- Poster session/Pecha Kucha (20 secs+20 slides)
- Moderated/facilitated conversation
- Talk back – Feedback and reflection
- Role playing
- Dance – with a reflective “talk-back” component
- Art gallery opening or similar to the Democracy exhibit in the Tang
- Student conference production
- An interactive event
- Museum exhibition
- World café model (splitting up groups to find solutions)
- Letter to the editor/Op-ed
- Consulting for stakeholders in town
- Ethnographic, observation, or action research
- Service learning both on and off campus
- Focused problem solving
- Citizen science project
- Focused problem solving (wicked problems, hackathon)
- Interactive Educational Program for Children/Teens
- Podcast
- Short story or other fiction
- Fashion design
- Documentary
- Short Film
- Website
- Comic Strip
- Graphic Novel
- Song
- Photo Essay
- Maker space project
- Exhibit
- Sculpture