

MEMORANDUM

To: University Curriculum Committee

From: Subcommittee on Diversity and Common Ground (current and former members): Susan Armstrong (Phil/UCC), Donia Bohan (Student, ES), Ann Burroughs (CS/UCC), Michael Eldridge (Engl/UCC), Nancy Frost (CD/UCC), Kathleen Hill (NAS), Casol Lasko (Chem/UCC), Ken Nakamura (SW), Nathan Smith (ES), Rick Vrem (OAA), Joi Young (Student, Engl)

Re: Report on DCG

Date: February 26, 1999 (revised April 14, 1999)

Current Situation

In response to the ASB Resolution of 1989, the University Curriculum Committee (UCC) subcommittee report of 1990 (revised 1991) and the Academic Senate resolution of 1991, the two-course Diversity and Common Ground (DCG) requirement was approved in 1991 and instituted as part of the 1993-94 academic year for students completing a baccalaureate degree at HSU. As articulated in the planning documents and the final guidelines issued by the UCC and approved by Provost Esteban, the relatively modest objective of DCG was to awaken students' consciousness of the diverse efforts of people in the U.S. and elsewhere to define and actualize their common humanity. It was assumed that such knowledge could help prepare students to be active and enlightened citizens of an increasingly diverse society. Although the UCC suggested general criteria, it was left to College Curriculum Committees to specify the standards for DCG designation of individual courses. Since 1993, nearly one hundred courses have been so designated.

The Diversity and Common Ground Requirement is now under scrutiny for a number of reasons:

1. The UCC is responsible for the regularly scheduled five-year program review of DCG, which is due this academic year. Such reviews offer opportunities to reflect on the integrity of curricular initiatives' aims and outcomes, and to consider possibilities for their revitalization.
2. Our current program review indicates relatively widespread unfamiliarity (on the part of both faculty and students) regarding DCG guidelines currently in force. This and a disparity in standards and interpretations from college to college have led to general confusion about the aims, implementation and review of DCG across campus.
3. Past and current WASC accreditation reports have repeatedly expressed grave concerns that HSU falls short in ensuring meaningful diversity in a variety of institutional contexts, including curriculum.

4. When asked to review and comment upon HSU's DCG program during a visit to our campus in the Spring of 1998, internationally renowned U.C.-Berkeley historian and author Ronald Takaki publicly questioned the integrity of the requirement as it currently stands, and urged the adoption of courses that would study the experiences and accomplishments of diverse ethnic groups in the U.S. within a more substantive, comparative and integrative framework. Takaki's pronouncement catalyzed extensive discussion and debate of the issue in many quarters of campus.
5. As a result of this campuswide discussion, the Associated Students passed a resolution that, in part, urged re-examination of both the "fundamentals" of the requirement and of all currently approved courses. The AS resolution stressed that in its opinion, many existing courses do "little to provide [the type of] greater understanding" that might prepare students to comprehend and contribute to a culturally diverse society.

Recommended Course Guidelines & Educational Objectives

Our initial assessment of existing university and college standards raised concerns about the seriousness and coherence of the organizing principle behind the broad list of currently approved DCG courses. The somewhat contradictory information gathered from student perception surveys and faculty self-reports during our program review amplified those reservations. Students and faculty alike often complained of low or doubtful expectations for DCG courses, and many were unaware of the simple fact of their course's DCG designation, let alone of any standards governing the aims or content of such courses. All of this suggests that we need both to reiterate the significance and purpose of this requirement with respect to our comprehensive goals for liberal arts education at HSU, and to ensure that all DCG courses have a clear and rigorous intellectual focus aimed at enhancing students' capacity for the critical study of certain key categories of human experience. (In current academic discourse, these categories include but are not limited to age, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, nationality, race, religion, sexuality and social class.) Given that a wide variety of discourses and practices has contributed to the formation and interpretation of such categories, we hope that *all* disciplines—humanistic, scientific, social-science and professional—will feel a sense of investment in ensuring a more meaningful implementation of the DCG requirement at HSU.

Recommendation #1

With that in mind, and conscious of the fact that individuals and disciplines may credibly take differing approaches to the study of "diversity" (a term which by itself risks becoming vague and dilute), ***the subcommittee recommends that any approved DCG course be centrally organized around the aims of one of the three pedagogical models below, or that it take an integrative approach which substantively incorporates aims from two or more of the models.*** We feel especially strongly that if a course is focused heuristically around the analysis of one particular aspect of human diversity (gender, for example), then it should consider how that category varies with respect to others (race, for example, or social class).

