November 17, 2009

To:   Undergraduate Council
From: University of Oregon Committee on Courses
Re:   Multicultural Requirement: Report and Review

The UOCC reviewed the draft report from the Council on the Multicultural Requirement.

All in all, committee comments have been favorable. We are glad to have several points clarified by the recommendations of the Council. And the review of courses that led up to this report has provided much useful information.

**Topics Courses**

One issue is seen as problematical: Topics courses. It is very difficult to assure that the goals of the multicultural requirement will be achieved uniformly in classes when the topic changes from term to term. As the Undergraduate Council has observed itself, topics courses are most likely to drift away from the original objectives for two reasons.

First, instructors are more likely to change, each time bringing new goals, increasing the rate of mutation (“genetic drift,” if you will), on one hand, or being unaware of the multicultural goals of the course as originally conceived, completely redirect the course, eliminating the multicultural content in one step (“punctured equilibrium”), on the other hand. The Council has itself found examples where instructors were unaware that they were entrusted with the multicultural general education goals!

Second, departments, looking for a topics number for a class, will sometimes overlook the multicultural requirement, scheduling a particular course offering that while it may appear to be appropriate for the generic title, is yet inappropriate for satisfying a multicultural requirement. Some departments have their topics courses on a rotation, and may choose a course number because of the term, rather than course content. The Registrar’s Office title reviews may reveal the inappropriate course number when the specific topic title completely disagrees with the generic title, but would be less able to identify the more subtle lack of a multicultural component in a course offering.

We would prefer that the multicultural status of topics courses be phased out; or at least, we should not add to the number of topics courses having multicultural status.

The UGC proposal to have a periodic review of multicultural topics courses would be effective if the syllabi of such courses were evaluated each term. We point out that the workload may run about several dozen sections. This would not be a trivial effort.

*It must be emphasized that should a course change its multicultural status, this change would have to be permanent.* It would be an advising and transcripting nightmare for courses to change status term by term, year by year, even if only once, briefly.
**UOCC Course Review**

During its review of 200 courses, the UGC was not able to affirm the status of 47 courses. Fourteen courses (one topics course listed twice) appeared to fall short of the multicultural aims; another 14 appeared to meet the criteria of another category; while 19 courses lacked sufficient information.

The UOCC has been awaiting the completion of the UGC review and report before initiating any changes to the multicultural status of existing courses, since any change to existing courses would have to be considered permanent.

Now that we are soon likely to have the guidance provided by Senate acceptance of the policy contained in the UGC report, the UOCC can now schedule the review process for individual courses.

We can now propose a timeline for further review of these courses:

- **Fall ’08**  
  Senate accepts UGC Multicultural Report.  
  UOCC and UGC request review documentation.

- **Winter ’09**  
  UOCC reviews 28 courses (14+14).  
  UGC completes review of 19 courses.  
  Senate accepts UOCC report.

- **Spring ’09**  
  UOCC reviews additional courses forwarded from UGC.  
  Senate accepts UOCC report.  
  Catalog copy reflects changes for Fall ’09.

Since faculty and departments will need to provide materials for this review, lead times are expected to be about one-half term for gathering review material. We envision needing

1. a syllabus from a recent course offering, and
2. a statement from the department regarding the suitability of a multicultural designation

for each course under review.

Since one of the UGC recommendations is to add to the expanded course descriptions explanations of why a course satisfies a multicultural requirement, the second requirement should serve double duty for departments.

**Other Items**

Thank you for clarifying several points. In particular:

1. The UGC found no reason to revise the categories or definitions.

2. Courses may continue to be offered at the 400 level. The UOCC will continue to encourage multicultural courses at the 100, 200, and 300 levels. The committee will give
MC status to courses at the 400 level if it is suitable, and if offering the course at another level would be inappropriate, as consistent with the UOCC responsible for appropriately numbering courses.

3. A clear purpose statement.

4. More clearly communicating why individual courses satisfy the multicultural requirement by requiring this in the expanded course descriptions for multicultural courses posted in the schedule of classes web site.

5. Clarifying the appropriate use of materials that may transcend U.S. borders in the American Cultures category.

6. Taking steps to address the important issues raised by topics courses.

**Presenting the UGC report to the senate.**

It should be decided whether to report the UGC findings to the Senate as a stand-alone committee report from the UGC, or to possibly “piggy-back” the report onto the Fall ’08 Curriculum report. In either case, the findings should be memorialized by faculty action.

Paul Engelking  
Chair, ’08 – ’09