

Working Group S: A For-Credit Educational Requirement for Students

Draft Recommendations for Senate Consideration (12/16/2020)

Members	
Glenn Asuo-Asante	ILR '21
Ashley Bishop	Government '22
Uche Chukwukere	Molecular and Cellular Biology and Chemistry '21
Eric Cheyfitz	American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program, English
David Delchamps	Electrical and Computer Engineering, Educational Policy Committee
Julia Felipe	Clinical Sciences
Chiara Formichi	Asian Studies
Neema Kudva	City and Regional Planning, ADoF, Co-Chair
Corrie Moreau	Entomology, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
Siba N'Zatioula-Grovogui	Africana
Peggy Odom-Reed	Hotel Administration
Jeff Pea	Biomedical and Biological Sciences, PhD Candidate
Krinal Thakkar	Biology and Society, Psychology '23
Charles Van Loan	Computer Science, DoF, Co-Chair
Mark Wysocki	Earth and Atmospheric Sciences

Background

[Working Group S](#) (WG-S) was charged with the design of a for-credit, educational requirement on racism, bias and equity for all Cornell students as part of the larger [antiracism initiative](#).

The demand for having such a course requirement was articulated by Black Students United in [2015](#), again in [2017](#), and yet again in [2020](#) (via DoBetterCornell). The idea of having a team-taught interdisciplinary course on race and indigeneity was actively studied at the “task-force level” in the early 2000s and a course on “Race in America at Cornell” was part of a Provost-supported initiative around the same time. Various reports over the years have asserted that curriculum development in this direction should be a priority and there has been some progress in this direction. The [CALS Diversity Requirement](#) and the [Arts and Sciences Social Difference Requirement](#) are college-level formulations that offer a “menu” model. These models allow students to choose from an extensive menu of course options sometimes allowing courses taken at other schools. Recommendation D.3 in the [2018 Task Force Report](#) argues for a university-wide version of these college initiatives. That report also triggered adoption of a skill acquisition-based approach to address diversity and climate issues during orientation. The Intergroup Dialog Project ([IDP](#)) currently administers such a program called [Community at Cornell](#) through a 2.5 hour session that all incoming students are required to take.

These efforts and countless others that are taking place within departments and through individual courses are moving the antiracist “instruction needle”. We applaud the efforts undertaken (and the current efforts at rethinking curricula that are underway) but also wish to note challenges. Faculty currently serving on committees that oversee the menu model at College levels note the unevenness between courses on the menu, the difficulties associated with enforcing excellence despite establishing standards, as well as the challenge of maintaining a menu (for example CALS currently has close to 300 courses from within and outside Cornell that meet the requirement). Student participants in courses focused on learning to have

conversations across difference note that it can have the perverse effect of putting the burden of explaining issues around race, ethnicity and indigeneity on the very people who find their views marginalized or misunderstood, *unless* discussions explicitly include broader concepts of the historical and structural basis of race, ethnicity and indigeneity or the ways in which disciplines and fields have emerged from, absorbed or continue to perpetuate systemic bias in ways that are not always easy to understand or change.

Our ambition is to respond to these challenges and move the antiracist instruction needle further.

The Goal

This for-credit educational requirement will apply to *all* Cornell students in *every* field of study. It will be the first critical and necessary step our students will take as they prepare to help build an equitable community of belonging at Cornell, and beyond.

We imagine a course in two parts. The first part will be rooted in the expertise of Cornell faculty whose scholarship is in the areas of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity. The second part will rest on incentivizing a broader group of faculty across the disciplines who will work with their colleagues and students to bring these issues into their departments and fields of study. The pandemic has shown us how to use technology and digital learning to effectively adapt our pedagogies and work collaboratively to meet urgent needs in classrooms that span the world. That experience and the speed with which we were able to learn, adapt and respond to an unforeseen challenge convinces us that we can come together to create a for-credit educational requirement that will ensure that every student

- **understands the historical formation, current manifestations, and structural basis of racism, colonialism, bias and injustice**, on the campuses where we are located and in the United States. In understanding the history and impact of bias against race, ethnicity and indigeneity, students will be able to take their learning to all the places where they live, work and study and to which they belong, both here in the United States and globally.
- **takes their learning into their field of study and actively learns anti-racism tools**. In the process of doing so, students will practice and acquire anti-racism skills and tools they can apply in their daily lives, in their communities, in professional careers and in their workplaces, to help build anti-racist, just and equitable societies.

These two components both aim to affect behavior. Engagement with the topics of race, ethnicity and indigeneity will continue to be integrated through other coursework currently being developed in departments and colleges. Consistent with the aims of liberal education, we hope it will prompt a lifetime interest in anti-racism and a lifetime commitment to using and sharing what is learned for the betterment of society.

The WG-S recommendation involves the creation and structure of a two-part “central course” and a rollout plan that realistically addresses constraints imposed by resources and our decentralized college set-up..

The Central Course

We recommend that the Office of the Provost support the design and implementation of one course for all students that will meet the learning goals described above. As noted, the course will have two parts A and B, in terms of design, content and authorship. Both parts will, however, be delivered by department-based faculty in their home departments and colleges. Part A will focus on learning the historical and structural basis of race, ethnicity and indigeneity. Part B will focus on understanding the ways in which race, ethnicity and indigeneity shape disciplines, and the acquisition of anti-racist skill sets that students can use in their

daily lives as well as bring to bear on their fields of study. Each part will be the equivalent of a 1-2 credit 7 week long (half semester) course of study, a format that is familiar and well established across Cornell.

