

**DIVERSITY AND GENERAL EDUCATION:  
A REPORT TO THE FGCU FACULTY SENATE**

March 10, 2009

Submitted by the General Education Council

Douglas Harrison, Chair, Arts & Sciences

Scott Anstadt, Professional Studies

Margaret Cavin, Arts & Sciences

Eric Otto, Arts & Sciences

Danielle Rosenthal, Library

Halcyon St. Hill, Health Professions

Dean Stansel, Business

Dayle Upham, Education

Scott Karakas, Director of General Education (*ex-officio*)

Peter Lechler, Student Government (*ex-officio*)

Marisa Ouverson, Academic Advising Council (*ex-officio*)

**Introduction**

In the fall of 2008, the General Education Council approved the framework for implementing a three (3) credit-hour requirement in Diversity coursework within the existing 36-hour General Education Program. This action reflected the Council's strong support for an increased, formal commitment to Diversity education in the curriculum and represented the culmination of conversations going back at least to 2006, when the [University Conversation on General Education](#) identified strong support across the University for a more intensified commitment to Diversity in General Education.

Between November 17, 2008, and February 1, 2009, the Council solicited proposals from faculty for new or existing General Education courses that would also satisfy the approved Diversity requirement. Upon reviewing the submitted proposals, the Council determined that while each course thoughtfully, organically, and effectively addressed one or more aspects central to meaningful Diversity education, the courses collectively did not represent a sufficiently diverse range of coursework to satisfy the philosophical and practical demands of such a requirement.

Thus the Council is confronted with a set of conflicting signals. Persuasive and compelling data from reliable research indicate a campus-wide mandate for more formalized Diversity education in the General Education Program. Yet movement toward a requirement in Diversity coursework as part of the General Education coursework did not yield a sufficient number of course proposals to implement the requirement in the curriculum with successful outcomes.

With this report, the Council hopes to extend and expand the ongoing discussion about what Diversity means to us as an institution, and to encourage a new phase in the conversation about the curricular location, purpose, and shape of Diversity education at FGCU. This document provides an overview of the relevant history behind the Diversity requirement, discusses key observations about the issues raised by the requirement from the Council's years-long experience in this area, and offers suggestions for possible ways forward.

**I. History of Diversity Requirement in General Education**

In the spring of 2006 the FGCU General Education Council initiated [The University Conversation on General Education](#). Members of the community, students, staff, and faculty joined in two forums to share their perceptions of the FGCU General Education Program. The Conversation revealed strong support for a broad definition of Diversity in General Education that emphasized differences of culture, language,

geography, experience, backgrounds, worldviews, and choices (see [General Education Conversation Appendix C](#)). The Conversation data also revealed that stakeholders in the General Education Program saw a close connection between a meaningful General Education experience at FGCU and the engaged exploration in the classroom of diversity-related themes, issues, and concepts – among them, providing a multicultural perspective, enhancing appreciation for diversity, promoting tolerance for ambiguity, and creating courses that address prejudices and fears (see [General Education Conversation Appendix B](#)).

Given both the qualitative data from the Conversation and quantitative data from program assessment, Diversity figured prominently in the four-year Strategic Plan for General Education drafted and discussed with Faculty Senate and administrative partners in 2006-2007 as a response to the Conversation's findings. Specifically, the Strategic Plan called for a General Education Diversity requirement to be developed in cooperation with the FGCU EEO/Diversity Committee (see Appendix 1).

## **II. The Diversity Requirement**

In 2007-2008, the Council worked with the University EEO/Diversity Committee and in consultation with the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance to create the language for a proposed Diversity requirement. The result of that work was a requirement that defined Diversity broadly, reflecting both the findings of the Conversation and the University's [Mission Statement and Guiding Principles](#), as well as FGCU's [Student Learning Outcomes](#), specifically Goal 2. That goal emphasizes the value of cultural diversity, including social and political differences, as well as differences of gender, socioeconomic status, native language, sexual orientation, and intellectual/disciplinary approaches.

In the fall of 2008, the General Education Council finalized language for a proposed six (6) hour requirement, along with a sample list of General Education courses that might satisfy the requirement (see Appendix 2). This requirement and coursework aligned with similar approaches to Diversity instruction in General Education at eight (8) of eleven (11) Florida SUS institutions (see Appendix 3), and paralleled complementary initiatives in diversity emerging across the FGCU campus, most notably, the Office of Multicultural Student Development Services recently announced by the Division of Student Affairs. The Council circulated the proposed requirement to faculty and requested their feedback, which is discussed in more detail below.

The Council carefully considered faculty feedback and made several substantive revisions to the requirement in light of that response from faculty. Changes to the language of the originally circulated requirement reflected key faculty concerns raised in the feedback process (see Appendix 6). The approved requirement reduced the number of hours from six (6) to three (3) and eliminated a pre-approved list of courses in Diversity. In place of a list, a call for proposals was issued to faculty inviting them to propose existing or new General Education courses that would satisfy the diversity requirement (see Appendix 5), thus making implementation of the requirement contingent on faculty support, as judged by their response to the call. The Council especially encouraged broad, creative, multidisciplinary interpretations of Diversity as described by the framework (see Appendix 6).

The Council also took very seriously the need for substantive institutional movement toward an intensified commitment to Diversity education. On November 6, 2008, the Council approved a revised version of the requirement (see Appendix 4), which states:

Students live in a society that is increasingly diverse and interconnected with the larger global community, and so are likely to interact with people of different cultures, ethnicities, religions, ages, genders, sexual orientations, socioeconomic conditions, and political affiliations. The university is committed to developing capacities for living together in a democracy whose hallmark is individual, social, cultural, and intellectual diversity. To help further this goal, students must successfully complete a minimum of three

credits of approved coursework in Diversity; these credits are intended to serve as a foundation for additional coursework in Diversity education already widely dispersed throughout the majors. Courses in this list will also fulfill another General Education category, and do not add to the 36 total hours required.

