

DEPAUW STUDENT GOVERNMENT

WHITE PAPER NO. 8

A White Paper concerning multicultural requirements at DePauw University with possible suggestions.

Introduction:

“Being a student at DePauw University means being a part of a college community with a long and proud history in education, service and leadership. Students at DePauw are maturing adults who must learn, serve and lead in a diverse environment while preparing for future enterprises. As students we expect challenges from our professors and to meet those challenges with enthusiasm and dedication. As classmates we expect to learn from each other, respect our differences and celebrate our diversity. As citizens we expect to work for the betterment of our campus, our community, our nation and our world. Students commit themselves to these goals when they join our DePauw community.”

(Adopted by Student Congress, May 8, 1998)

Over a decade ago, Student Government (formally Student Congress) passed the above resolution concerning issues of diversity and inclusion. Today, we want to revisit this concept and provide possible suggestions for achieving a truly inclusive DePauw. The aim of this white paper is to address how other universities have approached multicultural requirements, how this relates to DePauw, and possible suggestions for implementation of a multicultural requirement. We would like to acknowledge, thank, and praise the work already accomplished by the Office of Student Life and Multicultural and International Life.

What is a Multicultural Requirement?

Many schools, including some of our sister schools, require a multicultural fulfillment by taking a semester long course in a specific topic. Schools like Denison University, Wellesley College, Franklin University, and many state schools mandate that students take a course that focuses on one of the following:

- African, Asian, Middle Eastern, Caribbean, Latin American, Native American, or Pacific Island peoples, cultures, or societies; and/or
- Minority American culture, such as those defined by race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or physical ability; and/or
- Understanding the processes of racism, social or ethnic discrimination, or cross-cultural interaction as they relate to one another.

Penn State, who has a multicultural requirement, surveyed their students on their thoughts and feelings. They found, “Contrary to what some critics allege, only a small minority (less than 1%)

of students completing Pennsylvania State University's (Penn State's) required cultural diversity classes are strongly opposed to the requirement." Similarly, surveyed DePauw students have expressed interest in the implementation of a multicultural requirement.

Background:

The first formal adoption of a diversity requirement in the general education core occurred at Denison University in 1979. However, around fifteen years ago when Denison was reviewing their General Education requirements they decided to get rid of their multicultural requirement.

Dr. Toni King from Denison University's Multicultural office revealed that around 4-5 years ago the student body voiced their opinion and demanded something be done after a series of events pertaining to diversity insensitivity. The multicultural requirement was proposed again. The measure was passed and they are currently reviewing what classes will count for their new multicultural requirement.

Multicultural Requirement Relevance:

It is first important to highlight DePauw's history of diversity sensitivity within the past few years. The first major incident was two years ago (2010) when issues of racial insensitivity were directed at the Hispanic community on DePauw's campus. The Committee for Latino Concerns held several events, including a rally, about raising awareness about this particular issue. A campus forum was held but many students felt that not much has been done since then. The second major event occurred this academic school year (2011) when discriminatory instances were directed at LGBTQ on campus. Programming efforts by United DePauw, DePauw Student Government, and the Office of Student Life were held in response to this issue. However, momentum and support have died down tremendously second semester and many students have lost sight of the importance of diversity sensitivity at DePauw. Efforts by DePauw Student Government, in collaboration with the Office of Student Life and Multicultural and International Life, have hosted campus climate forums, but turnouts have been low.

According to the university website, "A DePauw education asserts that developing a global perspective and an appreciation and tolerance for a more diverse society are vital for living in an increasingly interdependent world." Furthermore, under the "Purpose and Aims" adopted by the faculty of DePauw University, it is said that some of our objectives are:

- to foster the love of learning and the increase of knowledge and to recognize and support intellectual and creative excellence;
- to understand and appreciate cultural and scientific achievements, past and present;
- to encourage serious reflection on the moral and ethical aspects of experience.

It is clear that the university supports the idea of diversity, inclusion, and respect for individuals

from all backgrounds. However, due to the major incidents of diversity sensitivity that have occurred over the past few years it appears that the implementation of multicultural requirement would greatly benefit our community.

Multicultural Requirement at DePauw:

A diverse group of student organizations and almost all DePauw Greek houses were surveyed and polled to gather how students felt about the idea of implementing a multicultural requirement at DePauw University. There were a large range of opinions. Some students believed that experiential classes should be implemented, while others did not understand the need for a requirement. The vast majority of students favored the idea but felt that students already have too many requirements to fulfill before graduation. Adding another class, students stated, would be too much to handle. Instead many students felt we should utilize the programming (i.e. First Year Experience, speakers discussing issues of diversity, faculty lectures, winter term) already in place at DePauw. It should be noted that many students preferred programming that lasts all four years. Many ideas were then proposed to us as to how DePauw could still implement a multicultural requirement. The ideas are as followed:

- Implement two weeks or more within freshman year seminar where the professor focuses in and discusses an issue pertaining to diversity sensitivity. This approach allows the subject to be discussed in a classroom setting without adding on the GE requirements.
- Have first year mentor groups focus more on issues of diversity and inclusion, aside from the “Tunnel of Oppression” or “Party House” that are already required.
- Have a series of punch card events related to issues of diversity that students have must attend each year. This will allow students to engage in conversations with people who are informed on the issues. Student organizations, as well as the School of Music, may register their events.
- Fulfilling one class within their four years at DePauw University in traditional departments and/or interdisciplinary departments. Allowing students who spend a semester abroad or a winter term abroad to have this requirement filled.

Conclusion:

“Students who truly value education must also have an appreciation of the interrelatedness of and the diversity within cultural traditions. The Multicultural requirement recognizes and reflects the full range of human groupings and cultural perspectives as well as the complex relationships among them.” (Florida State University)

Exploring the potentials of a multicultural requirement can only benefit the DePauw experience for students. A multicultural requirement would only enhance the probability of DePauw students graduating with a sincere understanding and respect for people from all walks of life.

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Presented during a joint Senate
Representative Meeting on
April 22, 2012

A copy of this report will be given to Brian Casey, Pedar Foss, Hermen Diaz, Dorian Shager, Cindy Babington, Cara Setchell, Bridget Gourley, David Harvey, Richard Cameron, and Caroline Smith upon its passage. The DePauw Student Government requests an official response to the concerns listed above by May 5, 2012.

Motion by:

Seconded by: Rep.

Aye: 37

Nay: 7

Absent: 5

Charles Pierre, President

Attest:

Annie Bowers, Secretary