Part A

To ensure that course content is fully informed by expert scholarship on race, ethnicity and indigeneity, we suggest that Part A be developed by a group of Cornell faculty affiliated with five core programs: Africana Studies, American Indian and Indigenous Studies, Asian American Studies, Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Latina/o Studies. We recommend a 2 credit half-semester long structure. Adequate resources will have to be provided to the faculty group developing and delivering the curriculum.

It is instructive to look at the minors that each of these programs offer for the types of content that will need to be developed. Minors are outward facing and are put together by expert faculty who thoughtfully work out what a limited snapshot into their field should look like, and faculty will likely draw heavily on content from the introductory courses that are associated with these minors. We anticipate that the central course will challenge our faculty colleagues even further in having to introduce topics to a lay audience in much shorter periods of time. To facilitate the process, we suggest constructing the course in topic-focused modular digital formats ('topical modules').

The details of each topical module must necessarily be left to the faculty preparing them, but we offer three recommendations:

1. The course will have a United States focus on race and colonization understanding that race, ethnicity and indigeneity are relational constructs that are shaped by global forces.
2. Each topical module will make use of the flipped classroom approach and digital technologies finessed during Cornell's shift to online learning. We recommend that each of the five (or more) modules in Part A of the central course include sufficient instruction and guidelines to allow department-based faculty to facilitate small-group, in-person discussions in the students' home departments and units. This will have an associated learning outcome of students and faculty learning to engage in difficult conversations that relate to systemic racism, settler colonialism, bias and injustice.
3. Digital topical modules and associated in-person facilitation guides be maintained as part of a digital hub at the proposed Antiracism Center with adequate support from the Office of the Provost.

The development of Part A of the central course can be regarded as a [radical collaboration](#) focused on teaching using digital technologies. For example, with assistance from the Library, instructional innovation and production units on campus, each collaborating program could develop the topical modules as high quality video modules (not unlike a short multi-media text book) accompanied by a discussion guide to be used by instructors/ facilitators from across the university for post-viewing, in-person discussion not just with students but also with other members of the departmental community. It could also be used by faculty developing courses in fields/departments that are focused on [professional degree programs](#) connected to the colleges. This web-hosted digital collection would be maintained under the auspices of the proposed Antiracism Center.

Part B

Embedding antiracist content into the disciplines is key and there must be adequate support and additional incentives for the faculty engaged in this work. We are aware that several efforts are currently underway to both understand how issues of race, ethnicity and indigeneity shape disciplines, fields and professions and bring these issues to bear on everyday behaviors and climate in our units and across Cornell. We recommend that departments and colleges draw on these efforts to develop an introductory version of these materials for delivery in Part B of the required course. Incentives, in the form of course release for development of materials, or summer salary or even payment into a research account (through the Office of the Provost and

the Deans) can facilitate the engagement of instructional faculty in their home departments. These faculty will also be involved with the in-person delivery of the content developed in Part A. The associated benefit to doing this work broadly across the university will be this: faculty often speak to how their teaching and research inform each other and we fully expect to hear stories of such informed and innovative engagements into the future.

Rollout of the Requirement

Cornell currently has no central requirement except for the swim test that is delivered by Physical Education and overseen by the Senate's Faculty Advisory Committee on Athletics and Physical Education. A requirement adopted by all colleges is the First Year Writing Program, whose size and complexity has evolved over more than three decades. The idea of groups of faculty coming together to offer "University Courses" has been floated before, and a related designation "UNI" was created. Currently the only UNI level designation that exists is tied to UNILWYL (Learning Where You Live) courses that are offered in residential halls and Houses on North and West Campus. We recommend that the University Course designation be revived and this course have a UNI 1000 (undergrad) and UNI 5000 (grad) designation

We are interested in rapid implementation but recognize the work and effort it will take on the part of faculty in the five core units, and in departments and units across the university. Accordingly, we recommend a stepped approach to implementation that will require resources and support from the Office of the Provost and the Deans.

Step 1, where faculty from the five core departments will prepare Part A in the form of topical digital modules with facilitation and discussion guides (spring and summer 2021) for experimental delivery across Cornell by departmental faculty in Fall 2021. These modules will together, take 7 weeks (offered for 2 credits) and will be the first half of the final required course. We anticipate revisiting the modules periodically in response to assessments and keep materials updated, a process that can be folded into the charge of the proposed Center.

Step 2, where departments and colleges prepare Part B (for another 7 weeks for 2 credits) for a delivery start date in any semester, but latest by Fall 2022. This will give departments 18 months time to prepare content and decide how they want to fold the final course into existing requirements. For example, Engineering could decide that one of its six required liberal electives be the central course.

Once both Parts A and B are finalized and on offer, we recommend that the course be offered at 4 credits every semester to make it easy for students to fit into their schedules.

We want to emphasize that this for-credit educational requirement will be a critical but necessary first step in a Cornell student's education on understanding race, ethnicity and indigeneity, and its impacts. It will build an awareness among faculty and students of the broad sweep of these issues and the deep ways in which race, ethnicity and indigeneity shape and penetrate all aspects of our lives and societies. Once the course is rolled out, we recommend that the university ensure a broader systemic approach to embedding antiracist pedagogies across the curriculum by:

- Continuing to incentivize and support faculty in addressing issues of race, ethnicity and indigeneity in their syllabi across disciplines
- Hosting an Equity and Justice Minor at the Antiracism Center which will focus on a comparative study of race, ethnicity and indigeneity, even as students will continue to learn the skills to not just excel and thrive in multicultural societies but to also contribute to building the equitable and just societies of the future.