

CELEBRATING PEDAGOGY CONVERSATIONS: TEACHING DIVERSITY

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“Celebrating Pedagogy XII: Teaching Diversity in Rivier College’s New Undergraduate Curriculum,” took place on Tuesday, February 12, 2008, from 4:00-7:00 p.m., in the Dion Center Reception Room. To make the most of the meeting, the 30 participants were asked to come to the conversation with some notes about how to incorporate diversity, as the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee has attempted to define that term, into our programs and, where appropriate, our course syllabi.

To assist faculty in thinking about this task, I provided a synopsis of what the College has done regarding the Diversity (D) requirement. I explained that, in the curriculum revision passed in December 2003, there was a Diversity (D) requirement whereby, as originally conceived, students would be required to take at least one Diversity-designated course. This requirement would not involve separate, additional, stand-alone courses, but rather courses from throughout the curriculum that would apply and need approval for the ‘D’. At the time, we had to agree to discuss with one another what the parameters would be for granting such approval. A task force worked through some of this and reported back to the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee as well as to the faculty as a whole. Several models were proposed; however, in follow-up luncheons with faculty, no consensus was reached about whether or not to treat the D requirement at the course level or the program level or even at the College level. As a result, the D requirement has been held in abeyance until consensus could be reached.

The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee has since put out a statement on Diversity, which will be used as a basis for a College-wide discussion about diversity. The statement is as follows:

Rivier College’s curriculum affords students the opportunity to learn from the diversity of the human condition and prepares them to engage a complex and diverse world. Through attention to such issues as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, religion, and culture, and through an inclusive curriculum and pedagogy, Rivier faculty enable students to transform their learning into meaningful and committed action. In curricular programs as well as through extracurricular activities the College assures that students will sustain and be sustained by the realities of diversity.

On March 31, 2008, the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee brought to the faculty a proposal for implementing the D requirement, and the following proposal was passed:

1. The Diversity requirement contained in the 2003 Core Revision proposed a course-based model for Diversity at Rivier College.

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2. Since then research conducted by the UCC-appointed Diversity Task Force, input from faculty (at meetings, presentations, and luncheon discussions on Diversity), and discussions with administration regarding availability of institutional resources have all convinced members of the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee that a course-based model is neither feasible, nor the best approach to diversity at the College at this time.
3. Members of the UCC are convinced that Diversity is implicit in certain of the already-existing College-wide Academic Goals, such as in the second goal that speaks of promoting “a strong commitment to social justice” and in the fourth that advocates for developing “the ability to place oneself, one’s discipline, and one’s society in historical, cultural, and global perspective.”
4. Therefore, the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee is proposing a College-wide approach to Diversity that will be supported and encouraged by Division Chairs, Department Coordinators, Program Directors, and by the UCC through its Program and Course proposal process.
5. Chairs, Coordinators, and Directors will encourage authors of new or revised programs and courses to consider ways to implement Diversity in their curriculum initiatives and to highlight Diversity in their proposals.
6. The UCC will add a statement to all our proposal forms, prompting faculty to indicate how their new or revised programs and courses address and implement diversity in any one or more of its aspects, as articulated in the Diversity Statement:
 - through a curriculum which engages diverse and competing perspectives as a resource for learning
 - through a curriculum which explicitly addresses issues of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, religion, or culture
 - through a pedagogy which incorporates diverse modes of instruction in order to provide the opportunity for access to learning for a diverse student population.
7. The UCC is proposing the use of ongoing faculty development to assist faculty in recognizing where in the Academic Goals Diversity is implicit and to heighten awareness of and commitment to ways of implementing Diversity, in theory and in practice, throughout the curriculum. The most recent program in the Celebrating Pedagogy series and the recent Brown v. Board of Education Program are examples of faculty development initiatives aimed at discussion and promotion of diversity.
8. Members of the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee believe that this approach will be the most effective, the most inclusive, and the least bureaucratic approach to the Diversity requirement at this time.

The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee obviously saw merit in avoiding any revision to established College-wide goals, and instead found a way to revise the curriculum proposal forms to enable attention to diversity. The February 12th conversation prepared participants to discuss how they would incorporate *diversity* into the courses they teach. As a follow-up to the discussion and presentations, I forwarded to faculty examples of course syllabi and of activities they use to encourage deep thinking about diversity. These examples were generated by the faculty in attendance at the Celebrating Pedagogy XII conversation.

* **Dr. ALBERT DeCICCIO**, Academic Dean, is in his eighth year at Rivier College. Before Rivier, he worked for twenty years at Merrimack College, until 1998, when he was asked to accept a position as Dean of the Graduate School at Wheelock College in Boston. In 1997-1998, DeCiccio completed a term as President of the International Writing Centers Association; in 2002-2003, DeCiccio ended a five-year term as co-editor of *The Writing Center Journal*. He regularly contributes articles and presentations about collaborative learning, writing, and writing center theory and practice. He has three times presented for the International Conference on the First-Year Experience.