

## Recommendations Related to the UO Multicultural Requirement

### Background

**Current Multicultural Requirement:** In its current form, the Multicultural Requirement states that

Bachelor's degree candidates must complete one course in two of the following categories:

- A. **American Cultures**
- B. **Identity, Pluralism and Tolerance**
- C. **International Cultures**

#### **Category A: American Cultures**

The goal is to focus on race and ethnicity in the United States by considering racial and ethnic groups from historical and comparative perspectives. Five racial or ethnic groups are identified: African American, Chicano or Latino, Native American, Asian American, European American. Approved courses deal with at least two of these groups in a comparative manner. They do not necessarily deal specifically with discrimination or prejudice, although many do.

#### **Category B: Identity, Pluralism, and Tolerance**

The goal is to gain scholarly insight into the construction of collective identities, the emergence of representative voices from varying social and cultural standpoints, and the effects of prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination. The identities at issue may include ethnicities as in Category A, as well as classes, genders, religions, sexual orientations, or other groups whose experiences contribute to cultural pluralism. This category includes courses that analyze the general principles underlying tolerance, or the lack of it.

#### **Category C: International Cultures**

The goal is to study world cultures in critical perspective. Approved courses either treat an international culture in view of the issues raised in Categories A and B - namely, race and ethnicity, pluralism and monoculturalism, and/or prejudice and tolerance - or explicitly describe and analyze a world view -- i.e., a system of knowledge, feeling, and belief -- that is substantially different from those prevalent in the 20th- and 21st-century United States.

**Work of the Undergraduate Council:** During AY 2006-07 and 2007-08, the Undergraduate council reviewed the courses that presently satisfy the Multicultural Requirement, with two goals in mind:

1. To determine whether the courses, as currently offered, meet the criteria for the Multicultural categories in which they are listed.
2. To consider the requirement broadly: that is, should the requirement itself or the way in which it is communicated be improved? The Council began its consideration with the knowledge that students frequently question the

rationale for inclusion and exclusion of individual courses, and are sometimes unaware of the significance of the requirement. The Council was also aware of concerns that the distribution of Multicultural courses may not be ideal. For example, students have noted that the American Cultures category includes fewer courses than do the other 2 categories, and the Committee on Courses has proposed that Multicultural courses be excluded from the 400 level in order to maximize their accessibility to beginning students.

### Results:

1. **Review of Courses:** The Council found that most Multicultural courses meet the intent of the requirement generally and are appropriate for their categories. We think that students are well-served by taking these courses. The few courses that do not appear to fit the requirement are still excellent courses and may have received their Multicultural designations in error. These courses have been re-considered by the Committee on Courses, the group that initially approves Multicultural status, and the Committee and Council jointly recommend a change in status. As indicated in the attached document (to be prepared), the change in many cases is simply to an alternative category. In others, it is the removal of the multicultural designation. The Council also considered other educational experiences that don't currently satisfy the requirement, but that might be appropriate. As a result, the Council recommends adding study-abroad experiences that meet standards of length and intensity (described in \_\_\_\_\_).
2. **Consideration of the requirement itself:** The Council did not find evidence that the Multicultural requirement needs fundamental revision, but did discover that it needs to be communicated more effectively to students, and probably to faculty, as well. In particular, a statement of the broad purpose of the requirement is needed, and descriptions of individual Multicultural courses should be explicit about how they address the defining ideas of the categories in which they're offered.

The following recommendations respond to these communication needs and to other concerns addressed during the Council's review.

### Recommendations

1. **Purpose statement:** The purpose of the Multicultural requirement is to introduce students to the richness of human diversity and to the opportunities and challenges of life in a multicultural society. The requirement asks students to complete a minimum of two courses that engage these issues.

- 2. Improved descriptions of Multicultural courses:** Students and advisors need to know what courses meet the multicultural requirement and specifically how the courses address multicultural issues. Therefore, for all multicultural courses to be offered during a particular term, faculty or departments will post electronically, in the Schedule of Classes, course descriptions that are substantially expanded over those provided in the catalog. Course descriptions should be full enough to give students and advisors, who are not experts in the field, a clear understanding of the course content. Moreover, these descriptions should show how the course is related to the general purpose of the multicultural requirement and how it fits the particular multicultural category in which it is offered. Beyond the Schedule of classes, these expanded course descriptions should be posted in all course syllabi.
  
- 3. Use of Topics Courses to satisfy the Multicultural Requirement:** The term “Topics Course” describes a set of courses that deal with different aspects of a broad subject – such as ENG 246 : Global Literature in English, for instance. Such courses are a valuable part of the curriculum because they give students access to the full range of faculty expertise in broad disciplinary areas. There is the potential for misunderstanding, however, when these courses are also intended to contribute very specific elements of a student’s education – such as fulfillment of the Multicultural requirement. Since it is only the general topic that is initially approved for Multicultural credit, variations among individual courses may mean that some of them fit the Multicultural course criteria better than others. Moreover, a faculty member newly assigned to a Topics Course may be unaware of its Multicultural designation.

For these reasons, departments offering Topics Courses that count toward the Multicultural requirement will be responsible for ensuring that each of the individual courses meets the specific criteria for the Multicultural category in which the set of courses is offered. Departments will provide the Registrar’s Office with an expanded course description for each offering of a Topics Course and will meet the Registrar’s deadline for posting the descriptions in the Class Schedule. The Undergraduate Council will establish a subcommittee to review these course descriptions periodically and report its findings to the Committee on Courses. If the UGC and the COC find that a particular Topics Course offering does not meet the Multicultural course criteria, students will not lose the Multicultural credit for which they previously registered, but the UGC subcommittee will work with the department to eliminate inconsistency for the future.

- 4. Distribution of Multicultural Courses:** In response to concerns of the Committee on Courses, the Council considered whether Multicultural courses should continue to be offered at all levels (100-400) or whether

they should be restricted to lower levels 100-300, as is done for Group-satisfying courses. Although the Council appreciates the argument that lower-division courses allow students to encounter multicultural concepts early in their college experiences, it is also sensitive to the value of multicultural study at a more advanced level – particularly, in the specialized context of a student’s major. Accordingly, we would encourage the creation of additional introductory (100 and 200)-level courses, but we recommend that 400-level courses not be excluded from Multicultural status.

With respect to the distribution of courses among the 3 Multicultural categories, the Council believes that variations in category breadth account for the observed differences in the number of courses each includes. “International Cultures” and “Identity, Pluralism and Tolerance” are both very broad and each includes a large number of topics that could be the subject of Multicultural Courses. Thus, although we support the creation of additional American Cultures courses, we recognize that the range of possibilities is relatively small.