Diverse Communities Courses: A Handbook to Guide Proposals

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Created by the 2006-07 CAPC Diverse Communities Subcommittee:

Rodney Mader, Chair
Chris Awuyah
Maria Purciello
Lynn Spradlin
Rick Voss

Steps for proposing a Diverse Communities course

Any faculty member may submit a proposal for a course to receive a Diverse Communities designation, or a "J" attribute in the course listings. Faculty are encouraged, however, to develop entirely new, or substantially new, courses that engage the values of the Diverse Communities designation rather than simply retro-fitting an existing course to match the criteria.

The Application for Proposed Diverse Communities Course will consist of three parts:

1. Narrative
2. Syllabus and schedule
3. Bibliography

Please note that these three parts are exclusive of CAPC Course Action Forms. These include the Course Approval or Modification Form and General Education Cover Sheet. The latter is necessary because a J course is *de facto* part of the General Education curriculum. As part of the Gen Ed Cover Sheet, you are asked to provide a narrative that explains how the course fits into Gen Ed, and explain how it fulfills three Gen Ed goals. There is overlap between two other elements of the Gen Ed Cover Sheet and the Application for Proposed Diverse Communities Course—the course syllabus and a bibliography—so only one of each of these is required.

A full application package, then, requires the following pieces:

1. Course Approval or Modification Form
2. General Education Cover Sheet
    a. Narrative
3. Application for Proposed Diverse Communities Course
    a. Narrative
    b. Syllabus
    c. Bibliography

Application for Proposed Diverse Communities Course

Following are guidelines for the three parts of the Application for Proposed Diverse Communities Course. Completing these steps in the application will allow the application itself to be used as an outline for producing/organizing the course content

<u>Narrative</u>

1. In the narrative, explain how structural inequalities (*in the area that is the course's topic/subject area*) are established by, and maintained by and exploited by, a dominant culture so as to marginalize certain peoples (and their concepts/practices) who in turn negotiate and contest the status and meaning of the concepts and practices of this dominant culture so as to resist and/or modify them. Focusing on "how" this is done requires a strong theoretical framework which clearly specifies the nature and workings of relations between peoples, power and structures.
    a. Do not place emphasis on cataloguing "differences" in practices and/or concepts (except as evidence of structural inequalities' existence and operations).
2. In the narrative, emphasize how a particular practice/concept achieves status as the accepted standard, thereby marginalizing others. Also, emphasize the mechanisms and

systems for maintaining and exploiting that status so that those with other practices/concepts are prevented from attaining power in that arena.

3. In the narrative, describe how institutions and practices are/become the products of structural inequalities (again in terms of the topic/subject of the course), and how these "products" are used by the dominant culture to subjugate the "others" by reinforcing schemes of oppression *(in matters that are the subject/topic of the course*).
4. In the narrative, explain, from a marginalized people's perspective, the modes and practices of resistance and negotiation by those marginalized peoples to the prevailing concepts/practices that are determined by the dominant culture.

<u>Syllabus and schedule</u>

1. In the syllabus, provide a detailed explanation of the course and its objectives. The syllabus should adhere to all of the criteria established by University Policy (and sent out before the beginning of each semester by the Provost's office).
    a. Diverse Communities courses should also be clearly identified as Diverse Communities courses, and should include General Education statements, objectives, and the ways that the course fulfills General Education goals.
2. In the schedule, clearly indicate the theories that inform the class work at any given point (week, unit, etc.).
3. In the assignments, clearly indicate the ways that assignments embody or put into practice the theories of oppression indicated in the narrative.

<u>Bibliography</u>

1. The Bibliography should include the major works in the field that identify the approach(es) used in the course, as well as any further works that inform your ideas or pedagogy.

J-Course Objectives for guiding the syllabus and course content:

1. Students will be able to identify, compare, and differentiate critical issues related to historically marginalized groups;
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to effectively apply theoretical framework(s) to analyze structural inequities relative to groups/content studied;
3. Students will be able to articulate an informed and reasoned openness to differences related to groups studied;
4. Students will be able to assess and evaluate broad social policies and practices in light of the university's goal of graduating students who are committed to creating a just and equitable society.

Common Problems

1. An Exclusive Emphasis on "Differences"

problem: A listing or description of different practices—those of the dominant peoples versus those of marginalized peoples—is the only manifestation of the contest around standard practices and resistance to them.

Cataloguing these differences is just the first step in understanding them. Listing differences should be secondary to educating students about how these differences are created and exploited by the dominant culture (to establish and maintain dominance), and how the characteristics prescribed/established by the dominant culture are resisted and negotiated by marginalized groups.

solution: Provide a theoretical explanation for HOW the noted differences arise, HOW and WHY these differences are embraced/dismissed/quashed by a dominant culture, HOW these differences reflect and rely upon structural inequalities to maintain the status quo, HOW these structural inequalities and resulting dominance are resisted and negotiated by marginalized groups, and HOW these differences are a manifestation of the competition for authority.

This solution requires a strong foundation in theory (see the next section).

2. Lack of Explicit Theory

problem: "Piles" of facts (typically about "difference") are presented, but no theoretical framework for understanding how these differences arise, how they operate (to dominate and/or resist), and what sustains them is provided.

Without a theoretical framework, students do not know "how to think about what." As a result, students can be fooled into thinking that "knowing differences" is the same as understanding the creation and function of differences for purposes of marginalizing peoples and of resisting marginalization.

solution: Theory is necessary in order to show students HOW hegemony, oppression, and structural inequities are linked so as to guide them to an understanding of how differences are more than simple distinctions between behaviors/practices/cultures.