On the following page, we have listed sample objectives for three complementary models of "diversity" pedagogy currently in practice around the country. DCG courses need not address every objective individually, but should clearly reflect their collective spirit.

Multicultural Studies: Educational Objectives

- To comprehend the diversity of knowledges, experiences, traditions and achievements represented by the cultures of the United States and beyond, and to understand some of the significant ways in which those cultures have interacted with one another
- To explore and evaluate concrete examples of the student's own cultural heritage in relation to others
- To develop in students the ability to read a culture critically through expressions and representations indigenous and exogenous to that culture

"Identity Politics": Educational Objectives

- To study how various cultural groups have defined their visions of self and other, and of the relationships between self and other
- To evaluate the complexity and fluidity of social identities, particularly with respect to the intersections of class, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and so on
- To understand how cultural differences and identities founded in such categories as age, race, sexuality and so on are produced and perpetuated through a variety of social, cultural, and disciplinary discourses (e.g., literature, popular culture, science, law, etc.)

Differential Power and Privilege: Educational Objectives

- To become aware of the causes and effects of structured inequalities and prejudicial exclusion rooted in race, class, gender, etc., and to elucidate broader questions of bias and discrimination as they relate to the exercise and distribution of material and cultural power and privilege
- To study culturally diverse perspectives on past and present injustice, and on processes leading to a more just and equitable society
- To expand the ability to think critically about vital problems and controversies in social, scientific, economic and cultural life stemming from differences of gender, race, class, etc.

An Integrative Approach

- An integrative approach which substantively incorporates aims from two or more of the models.

Recommendation #2

The subcommittee also recommends that departments review these guidelines with all faculty assigned to teach DCG courses, and that individual instructors highlight for students, in class and/or on the course syllabus, the principal aims of their courses with respect to DCG.

Further Recommendations for Implementation

While it might strike some as insular or provincial to limit a study of "diversity" only to the United States, there is clearly an immediate need for graduates to be able to interact productively, both as workers and as citizens in a participatory democracy, with people in their immediate surroundings from unfamiliar backgrounds. California's cultural diversity is not a future development; it is a present fact. The rapidly increasing heterogeneity of American society (of which California finds itself in the vanguard) will

demand of students a thorough appreciation of diversity issues central to their local, state and national past and present—an appreciation which DCG courses might help them achieve.

Recommendation #3

The subcommittee recommends that the focus of at least one of the two courses used to satisfy the DCG requirement be “domestic,” i.e., confined to the United States, so as to put students in a position to appreciate their own experiences and perspectives in relation to those of other, diverse members of their local community, state and nation. In order that the requirement as a whole not be construed as parochial, however, the second of the two mandatory courses should be free to take an approach which recognizes wider international or transnational forces and trajectories that have shaped and/or continue to shape cross-cultural relations in this country and beyond.

Different disciplines will naturally have different approaches to constructing curricula which satisfy these guidelines. Nevertheless, some core consistency in the interpretation of the guidelines is essential if we are to refine and focus the coverage and treatment of DCG topics and to ensure the integrity and credibility of the requirement as a whole. The several sets of college criteria for DCG courses reveal a few faint but common themes in intent, yet the widely disparate focuses of currently approved courses suggest that more central oversight of course approval is warranted.

Recommendation #4

The subcommittee recommends that the UCC discontinue delegation of the DCG course approval process to the colleges. Instead, it should maintain a DCG Subcommittee, expanded to include faculty who can help provide appropriate insight and guidance.

HSU implemented the DCG guidelines approved in 1991 largely by redesignating, or in some cases modifying, existing courses. That is, we have implicitly settled upon an “inclusion” model, which seeks to infuse existing courses, both general education and discipline-specific, with appropriate treatments of diversity. In doing so, we have at least tacitly rejected the model of (a) separate diversity course(s)—a model which has several drawbacks (additional units for graduation, negative student reaction, marginalization of the subject matter), even though it has other attractions (provision of a unified student experience, assignment of faculty with expertise in the subject matter, expression of serious University commitment). One problem with our chosen model, however, is that it is, in the words of one expert, a “very difficult model to institute effectively....[which risks] paying lip-service to diversity, but avoiding actually addressing it in depth anywhere in the curriculum.”[†]

As it has evolved over the last five years, DCG at Humboldt has, in our opinion, failed to avoid such risks. This is an opportune time to redouble our labors and to refine our response, based on the experience we’ve gained during our initial effort. Such curricular refinement will inevitably continue over future program review cycles, as local experience and national pedagogical research in this area evolve.

