University of Central Oklahoma  
Committee on Diversity  

Curriculum Subcommittee  

Proposal:  
Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity in the Curriculum  

October 19, 2020  

Introduction  

The Curriculum Subcommittee of the Committee on Diversity proposes that the Committee on Diversity formally recommend to President Neuhold-Ravikumar and to the incoming Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs the implementation of an equity, inclusion, and diversity requirement for all undergraduate students. The following proposal outlines, for consideration by the committee as a whole, possible structures for organizing and strategies for implementing such a requirement.  

Background and Context  

The University of Central Oklahoma seeks to educate creative, collaborative, adaptable, and engaged critical thinkers who are receptive to new ideas and who celebrate diversity, in order that they may become productive, creative, ethical, and engaged citizens and leaders who serve our global community (UCO Mission and Transformative Learning Statements).  

The Global and Cultural Competencies tenet of the university’s Transformative Learning pillar, in particular, commits the university to “preparing students to communicate effectively in a complex world, to function in multiple and diverse environments, and to adapt to a continuously changing global society through an attitude of awareness, consciousness, and respect” (Transformative Learning: Central Six Core Areas).  

Scholars working in a variety of disciplines across the curriculum have emphasized the importance of studying issues of equity, inclusion, and diversity in inter- and multidisciplinary contexts in order to prepare students of all majors to function effectively and to assume leadership roles in our complex, diverse, multiethnic, and multicultural world and to become agents for change in a culture that continues to be permeated at its deepest levels by systemic racism and deep structural inequalities related to race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and ability, among other areas of self-identification. UCO’s Diversity Round Table has continued to advocate, on our campus, for the creation of such courses, arguing that, “it is imperative that we create more critical diversity classes.
that challenge students to write, analyze, and discuss historical and modern-day cultural issues” related to inclusion, equity, and diversity at critical junctures within the university’s curriculum.\(^1\)

Recent public statements, position papers, and calls to action by professional organizations in nearly every major academic discipline have underscored the urgency of efforts to revise our curricula to address this important need. The current momentum toward social justice initiatives, prompted by calls to action from advocates and activists both on and off campus, suggests the particular timeliness of engaging in this important curricular work at the present moment.

A growing number of colleges and universities across the country have adopted specific diversity and equity requirements; these institutions include both flagship research universities such as the University of California, Los Angeles and public regional comprehensive universities such California State University, which includes two UCO peer institution (San Jose State University and California State University, Fresno) and which has recently approved a system-wide requirement of this sort. Within UCO’s peer group, Kennesaw State University has also implemented an equity, inclusion, and diversity requirement within its General Education curriculum; in our region, Oklahoma State University has included diversity as a separate required area within its General Education curriculum since 2008, and Western Colorado University has implemented a minor program in Humanities and Diversity.

**Possible Approaches**

In some cases, institutions have implemented a single course, required of all students, that provides an introduction to inclusion, equity, and diversity issues in an academic context. Other institutions have developed processes to identify courses across the curriculum that address issues of inclusion, equity, and diversity in a substantial and sustained manner and require students to complete a specified number of credit-hours selected from among these courses.

The Curriculum Subcommittee recommends the latter of these two approaches, for several reasons.

- Requiring a single inclusion, equity, and diversity course may foster the perception among students that they have completed or even exhausted inclusion, equity, and diversity as a field of study and action; that they have learned all that they need to know about these complex and continuously evolving issues; and that they may now, so to speak, “check off” the equity, inclusion, and diversity “box” on their plans of study and need not devote further thought or energy to these issues.

\(^1\) Diversity Round Table, Connect to DRT: Diversity Round Table 2018-2019 Goals (Edmond, OK: Office of Diversity and Inclusion, 2018), 9.
• At the same time, requiring a single inclusion, equity, and diversity course may encourage faculty, programs, and departments not involved in delivering that course that the work of educating students about inclusion, equity, and diversity is someone else’s responsibility, that this work has been completed in another area of the curriculum, or that they themselves are therefore absolved of any responsibility for engaging with these issues in their own teaching.

• Adding an additional course, required of all students, to the existing Core Curriculum and staffing that class could pose significant logistical and resource-related challenges, especially given existing demands on the university’s financial and human resources.

The Curriculum Subcommittee sees significant advantages to an approach that would involve identifying a group of courses from across the curriculum, including both existing courses and courses that may be added to the curriculum, from which students would be required to select a specified number of credit-hours to satisfy an equity, inclusion, and diversity requirement.

• This approach would encourage students to understand that equity, inclusion, and diversity are common interests among—all disciplines and professional communities, and it would enable students to explore the specific approaches and strategies that professionals in different disciplines have adopted in addressing these issues.

• This approach would encourage faculty members, programs, and departments to expand and to highlight the work that they do on issues of equity, inclusion, and diversity; to strengthen existing coursework in this area; to include discussion of equity, inclusion, and diversity in courses in which these issues have not previously been points of focus; and to develop new courses that engage in a substantial and sustained way with issues of inclusion, equity, and diversity.

