

University of Massachusetts Boston
Guidelines for Proposing Diversity Courses
Adopted by the Faculty Council, April 2014¹

Diversity is of utmost relevance and importance for the University of Massachusetts, Boston (UMB). The April 1991 Faculty Council resolution establishing a university-wide diversity requirement, recognizing that each college handled diversity education in a manner particular to its mission, left to collegiate oversight the responsibility for incorporating diversity into the curriculum. There have always thus been different implementations of the diversity requirement in each of the colleges. In the two decades since, the separate diversity curricula and requirements of particular colleges have been under the aegis of the academic affairs committee of each collegiate unit. CAS (later CLA/CSM) was the only college that created a dedicated diversity subcommittee within its academic affairs committee, and it has been active over these past two decades, reviewing only CLA/CSM courses.

From the beginning, the CLA/CSM Diversity Committee has conceived its work as inextricable from the work on diversity that has marked the scholarly identities of many faculty in our departments and thus the members of the committee. As scholars working in the humanities and social sciences, the members of this committee have been drawn from a pool of candidates selected based on their demonstrated commitment to both teaching and research that highlights and privileges diversity. Diversity perspectives during the past several decades, of course, have entered the mainstream of critical thinking in most of the humanities and social sciences, most centrally in the broad range of fields falling under “critical cultural studies.”

Although over 40 faculty have served on the CLA/CSM diversity committee over the last 20 years, each and every member has been someone who actually teaches in the program, often having designed, proposed, and gained governance approval of their diversity course. As a group carefully selected based on demonstrated commitment and success in researching and teaching relevant material, the committee has taken a special charge to ensure that diversity courses avoid tokenism and superficial overtures toward inclusion in favor of course rationalizations that theorize and articulate a clear and central concern with the relations of power and distribution of

¹ These guidelines were developed by the Faculty Council Diversity Planning Working Group during 2013-14, and proposed to and approved by the Faculty Council on May 5, 2014. The Working Group was composed of: Neil Bruss (Chair, FC Gen Ed Committee); Tim Sieber, Working Group Chair (CLA); Peter Kiang (SGISD); Aaron Lecklider (CLA); Marc Prou (Faculty Council Representative, CLA); Sharon Lamb (GCOE); Banu Ozkazanc-Pan (CM); Teri Aronowitz (CNHS); and, Judith Griffin (CPCS).

The longer, approved FC report from which these diversity guidelines are taken is at: http://cdn.umb.edu/images/provost/Report-FC_Diversity_Planning_Comm_4-21-14.pdf
The guidelines were approved unanimously by the Faculty Council (see the FC minutes at http://cdn.umb.edu/images/faculty_and_staff/Faculty_Council_Minutes_5.5.14.pdf).

cultural practices across and between minoritized communities within the U.S. and conceived transnationally.

This distinction is important: when courses have come through the committee that gesture only towards having members of diverse communities represented on the syllabus in token ways, the committee has urged the faculty proposing the course to think and theorize the particular reasons why this diversity has mattered historically, socially, and culturally. It has not been enough, in other words, for approved courses to show that diversity is represented in the course; the courses must demonstrate evidence of having been conceptualized and organized with intensive examination of the meanings, politics, and conflict attending to diversity always at their center. In this sense, diversity can serve as a lens through which the course material can be analyzed, interpreted, and understood.

Today diversity is embodied in the policies and practices of UMB, including its urban mission and the [2012 Diversity strategic plan](#) that, among other areas, aims to, “Create a clear, quantifiable, and achievable diversity and inclusion strategy and infuse it into the academic environment – making diversity a university-wide responsibility, ensuring commitment at every level of the organization”. Guided by the leadership of CLA/CSM Diversity committee, this proposal clarifies relevant points for approving courses as diversity courses and in doing so, for offering students classes that reflect the strong and ongoing commitment to diversity at UMB.

