

January Diversity Requirement Research Summary

During J-term 2022, the Chair of the Core Curriculum, the two student members of the Core Curriculum Committee, and the PLU Director of Assessment conducted focus groups in seven large gen ed classes; 192 students participated in the conversations. The students represented all levels, but were predominantly first- and second-year students. The conversations were recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were analyzed for common themes (summarized below). The findings from this docs group research largely echo findings from previous studies done by the General Education Council in 2018.

Generally, a majority of students are either satisfied with the requirement or want some form of revision to content or delivery. There were very few who wanted fewer requirements. Most who want change want it badly. Most who are satisfied, seem content with any option so long as it doesn't add credits and, ideally, intersects somehow with their major.

Question #1: Do you feel like the general education diversity requirement--as it is currently designed and delivered--provides too much, too little, or just the right amount of exposure to diverse perspectives? *Why do you feel this way?*

Top answers (appeared 5 or more times):

1. Some students, usually first-years, are unsure of what courses count. They don't know why some courses that deal with diversity do not meet the requirement. Nor do they know why some courses that do meet the requirement don't deal very well with issues of diversity. They are unclear of the purpose of the requirement.
2. Students report some disappointment that diversity courses--particularly "C" courses--focus on historical context rather than contemporary issues and circumstances they feel would be more applicable.

Other answers that appeared more than once:

- Not enough intersectionality; too many classes focus on one culture or group.
- While there may not be enough exposure to diversity via this requirement, students often choose classes that meet other requirements (rather than what interests them). Their major courses are the priority.
- The requirement is inconsistent. Some classes are great, meaning the requirement is just right. Other courses don't deliver on student expectations, meaning they feel the requirement is too small.
- Several students felt the credit total for the requirement is just right as is. Some of these students (seem to be Nursing primarily) would like more options linked to their major requirements. Others want diversity to be more prominent throughout the curriculum, rather than adding to the current diversity requirement.
- Many students noted a desire for more course options, generally.

Question #2: Do you feel like the general education diversity requirement--as it is currently designed and delivered--prepares students for the diverse professional and social contexts they'll experience after graduation? *Why do you feel this way?*

Top answers (appeared 5 or more times):

1. The most common answer was that the value of the diversity requirement for the future depends on the student's plans after college.

Other answers that appeared more than once:

- The value of the requirement for future application depends on the quality and content of the classes taken.
- There was a feeling that the diversity courses are too specific, too focused in their content. As such, they don't apply to a broad range of post-graduate contexts. Notably, a couple students said they thought the requirements were too broad and need to be more specific. Part of this critique is the focus on historical contexts rather than present circumstances.
- Some students (seem to be Nursing primarily) note they'd like to have exposure to the specific cultural groups (e.g., ethnicity and language) they'll be most likely to engage within their profession.
- There was a feeling from a couple students that a focus on marginalized groups and their marginalization doesn't necessarily prepare students for diverse interactions.

Question #3: Do you feel your class colleagues are equally equipped to have conversations around diversity? What would students need to be on the same starting point? *Explain in as much detail as you can.*

Top answers (appeared 5 or more times):

1. There was a strong majority that suggested that some students have more exposure to diversity than others.
2. Many students expressed a desire for more context/preparation. Specifically, they noted the need for some "standardization," a similar "starting point," and a "basic understanding of power and identity." The goal of this preparation would be to be able to engage respectfully in difficult conversations about diverse experiences. Two groups noted that NSO requires modules on alcohol and consent. Could they also have a module on engagement with diversity that would deliver some initial language for these conversations?

Other answers that appeared more than once:

- The open timing of the requirement is a problem. A student can be finished before the end of their first year or they can put these courses off until the end of their degree program. A few students noted a desire for a required diversity course early on to help prepare students for engagement with diversity throughout the curriculum.
- Several students noted that the preparedness of their peers often depends on the class and what is needed/expected. Some classes attract students who are prepared to/want

to have these conversations, while others don't. Additionally, some classes provide support/training, while others don't.

- Students note that some of their peers simply have more interest in these conversations than others.
- Several students noted that most of their peers are okay in terms of preparedness, even if their opinions differ. At least two students remarked that willingness is more important than preparation.
- Some said that, generally, PLU promotes open-mindedness and so most students approach the material that way. Additionally, the NSO curriculum already does some work toward this goal.
- This idea was contrasted by students who note that their peers are not open-minded; they approach these conversations from a "partisan perspective."
- There was a sense from a handful of students that those with privilege are the most unwilling to learn and listen.
- A few students noted that students don't need to be on the same page. The differences in experience and perspective make for better conversation.
- Finally, students remarked on the need for a mediator in class discussion about diversity (or someone trained as a mediator). This connects to other comments about some professors being unwilling to call out unacceptable behavior.

Question #4: What changes would you like to see made to the diversity requirement as it is currently designed and delivered?

Top answers (appeared 5 or more times):

1. There was a strong desire for more options and topics, with a common caveat that they must double-dip so as not to slow down progress toward graduation. Additionally, several students noted a desire for course options to reflect current events and issues.
2. There was also a strong desire to see discussion about diversity integrated more into the larger curriculum, including in upper division courses in majors. STEM students noted this most prominently when they observed that, outside of general education, they sometimes had no structured engagement with diversity in their courses.
3. Finally, many students noted a desire for change in how the courses are delivered. Specifically, they asked that courses on diversity should be taught by diverse faculty and should draw on materials/texts by diverse people. Some students noted that better training and preparation among faculty would help. They commented on problems with classroom management (e.g., managing difficult discussion) and misgendering students.

Other answers that appeared more than once:

- Narrow what counts for this requirement. Diversity should be the focus of these courses. Further, the fact that diversity courses double dips sometimes results in limited exposure. The one-and-done nature of the requirement also limits exposure. If you get a weak course, you lose an opportunity to learn.
- There is a need to spread the requirement out (so, for example, a first-year student can't be finished in their 2nd semester).

- There is a need for more information about the courses and what options are available.
- Students expressed the sentiment that these shouldn't be "textbook" or theory courses. Rather, they should focus on experience and engaging with different groups/experiences. At least one group called for a course that specifically offers an overview in how to interact with cultures that are different from one's own. These courses should celebrate diversity.
- There was a sense from a few students that all diversity courses should be intersectional.
- A handful of students expressed the idea that diversity courses shouldn't be required at all; they should be sought out by those who are interested in the subject matter.