• Finally, this approach would not require substantial changes to the existing curriculum but would instead function as an “overlay,” allowing and encouraging students to pursue an equity, inclusion, and diversity “track” through the existing Core Curriculum and existing major and minor programs.

This recommended approach would require the university to develop a clear definition of equity, of inclusion, and of diversity; a set of criteria, similar to those that have been implemented at other institutions, for determining which courses would count toward the fulfillment of the proposed requirement; and a process for reviewing both new and existing courses to determine whether they meet these criteria.

A significant amount of academic research has been devoted to equity, inclusion, and diversity courses and curricula:
Course content is often used to categorize what constitutes a diversity course. For instance, Bowman (2010) regards diversity courses as, “coursework that focuses on racial/ethnic and/or gender diversity” (p. 544). This conception merely touches the surface, however, for diversity courses have come to be regarded as consisting of a curriculum and pedagogy inclusive of, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, ability, political ideology, language, and teaching and learning styles (Bowman, 2010; Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012, Chang, 2002; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). The utility of diversity courses is in their connecting community discourses to social problems involving identity, geography, commerce, social institutions, and human rights (Appaduri, 2000; Hall & Tarrow, 2001). There is general agreement that social identity-based diversity courses are infused with a transformative or critical philosophical paradigm (Arthur, 2011; Bird, 2001; Taylor, 1998) that enlightens students to new perspectives through expanding their knowledge of human and cultural differences (Denson, 2009; Engberg, 2004; Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012).

A review of the criteria that other institutions use to determine which courses may be counted in fulfilment of equity, inclusion, and diversity requirements reveals several common elements. The criteria established by California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo (a public regional comprehensive university)2 and by Oklahoma State University (an Oklahoma institution)3 provide specific examples of such criteria. Criteria at the institutions surveyed by the subcommittee typically include:

- focus on at least one historically marginalized population or community.
- focus on historical contexts and/or present-day experiences of inequality or injustice and/or on movements to advance equality and social justice for historically marginalized communities.
- use of inclusive, anti-racist, and equity-oriented pedagogical techniques.
- a significant critically reflective component.

These criteria align closely with UCO’s existing Transformative Learning tenets and strategy statement, especially in relation the Global and Cultural Competencies tenet. Many sets of institutional guidelines also include specific requirements regarding the amount of class time and course material that must be devoted to these issues and activities in order for a class to qualify for inclusion on the list of courses that fulfill the equity, inclusion, and diversity requirement.

If the university chooses to implement an equity, inclusion, and diversity requirement of the sort recommended by the Curriculum Subcommittee, the Division of Academic

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2https://academicprograms.calpoly.edu/content/academicpolicies/Policies-Undergrad/USCP-policy
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Affairs, in close collaboration with faculty representative bodies including Faculty Senate and the UCO Chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), might initiate and facilitate a faculty-driven process, consistent with the principles of faculty governance and academic freedom described in the Faculty Handbook, to formulate working definitions of key terms and concepts including “equity,” “inclusion,” “diversity,” and “historically marginalized,” drawing upon existing university-level statements and definitions, and also to articulate a set of criteria for identifying courses that will fulfill the inclusion, equity, and diversity requirement and will promote intersectional study and action. This process might include consultation and/or active collaboration with the Division of People and Culture’s Inclusive Community Advocate, the Office of Global and Cultural Competencies, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Committee on Diversity, and other stakeholders both on campus and off.

Considerations for Implementation

The Division of Academic Affairs might also, in consultation with the colleges, establish a standing committee, including a diverse cross-section of faculty members, to review both existing and new courses, using the criteria that the division establishes, in order to determine whether they may count toward fulfillment of the equity, inclusion, and diversity requirement. Such a committee might include representatives from each of the university’s colleges and might work in a manner analogous to the existing University Core Committee, which reviews requests for courses to be added to the Core Curriculum. This standing committee, in partnership with other stakeholders across the university, might also develop and deliver training programs and resources in order to assist faculty members in creating and continuously improving courses that fulfill the equity, inclusion, and diversity requirement.

Should this proposal be accepted, further discussion will be required to determine how many credit-hours students should be required to take in approved equity, inclusion, and diversity courses. It will also be necessary to determine whether this requirement will function exclusively as an “overlay” of the Core Curriculum and will therefore include primarily or exclusively lower-division (1000- and 2000-level) courses, or whether students will be allowed or required to take upper-division (3000- or 4000-level) courses in fulfillment of any part of this requirement. One option would be to require students to take both a lower-division and an upper-division inclusion, equity, and diversity course, the first as an introduction to and foundation for equity, inclusion, and diversity work and the second to introduce the student to the ways in which equity, inclusion, and diversity work takes place with their major or minor program or at an advanced level in another discipline. Finally, it will be necessary to discuss whether individual sections of a multi-section course may be approved to fulfill the equity, inclusion, and diversity requirement, as well as to determine how often courses accepted to fulfill the equity, inclusion, and diversity
requirement should be reviewed to ensure their currency and continuing efficacy in fulfilling this requirement.