In order to assess whether courses meet the diversity requirement broadly as well as determine whether the focus is U.S. or international diversity, we propose the following guidelines related to defining diversity, making it a central theme of the course, teaching it through a diversity-centered pedagogy, and filling out the One Form.

The first set of guidelines focuses on 1) expanding the definition of diversity currently used at UMB. The second set of guidelines 2) explains what it means to show that diversity is a central theme guiding the course. The third set of guidelines 3) focuses on pedagogy, which for some faculty is a tool for enhancing their teaching of diversity. Finally 4) the final set of guidelines focus on the actual application process related to filling out the One Form proposing the designation of a course as a diversity course.

Defining diversity

Currently, diversity at UMB is defined along seven dimensions including the following:

- Race
- Gender
- Culture (national origin, ethnicity, religion)
- Social class
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Disability

In addition to the existing seven diversity areas recognized by UMB policy mentioned above, the following notions of and approaches to the study of diversity reflect contemporary thinking about diversity that further elaborate on the ways that diversity course content can be defined.

First, the following categories of analysis reflect expanded notions of diversity. These include race, class, gender, color, culture, national or geographic origin, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, able-bodiedness, age, education, economic background, and immigrant status. Furthermore, awareness of marginalization or other minority status issues when applicable can reflect diversity.

Second, relational and historic approaches to the study of diversity that build upon categories of identity and difference can guide course content in addition to the above mentioned dimensions of difference. For example, intersectional notions of identity as they relate to understanding different individuals and groups can offer insights and analyses of U.S.-based experiences of diversity. An example of such an approach is the following from PolSoc 451, an approved U.S.-focused diversity course:

“The subject of the course highlights an important aspect of diversity in the United States: sexual identities. The units in the course highlight intersectionality as a central topic throughout the semester: race, class, and gender are conceived in each unit as informing the structure of sexual identities.”

Beyond intersectionality, transnational notions of identity as they relate to diversity and difference can guide course content. The mobility of people, ideas, and practices across a variety of borders reflects historic and contemporary social experiences under globalization. For example, examination of migration, culture, gender, and class in historic context as they relate to particular groups of people can provide insights into localized experiences within broader social, economic, and political contexts. An example of such an approach is the following from ANTH/LAS 338L, an approved international-focused diversity course:

“While many early states around the world found similar solutions to the problems presented by dense, increasingly urbanized populations, the specific forms they took in the Andes are distinctive, from the importance of clan and lineage groups in social and economic affairs to the widespread use of colonies to provide access to critical resource zones. Particularly important in ancient Peru was the role that gender complementarity played in all aspects of social and political life. Students in this course will get a new perspective on the cultural construction of gender as they learn how gender roles were metaphorically transformed from the household and community level to become the basis of political integration in the Inka Empire.”

Overall, the conceptualization of diversity gives room to examine it as a category of difference, a system of relationality or intersectionality, or a global/transnational system, in both its contemporary as well as historic manifestations.

Diversity as central theme

To be a designated diversity course, diversity must be a central theme that guides course content, course materials, and pedagogy. To this end, the course can focus on understanding the varied experiences and identities of particular groups of people in the U.S. or comparatively in a global context, shed light on issues relevant to marginalized groups and identities, or address identities, ideas, and practices relevant for understanding differences between and among people, and their life perspectives, within the texts and other materials used in the course.

For example, diversity as a central theme can reflect exploration and analyses of different perspectives related to issues embedded in the discipline of the course (i.e., sociology, management). An example of such an approach is the following from SOCIOL 473, an approved U.S.-focused diversity course:

“This entire course is focused on exposing students to different theoretical perspectives on diversity—and having them apply these perspectives to a number of practical, present day examples (ranging from immigration integration to women’s rights and the cultural politics of black identity among other things). The three main subject areas of the course include: pluralism, cultural and assimilationism, pluralism and absolutism, and pluralism, diversity and democracy.”

