

Date: March 12, 2007

To: Paul Engelking, Chair of University Committee on Courses (UOCC)

From: Heiner Linke, Chair of CAS Curriculum Committee (CASCC),
on behalf of the CASCC.

Re: Multicultural status of newly proposed 400-level courses

In its Preliminary Winter Report 2007, the UOCC recommends to deny multicultural status to all proposed 400-level courses for which this status was requested, specifically HIST 438, HIST 423, and PSY 459.

The CASCC is concerned about these recommendations. Neither Senate legislation nor publicized changes in UOCC review policy would seem to specifically exclude newly proposed 400 level courses from qualifying for multi-cultural status.

We feel that a UOCC policy against multicultural status for all new 400-level courses would step outside Senate policy, would interfere with department autonomy, and would place unnecessary limitations on some of the university's stronger students who may sometimes wish to satisfy that requirement while taking an advanced course.

As part of its responsibilities, the CASCC has the charge to "maintain the liberal arts perspective at the University of Oregon while supporting the academic freedom of its faculty members." We therefore wish to respectfully remind the UOCC of the Senate policy quoted from the final fall 2006 curriculum report:

Multicultural Courses Policy: As part of general-education requirements, offerings of multicultural courses at the 100, 200 and 300 levels need to be available to a wide spectrum of students from all across the university. Departments wishing to offer courses to satisfy the multicultural requirement should make such courses available at the more general 100, 200 or 300 levels whenever possible, rather than at the more specialized 400 level."

The quoted Senate policy clearly encourages the offering of courses that satisfy the multicultural requirement at the 100 – 300 level. It does not prohibit departments from offering courses at the 400 or even 400/500 level that satisfy this requirement.

On the basis of this stated policy and our observations on the general nature of the curriculum here, we offer the following comments:

1) Even if there were a dearth of 100-300 level courses with broad appeal, the focus of curriculum work should be on correcting that lack rather than on ruling out more specialized courses, which also happen to meet the multicultural requirement.

2) The notion exists that few or no 400-level courses would be suitable for multicultural status. The CASCC disagrees. It is easy to find examples of sensible 400/500 level multicultural courses in the catalog. The very first 400-level course listed (on p. 21 of the 2006-2007 catalog) is ANTH 442/542. This course cannot be numbered at the 300 level if it is to remain open to graduate students. The prerequisite for this course is ANTH 150 or ANTH 250, neither of which satisfies the multicultural requirement.

3) We dislike a policy that may eventually encourage students who might take more challenging courses at the 400 level to satisfy the multicultural requirement by taking less challenging courses at the 300 (or below) level. It may be true that many students satisfy the multicultural requirement with courses below the 400 level, but requiring that all students do this could easily result in a decrease in the rigor of education for some of our best students.

4) The argument could be made that by allowing 400-level courses to be MC courses, we make it easier for some students to satisfy the multicultural requirement by taking courses within their major. Although this may be true, this is in no way at odds with the spirit of the multicultural requirement. This requirement is not a breadth requirement, nor is it a distribution requirement.

5) Departments should be free to decide for themselves whether to offer courses with MC-qualifying content at the 400-level. While some highly specialized courses will be judged better as restricted only to majors, others might be open to non-majors who fulfill prerequisites. In the latter case the department may choose to apply for MC status, but the level at which a course is offered should be a departmental decision.