

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE TO  
ADVANCE OUR COMMON PURPOSES  
CURRICULUM TASK FORCE**

**MAY 2000**

## **Committee to Advance Our Common Purposes Curriculum Task Force**

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We are living in a multicultural society, and as the 21<sup>st</sup> century begins, the need for our students to develop an understanding of how to function effectively, productively, and positively in a multicultural environment continues to gain importance. As we look around Rutgers, we see that our student body undoubtedly can be characterized as multicultural. University wide (Fall 1999), a substantial percentage of our undergraduate students are from racial/ethnic groups that have traditionally been considered to be minorities, and 55% of our students are women. Ten percent (4712) of our undergraduate students are African Americans, 14% (7027) are Asian, 85 (38480 are Latino, and 6% (2946) are from other countries. Nine percent (4491) of our undergraduate students categorized their race/ethnicity as other (not White, African American, Native American, Asian, Latino or International). For the past three years, our Newark campus has been ranked as the number 1 campus in the nation in terms of multicultural student population by US News and World Report. The population of the state of New Jersey and the nation also currently reflect the wide range of racial/ethnic groups, and demographic models indicate that the population of current minority groups will continue to increase in the future. Similar, reports from the corporate community, the future employers of our undergraduates, indicate that the workplace is increasingly multicultural and multinational, and that an appreciation of the benefits of the differences among people, and a knowledge of how to interact and work in this type of environment are essential for career success

What do we mean by culture? Culture can be viewed as the ways of living of a group; including values, beliefs, esthetic standards, linguistic expressions, patterns of thinking, behavioral norms, and styles of communication transmitted from one generation to the next. An individual may be a participant in a number of cultures, some inherited and some self-chosen. The study of culture can be a way to understand both who one is and how an individual is connected to other groups.

The multi cultural nature of the communities, organizations, and societies in which we function has the potential to enrich our lives. However, the multicultural nature of these settings, which provide the context for our lives, has historically yielded and continues to present serious problems. These range from war and violence to exclusion, discrimination, and prejudice. Examples, of these problems can be found in news reports on a daily basis and exist on local, national, and international levels.

As an educational institution Rutgers is committed to providing experiences that will develop in students “the skills and knowledge to be responsible citizens and productive contributors to society in their workplaces and in their intellectual, cultural, and social endeavors.” The social context in which we live our lives makes the development of multicultural understanding essential for those who aspire to successful careers and leadership in their communities. Thus, the need for serious examination of multicultural issues in the curriculum is partially driven by our knowledge of students’ information and skill needs. However, it is also driven by the fact that historically, in many cases, the academy has provided intellectual and social leadership.

Since the development of land-grant colleges in 1862, a large number of higher education institutions have formally included addressing societal problems as a part of

their mission. In recent report on Rutgers' engagement with the community, President Lawrence stated: "a deep commitment to active involvement with society is part of our fundamental ethos and mission." It has been well documented that Rutgers provides service to society through a plethora of applied faculty research efforts and through the community service efforts of its student and faculty. It is time for us to serve our local community and the larger society by ensuring that our students are poised to address one of the major social issues of our time. "How can we foster positive intercultural interaction?" is one of the great questions that remain to be answered in our society.

Therefore, attention to the role of multicultural issues in the curriculum represents the university's engagement with the larger community and with fundamental societal questions, as well as the university's concern with providing a curriculum that will prepare its undergraduates to function successfully in the 21<sup>st</sup> century society. Our task today is to build on the strong base for understanding multicultural issues that our courses and co-curricular activities provide to develop a curriculum and university environment that will allow our students to have positive intercultural interactions.

Rutgers currently provides an array of experiences for students that address a variety of cultures. These take the form of majors, courses, cultural programs, special interest housing, and student associations. There are also committees of faculty and staff that address multicultural issues and may sponsor multicultural events. Notable among these is the university wide Committee to Advance Our Common Purposes. Some, but not all colleges/schools have requirements that address multicultural or diversity issues. These requirements may be referred to as non-western courses, diversity courses, cultural perspectives courses, cross-cultural perspectives courses, or multinational courses. Some

units have required courses that do not focus on multicultural understanding, but that have multicultural components within the course. Some units have no such requirements. Some units offer, but do not require, courses with multicultural components. A listing of college/diversity requirements can be found in Appendix A.

During the 1980's and 90's Rutgers made great strides in its curricular and co-curricular offerings related to information about a large variety of individual cultures. However, in order to provide our students with the knowledge and skills for success in the 21'st century, and, as an institution, to provide leadership in dealing with one of the major global problems of our time, it is essential that we go beyond an emphasis on increasing student knowledge concerning intercultural interaction. The outcomes of task, problems, and opportunities that we, our students, and our society face require not only knowledge that many cultures exist, but knowledge of how cultures interact with each other, and how this interaction can occur in a positive, productive manner. This knowledge cannot be gained by studying individual cultures and isolation.

A review of current Rutgers undergraduate offerings and requirements reveals that despite the fact that the student body is diverse and there are very large numbers of curricular and co-curricular experiences that focus on a range of cultures, it is possible for a Rutgers student to complete her undergraduate education without increasing her understanding of her own or those of others because of the absence of multicultural requirements in many units. Appendix A indicates that students in a substantial number of colleges/schools can complete their undergraduate education at Rutgers without taking any multicultural issues. Perhaps, more important at this time, it is also possible for a student to participate in many of the cultural offerings, and to increase his understanding

of individual cultures, while never addressing the issue of intercultural interactions. As Appendix A also indicates, the lists of courses maintained by colleges that have multicultural contain many courses that present information about an individual culture but do not address the issues related to the broader social, political and/or economic context of the culture. A large number of our multicultural courses and events present cultures individually, but do not address the multicultural environment in which that the culture exists and the intercultural interactions that are part of that environment. An education that ends with the knowledge of multiple individual cultures understood in isolation from each other will not serve our students or society well in the future.