Diverse Communities courses are not meant to be courses in theory. Classes centered on theoretical debates or nuances of any chosen theory are not the committee's intent. Rather, the committee is concerned that there be some guiding framework to help students understand what they see, read, and hear. An appropriate theory can be simplified to the level of the course and the students' capabilities.

Theory is a set of organizational principles (formally stated) of well-specified relations between well-defined phenomena. Theory tells students how a dominant practice emerges, creates structural inequalities, exploits those structural inequalities to marginalize other practices, and maintain its dominance.

There are many theories available to applicants. Some useful theories from various disciplines include:

- Feminism
- Functionalism
- Critical Race Theory
- Marxism

- Post-colonialism
- Postmodernism
- Queer Theory
- Social Conflict Theory
- Social Stratification Theory
- Structural Functionalism
- Symbolic Interaction Theory

Proposals should include specific information about their theoretical approach in the narrative, and should also include specific references to the theory in the syllabus and course schedule.

3. A Lack of Correspondence Between Narrative and Syllabus

problem: The narrative includes a brief mention of a theory to be employed, but there are no readings or class time dedicated to explaining the theory; OR the narrative mentions the marginalized groups covered in the course, but readings do not address the groups and the manners by which they are marginalized and resist; OR class work, projects, or assignments do not match the issues covered in the narrative.

solution: These problems (most likely) stem from trying to “shoehorn” diverse community requirements into what a course already does, making the issues of diverse communities “fit” the course rather than modifying the course around the diverse communities’ issues. One solution is to step back and re-envision the course, eliminating what doesn’t fit the terms of the J-course, and adding elements that might update or offer alternatives to existing approaches.

(Much of the material collected above was written by former J-course committee members, particularly Jake Lewandowski.)

Key Terms

Here are explanations of some of the key terms used by the Diverse Communities program.

diverse communities perspective: A perspective that includes sensitivity to the historical, cultural, and ideological sources of structural inequality and of unequal privilege, as well as the ability to understand a situation or issue from the perspective of someone in a historically marginalized group. This includes but isn't limited to the ability to understand the modes and practices of resistance and negotiation by those marginalized peoples to the prevailing concepts or practices that are determined by the dominant culture.

historically marginalized groups: those groups of people who have been historically and systematically excluded from advantage, or oppressed by a dominant group. Categories of marginalization have included race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability, and immigrant status.

reasoned openness: an attitude that includes acknowledging the viewpoints of others, approaching them with objectivity, and understanding the factual bases of differences in power between dominant and marginalized groups. In addition, a reasoned openness to diversity includes valuing the experiences and perspectives of historically marginalized peoples.

structural inequality**:** a process and a set of institutional relationships by which groups are historically and systematically excluded from advantage or oppressed by a dominant group. These inequalities are established and maintained by the dominant group, which results in the marginalization of other peoples and their concepts or practices. These marginalized groups in turn negotiate and contest the status and meaning of the concepts and practices of the dominant group.

Diverse Communities Course Proposal Assessment Matrix

This is the matrix used by the committee to evaluate proposals.

1) Narrative:	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**
Explanation of which historically marginalized groups (based on gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexuality, etc.) are substantively studied	Criterion not addressed	Criterion is mentioned but not adequately developed	Criterion is discussed but not in a substantive manner	Criterion is discussed in a substantive manner
Explanation of how theoretical framework of the course provides an analysis of structural inequities	Criteria are not addressed	Criteria are mentioned but not adequately developed	One element is addressed but not both theoretical framework and analysis of structural inequities	Criteria are incorporated in a substantive manner
Explanation of how the course fosters an informed and reasoned openness to, and understanding of differences	Criterion is not addressed	Criterion is addressed in a superficial manner	Criterion is addressed, but not in a substantive manner	Criterion is addressed in a substantive manner
Explanation of how the course furthers the university's goal of graduating students who are committed to creating a just and equitable society	Criterion is not addressed	Criterion is addressed in a superficial manner, e.g., there is mention of university goals, but links to course objectives is unclear or undeveloped	Criterion is addressed, but not in a substantive manner	Criterion is addressed in a substantive manner and is transparent in course objectives and/or assignments
2) Syllabus and Course Outline:				
Required readings reflect the approaches listed above	Criterion is not addressed	Criterion is addressed, but not transparent in required readings	Criterion is addressed, but not in a substantive manner	Criterion is addressed in a substantive manner
Course objectives reflect the approaches listed above	Criterion is not addressed	Criterion is addressed, but not transparent in course objectives	Criterion is addressed, but not in a substantive manner	Criterion is addressed in a substantive manner
Course organization reflects the approaches listed above	Criterion is not addressed	Criterion is addressed, but not transparent in course organization	Criterion is addressed, but not in a substantive manner	Criterion is addressed in a substantive manner
Assignments reflect the approaches listed above	Criterion is not addressed	Criterion is mentioned, but not transparent in course assignments	Criterion is addressed, but not in a substantive manner	Criterion is addressed in a substantive manner
3) Bibliography				
Reflects the instructor's preparation to teach a diverse communities course	Criterion is not reflected	Criterion is minimally reflected	Criterion is reflected, but not in a substantive manner	Criterion is reflected in a substantive manner
4) Accompanying Forms:				
General Education Cover Sheet	Not attached	Incomplete		Complete and attached
Course Approval or Modification Form	Not attached	Incomplete		Complete and attached

Developed by Diverse Communities Subcommittee, 12-16-03.