Alternately, diversity as central theme can reflect exploration of how different diversity categories intersect and contribute to the formation of identities at the national, regional, and/or global levels. An example of such an approach is the following from Modern Languages/Asian Studies 365L, an approved international-focused diversity course:

“Gender issues are discussed in every class session, since they are fundamental to the formation of the iconic figures of women entertainers (ranging from courtesans to the geisha) and “macho” martial masters...sexual orientation is an issue that is directly addressed in several class sessions as male-male sexuality is at the forefront of discussion when we cover Korea’s *hwarang*...and Japan’s *Great Mirror of Male Love*...class is another crucial theme that is consistently examined in this course...various types of women entertainers in each culture under study (China, Japan, Korea) themselves represent a “grey” class: often denigrated, they sometimes wielded great power and influence.”

As a central theme, diversity guides choice and analysis of topics and ideas covered in the course and allows students to discover the difference that diversity makes for understanding the perspectives and identities of people whose experiences they may not have considered or understood prior to the course.

Pedagogy

In designing a course as a diversity course, many instructors see pedagogy – in addition to course content—as an important dimension of the diversity teaching in the course. In such cases, the faculty proposing diversity courses are invited to explain how their teaching philosophy, choice of materials, and approach to teaching reflect the commitment to and engagement with diversity.

An example of such an approach is the following from AMST 201, an approved U.S.-focused diversity course:

“Students move through various themes in the course that encourage a comparative analysis of the histories of various Latino groups... While race, culture, and class are central categories of analysis throughout the course, the various themes in the class encourage students to understand how factors like language, gender, and sexuality inform the experiences of Latinos in the United States.”

The centrality of diversity is also reflected in the variety of course materials and expectations around student engagement with the topics at hand. While the choice of materials will most likely be dependent on the instructor and designating a course as diversity does not mandate any particular pedagogical requirements, the diversity orientation of the course is usually reflected in the teaching and learning expectations for the course, and often in principles of mutual respect expected among participants in classroom discussion and dialogue. An example of such an approach is the following from Amst 325, an approved U.S.-focused diversity course:

“There are several pedagogical strategies that I use to handle diversity in the course. First, as noted on the syllabus, the course acknowledges the diversity of perspectives students bring into the course. Students are expected to be respectful of differing viewpoints and attentive to diversity in the classroom. The classroom discussion is focused on building community and dialogue in the classroom. With that goal in mind we will spend time at the beginning of the semester working collaboratively to set up guidelines for class discussion. Second, the course balances lecture with discussion. This will allow various perspectives to be voiced. Third, the assignments allow students to select texts to analyze; this allows students to work with a wide variety of materials from across communities. Finally, units have been selected to highlight diverse sexual identities and avoid marginalizing historically underrepresented minority groups.”

Designating a course as diversity course

To designate a course as a diversity course, please fill out Part 7 of the “One Form.” The most important item to cover is the explanation of how the course handles diversity as a central theme. This usually takes the form of a short essay of 150-400 words and involves connecting the syllabus, course texts and other materials, assignments, and teaching approach to the diversity goals of the course, in simple terms that a non-specialist can understand. If the course is multi-sectioned, and has different instructors, the department must certify that all sections will conform to the diversity orientation that is articulated in the proposal.

Diversity courses are judged as suitable on the basis of their content can be at any level of the curriculum, and of any type. As noted, there are no pedagogical requirements (and current diversity courses include large lectures, small seminars, field-based courses, blended courses, and on-line courses), but for many instructors the pedagogical dimensions of the course are important factors in diversity teaching and learning, and if relevant there is a place to state how they are.

Overall, the course should handle in a clear way two or more of the diversity areas recognized by UMB policy or in the expanded version above. It is probably not a good idea to try to cover all of them in a single course, and few courses ever do. Typically courses examine the intersectionality or crosscutting dimensions of several of the categories of diversity.

The course has to be either U.S. or Global/International in focus, and proposers should state which applies. Courses that examine the U.S in comparative context are considered International in focus.