### **III. The Call for Proposals**

Faculty from the College of Arts & Sciences and the College of Professional Studies submitted a total of nine (9) proposals in response to the call (see Appendix 7). In reviewing these proposals, the Council was not only concerned with the degree to which the individual courses meaningfully engaged some aspect(s) of Diversity education as described by the requirement. The proposed courses also needed to comprise a conceptually diverse yet intellectually coherent body of coursework that would fulfill the requirement's broad definition of Diversity. Additionally, any mix of Diversity courses would need to be sufficiently varied across the General Education subject areas and include certain Gordon Rule courses to accommodate those majors whose degree requirements limit students' options for General Education electives. While the proposed courses were all individually compelling, they did not collectively satisfy these practical and philosophical concerns.

Considering these factors, the Council voted on February 10, 2009, to suspend further movement toward implementing the Diversity requirement at this time.

### **IV. Key Factors Related to the Development, Implementation, and Results of the General Education Diversity Requirement**

Several key issues, recurring themes, and relevant attitudes related to Diversity at FGCU have emerged in the process of developing and attempting to implement an array of coursework in the curriculum that would satisfy a Diversity requirement in the General Education Program:

- Support for an emphasis on Diversity, broadly defined, in the curriculum runs wide and deep across campus – including students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community partners.
- The call for Diversity course proposals was open for less than two (2) full months of in-session work days (November 17, 2008 to February 1, 2009). This timeline was necessary given the fall 2010 implementation target, but it may have contributed to the relative lack of response to the solicitation.
- Feedback the Council received in response to the initial fall 2008 proposal (see Appendix 8) indicates that some faculty who support the idea behind the Diversity requirement remain skeptical of any requirement in General Education primarily because of concerns that it would negatively impact students' ability to graduate in a timely fashion, especially in those programs which require students to fulfill significant credit hours toward the major in the General Education Program.
- The feedback also documents a strong belief among faculty that Diversity is already being taught throughout the FGCU General Education Program curriculum in ways that vitiate the need for a General Education Program requirement in Diversity education.
- A related viewpoint emerging from the faculty feedback holds that Diversity education is most effective in students' major field of study and that many/most programs already satisfactorily address Diversity at the upper levels.
- Both the prevailing trends in liberal higher education over the past two decades and anecdotal evidence from faculty at FGCU give good reason to believe that Diversity education may indeed already be widely dispersed and effectively taught across the curriculum. However, there is no formal assessment protocol in place to confirm or correct this perception, or to test to what degree, if any, Diversity education as it currently exists in FGCU's highly diversified curriculum aligns (or not) with the institutional Mission and Student Learning Goals.

## V. Prospects

Where do we go from here? The suspension of further movement at this time toward implementing a Diversity requirement in General Education leaves open a number of promising paths, some of which might work productively in combination with one another or other initiatives not addressed here.

Possibilities for further action on this issue include:

- Surveying General Education Program faculty to better understand limited response to call for Diversity course proposals.
- Re-circulating the call for Diversity course proposals early in fall 2009 with a target implementation date of fall 2011.
- Establishing an instrument to assess, and conduct an assessment of, the presence, variety, depth, and scope of Diversity education in the majors.
- Maintaining the suspension of movement toward implementing a General Education Diversity requirement and awaiting action by the Student Learning Outcomes and Goals Task Force to see how any results from this process may refocus the discussion of where assessable Diversity education belongs in the curriculum.
- Undertaking a Campus Conversation on Diversity to engage stakeholders on and off campus in a sustained and substantive discussion about what Diversity means in the 21st century and how FGCU can best live up to its goals and aspirations to be a leader in diverse and inclusive education and life-long learning.

## VI. Summary

Throughout the process described in this report, the Council has been guided by a strong belief that Diversity warrants more sustained, formalized, and comprehensive attention in the curriculum than it has so far received. Yet, as the options for future action indicate, the effort to implement a Diversity requirement in the General Education Program raises questions, issues, and possibilities that in most cases go far beyond the scope of the Council's work as defined by the Senate bylaws. Though the dialog about Diversity has so far focused primarily on General Education, the Council's experience with this issue suggests that whatever the best approaches may be to teaching and *assessing* Diversity meaningfully at FGCU, any successful strategy will require more direct involvement from people across campus to a greater degree and in a more intentional way than has been realized up to this point. Consequently, given both how far and wide this issue reaches, and given the range of options available for future action, the Council is particularly eager for the Faculty Senate, in cooperation with its staff, student government, and administrative partners, to provide clear guidance about a way forward that encourages more investment and participation in Diversity education from stakeholders across campus.

### List of supporting documents

**Appendix 1:** FGCU General Education Program Strategic Plan, 2007

**Appendix 2:** FGCU Diversity Requirement, draft October 2008

**Appendix 3:** Florida SUS Diversity Requirements, February 2009

**Appendix 4:** FGCU Diversity Requirement, approved November 2008

**Appendix 5:** Diversity Course Proposal Submission Form, November 2008

**Appendix 6:** Announcement of Diversity requirement framework approval, November 2008

**Appendix 7:** Diversity Course Proposals Submitted by Faculty, February 2009

**Appendix 8:** Faculty feedback to proposed Diversity requirement, October 2008