A curriculum that prepares our students to function effectively in a global society will not only develop their understanding that their own attitudes, perspectives, and beliefs are shaped by cultural, ethnic. And racial heritage, by religion, by gender, by age, by sexual orientations, and by abilities; but also develop their understanding that is acceptable and frequently beneficial for others to be different than themselves on these attributes. A curriculum that prepares our students to lead in the 21'st century will ensure that students develop an understanding of cultural groups in relation to one another, and a tolerance and appreciation for different cultures. This curriculum will include:

- 1) an examination of the interaction among cultural groups
- 2) an extended and comparative exploration of cultures, with cultures explored in a larger context;
- 3) an examination of power relations among groups, including the issues of privilege, subordination, discrimination, disenfranchisement, prejudice, and the sources of inequality

- 4) an examination of the enriching aspects of cultural diversity and interaction;
- 5) an examination of current problems related to intercultural interaction and potential positive solutions;
- 6) an examination of issues specifically related to cultural diversity in the United States; as well as
- 7) an examination of the tension created by global interdependencies and diverse world cultures.

The learning of objectives listed above can be met in a number of ways. First, they can be addressed through courses that have multicultural and intercultural issues as their main content focus. A few simple syllabi from such courses already in existence at Rutgers can be found in Appendix B of this report. The issues can also be addressed across the curriculum in a variety of courses where the main focus is not multicultural or intercultural, but some other disciplinary or interdisciplinary topic. In such courses, concepts can be examined through the lens of a variety of cultures in addition to that of the dominant U.S. culture. A range of culturally-related views can be presented relative to the subject matter of focus in the course. In addition, the contributions of people of different cultures to current information in the field can be examined. Statements from a number of faculty members that provide examples of how they have addressed multicultural and intercultural issues within the context of a discipline-based course are included in appendix C. Finally, these issues can and should be addressed within the context of the co-curriculum. Although this report is from a “curriculum task force”, the fact that a great deal of student learning has the potential to and does take place outside

the context of courses cannot be ignored. It is essential that co-curricular activities at Rutgers also directly address the objective enumerated above.

Given the importance of addressing multicultural issues, including intercultural interaction, in the undergraduate curriculum, and given the current status of such offerings at Rutgers at present, the task force makes the following recommendations.

- 1) Each college that grants an undergraduate degree should require that students participate in educational experiences that address multi-cultural understanding and intercultural interaction. In order to accomplish this, it is recommended that the university Vice President for Academic Affairs distribute this report to every dean of an undergraduate degree-granting unit, requesting that each dean have their curriculum committee or other appropriate faculty governing body review this report, review current college/school offerings related to intercultural issues, enact requirements that will lead students to accomplish the learning objectives enumerated above, and develop a calendar for implementation. It is recommended that the professional schools consider whether courses addressing intercultural issues offered by liberal arts are appropriate for their students, or if a school-specific course should be developed in which the content is tied to the profession (See example from the College of Nursing-Appendix B). Progress toward implementation should be reviewed at the dean's annual accountability meetings.

- 2) It is recommended that each dean provide this report to their department chairs and discuss this report to their department chairs' meeting in order to emphasize the importance of addressing intercultural issues throughout the curriculum, as well as through specific graduation requirements.
- 3) It is recommended that the University Vice President for Academic Affairs send this report to the University Senate for its information.
- 4) In order to provide sound and rigorous educational experiences for students that address multicultural understanding and intercultural interaction, new courses may need to be developed and existing courses may need revision. It is recommended that the Committee to Advance Our Common Purposes be provided with funds to send a team of faculty and members each summer to the American Association of Colleges and Universities Diversity Institute, or for the development of an internal Rutgers summer faculty institute on the multicultural curriculum in order to support such course and curriculum development. If an internal summer faculty institute is developed it should be done in conjunction with the Teaching Excellence Centers.
- 5) It is recommended that the Vice president for Undergraduate Education designate courses that address intercultural interaction as a Rutgers Dialogues Grant program focus for the coming year.
- 6) It is recommended that the New Brunswick Faculty Council devote a portion of its Annual Teaching Conference to discussion of issues

related to addressing multicultural understanding and intercultural interaction in the curriculum, and that similar faculty development activities on the Newark and Camden campuses also address these issues, with the support of the Teaching Excellence Centers.

- 7) It is recommended that the Vice President of Student affairs work with the undergraduate college deans to promote student life programs that address promoting positive intercultural interaction.
- 8) It is recommended that the Vice President of Undergraduate Education review this report with the directors of the multicultural centers (Paul Robeson Cultural Center, Center for Latino Arts and Culture, Asian American Cultural Center) and ensure that a portion of the programming of these centers address intercultural issues and the promotion of positive intercultural interaction.
- 9) It is recommended that the Vice President for Undergraduate Education, in conjunction with the Vice President for Student Affairs, and the Committee to Advance Our common Purposes oversee the development and production of materials of incoming students that will orient them to the multicultural nature of the Rutgers community, the importance of increasing their knowledge of intercultural issues and their skills in intercultural interaction, and the need for students to seek out the experiences that will improve knowledge and skills in this area . In addition to more traditional brochures and other print pieces, the new Rutgers Television would be an appropriate means through

which to provide information for students about the important crosscutting issues.