Faculty Senate Task Force on the Undergraduate Diversity Requirement

Co-Chairs
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Faculty and Faculty Council Representatives
UW Seattle College of Arts & Sciences
UW Bothell School of STEM
UW Seattle College of Arts & Sciences

Student Members
Black Student Union
Associated Students of the University of Washington Bothell
Associated Students of the University of Washington Seattle

Staff Members
UW Registrar
Undergraduate Academic Affairs

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a member of the Faculty Senate Task Force on the Undergraduate Diversity Requirement. This is an effort by faculty, staff, and students representing all three University of Washington (UW) campuses. Your participation and contribution to this very important work are highly valued. The task force will focus on review of our present diversity requirement to highlight strengths, as well as deficiencies and shortcomings, and then make recommendations for how we might change and improve or replace the UW diversity requirement, with a look to the future.

Membership of this task force was chosen in an attempt to elicit perspectives that are broad and diverse across our University while also keeping the number of members small enough to remain effective and manageable by the task force co-chairs. A variety of faculty ranks and disciplines are represented as are faculty, staff, and students of diverse backgrounds. Our students are an integral part of our community and should have a voice in major curricular changes that will affect their educational outcomes and the health of the university community as a whole.

GOAL:

The UW is committed to diversity as one of its six stated values. The diversity requirement for undergraduate students attempts to align the University’s values and curriculum. In the years since the diversity credit was passed in 2013, the University has launched its Race and Equity Initiative, making it timely to now review the requirement’s implementation, assess its effectiveness, and update its parameters to ensure alignment with the University’s commitment to confronting racism and advancing equality.

Faculty Senate leadership is charging this task force with the following goals: to examine the current diversity requirement, assess the efficacy of the current requirement in meeting student needs, and make recommendations for improving and supplementing or replacing the diversity requirement to more effectively address issues of race, equity, inclusion, power, bias, systems of oppression, and anti-racism. The task force should think broadly and be willing to break new ground and position the UW as a leader in this arena.
SCHOLASTIC REGULATIONS CHAPTER 114 ON A DIVERSITY REQUIREMENT:

Chapter 114 2.B. 1.d. of Scholastic Regulations:

“No fewer than 3 credits of courses, approved by the appropriate school or college, which focus on the sociocultural, political, and economic diversity of human experience at local, regional, or global scales. This requirement is meant to help the student develop an understanding of the complexities of living in increasingly diverse and interconnected societies. Course focus on cross-cultural analysis and communication; and historical and contemporary inequities such as those associated with race, ethnicity, class, sex and gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ability, religion, creed, age, or socioeconomic status. Course activities should encourage thinking critically on topics such as power, inequality, marginality, and social movements, and effective communication across cultural differences.”

BACKGROUND:

There was periodic debate in the Faculty Senate for over 20 years before the diversity requirement was passed in 2013. Faculty members had concerns about the definition of diversity, the number of credits required, and the enrollment capacity of existing courses that would satisfy such a requirement. The Faculty Senate thought that the current requirement addressed all of the concerns above by requiring 3 credits of coursework that can simultaneously satisfy other Area of Knowledge Requirements; employing a broad definition of diversity; having the faculty at each school, college, and campus recommend and approve courses that meet the requirement; and estimating that two-thirds of graduating seniors already met the requirement.

The requirement was meant to ensure that students develop an understanding of the complexities of living in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. Acknowledging the role that universities (including the faculty, staff, and students) play in continuing structural racism by perpetuating unwelcoming academic cultures for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students gives the UW community an invitation to uphold our values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

It has been shown faculty members' perceptions of the curriculum matter: The more that faculty members perceive the undergraduate curriculum as inclusive of diversity, the more likely they are to include diversity in their own courses. Faculty members who include diversity in their courses are much more likely to engage in effective educational practices such as emphasizing deep approaches to learning, using active classroom practices, interacting with their students, and promoting learning outcomes like intellectual and practical skills or personal and social responsibility (Banks, “Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform,” in Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives, ed. J. A. Banks and C. A. McGee Banks, 7th ed., 2010, 233–56).

It has been almost eight years since the requirement was passed and it is now time for the Faculty Senate to assess its effectiveness. The 2017-2021 Diversity blueprint (link) calls for assessing the impact of the student diversity requirement that was implemented in 2014.

Since the original passage of the diversity credit requirement, and especially during the past year, our country has seen a number of events that have brought to the fore issues of institutional and structural racism, including a pandemic that has disproportionately sickened and killed Black, Indigenous, and people of color; an economic downturn that has had an inordinate effect on BIPOC; numerous police killings of Black people, highlighting racially-biased policing; a rise in white supremacy exposing a deeply rooted legacy of racist structures; and a violent attempt to overturn the results of a presidential election by excluding the votes of states in which the ballots of Black people were critical to the outcome.

There have been significant changes in how diversity is viewed inside and outside of academia, and the current requirement may not best serve the needs of current and future students during their time at the
University and after they graduate. Appropriate changes may include increasing credit requirements and improving the quality or content of a designated diversity course to address issues of race, equity, inclusion, power, bias, systems of oppression, and anti-racism.

The chairs from the Faculty Council on Academic Standards and the Faculty Council on Multicultural Affairs recommend that this task force be created to facilitate a concerted and accelerated inquiry and change effort for the present model.

SPECIFICALLY:

This task force is required,

1) To obtain data on policies and courses that students are currently taking.
   a. Learn how courses are currently approved in each campus and school.
   b. Find out if policies align with Scholastic Regulations.
   c. Check requirements at peer universities to learn about current practices at other institutions.

2) To delineate the purpose of the diversity requirement.
   a. Identify the needs of students and whether or not the requirement meets those needs.
   b. Explain how the requirement serves the people of the state of Washington.

3) To propose an updated requirement.
   a. Recommend course content, number of credits, and type of courses (for example: departmental and/or interdisciplinary; experiential and/or didactic).
   b. Define how courses should be approved and the interval at which reapproval is required.
   c. Establish whether requirements and course approvals should be uniform across all academic units.
   d. Specify whether a course can satisfy the diversity requirement as well as another general education requirement.
   e. Determine the need for new courses to supplement current course offerings.
   f. Outline the qualifications for diversity course faculty.
   g. Ascertain the need for funding to develop new courses or to hire faculty.

TIMELINE:

The desired outcomes are an initial report by June 2021 and a final report by December 2021 with specific recommendations for changes to the Scholastic Regulations and guidance on an implementation work plan.

Co-chairs of this task force, Person 1 and Person 2, will work with you to develop the preliminary report of findings and the final report and recommendations. We recognize that you have many demands on your time, and appreciate your willingness to take on this work.

Thank you.

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