Recommendation #5

While there are doubtless some existing courses which already target the revised guidelines proposed above, it is very likely that other courses will need to be extensively modified or created from scratch. Departments and faculty interested in fielding new or revised courses will need time to consider and respond to the guidelines' tightened focus. . ***The subcommittee recommends a re-certification process that would begin with the term following final approval of this document and continue for three years*** (target completion date May 2002). During this time, departments would apply for DCG certification of any course, *whether or not it is currently certified*, which they consider to meet the revised guidelines. This three-year period would allow the University community time to reflect, research, train, and consult in order to re-shape, adjust or invent individual courses as appropriate. Courses which currently satisfy the DCG requirement will continue to do so throughout the transition period or until such time as they are definitively recertified or rejected, whichever comes first. (Naturally, it will be difficult to deal with a large volume of applications during the final months of this period. Course sponsors are therefore encouraged to apply as soon as their course is conceptualized, in order to avoid congestion and concomitant delay.)

The subcommittee recognizes that there are many approaches and many pedagogies, even within disciplines, for creating the learning environments and facilitating the student experiences which address the educational objectives identified earlier, and we are therefore reluctant to be too prescriptive. Rather, it should be the task of the advocate(s) of a course to explain how it accomplishes its goals. However, some consistency in the approval process over the years will be important.

Recommendation #6

The subcommittee recommends that a standing subcommittee of the UCC be formed with the responsibility of reviewing applications for DCG approval. This DCG Subcommittee should consist of four UCC members, one from each college plus one student, and three members from the faculty, not necessarily representing each college, who can contribute their perspectives and experience to the subcommittee's task. These latter members will be appointed by the UCC from a set of volunteers. No more than two faculty members of this committee will be from any one college. This subcommittee should keep minutes which clearly explain the concerns which result in recommending the disapproval of a DCG application as well as any reservations which might attach to recommending approval of a DCG application. This subcommittee's role is to advise the UCC regarding the degree to which a course being proposed for DCG approval meets both the letter and the spirit of the requirement. The UCC will then approve or reject the subcommittee's recommendations.

Recommendation #7

The subcommittee further recommends that the UCC monitor the campus community's response to the revised DCG requirement as it evolves over the next review cycle. There are many forms which this could take; perhaps the easiest would be a yearly report from the standing subcommittee to all concerned parties, students, faculty, departments and administration alike. Of course, the program review process for courses with UCC oversight will continue to apply to the suite of DCG-approved courses. Instead of the longer 7-year review cycle now permitted, ***the subcommittee recommends*** an initial 5-year review period, to begin with the term following final approval of this document (target date for first review is Fall 2005).

While the principal concern of this subcommittee has been the academic and intellectual integrity of the DCG requirement, we recognize that serious curricular initiatives cannot be effected "on the cheap." If we are to succeed in strengthening and improving this program, a broad base of faculty will need to "buy in" to the process, and they will need extensive support in sustaining the energy and vision required to transform existing courses and to develop new ones. Curricular transformation is closely connected to pedagogical training; faculty can't teach what they don't know. Committed involvement and innovation on the part of faculty must therefore be matched by institutional resources devoted to faculty development. As a recent national report on this issue emphasized, "[t]o be done with intellectual integrity...the infusion model requires a serious allocation of institutional funds sustained over many years. Rather than a quick make-over of the curriculum, it is actually a model dependent on resources, time and a process of faculty engagement."[†]

<i>Recommendation #8</i>

The subcommittee strongly recommends that the University provide a variety of ongoing faculty development opportunities which are specifically targeted toward the infusion of diversity topics into a broad spectrum of general education and discipline-specific courses, and which might aid all faculty who want to engage in this process as part of a renewed commitment to their intellectual, professional, and pedagogical development. It is our feeling that the University should not rely on outside money to carry out initiatives it has identified as central to its mission.

[†]Debra Humphreys, *General Education and American Commitments: A National Report on Diversity Courses and Requirements*. Washington: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1997. 31-2

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