

MEMO

To: General Education Program/Graduation Requirements Committee

From: Professor Jacqueline Carrigan

Date: March 28, 2005

Subject: General Education Race and Ethnicity in America Requirement Assessment Results

In the Fall 2004 semester, the General Education Program/Graduation Requirements Committee (GEP/GRC) conducted an assessment of the Race and Ethnicity in America course requirement in the General Education Program. The GE race and ethnicity courses were completed by 4,366 students in 97 sections of 26 courses offered in 13 departments by 71 different instructors last Fall. Surveys were received from 2,232 students in 46 of the sections. Sixty-two percent of the respondents were female, 70 percent were upper division students and 3 percent were international students. The respondents were most likely to identify as Caucasian/White (43%), followed by Mexican-American or Other Hispanic at 19 percent, Southeast Asian and Other Asian at 12 percent, 7 percent African American, 6 percent Pacific Islander/Filipino, 2 percent American Indian and 6 percent "other". Another six percent declined to state their racial-ethnic/cultural background.

The student respondents offered very positive assessments of the learning outcomes for the General Education requirement, as measured by 18 Likert scale items. A large majority of the students "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the course provided them with an understanding of the following items: "the cultures of ethnic/racial minority groups in the U.S." (80%); "the diversity of cultures within social groups" (80%); "the social experiences of underrepresented groups in the U.S." (80%); and "the histories of underrepresented ethnic/racial groups in the U.S." (76%). An even larger percentage of the students "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the course included the study of at least two ethnic/racial minority groups (88%), while 78 percent felt that the course provided them with an understanding of the contributions of underrepresented groups to American society. The responses were more variable regarding the course coverage of particular ethnic/racial minority groups. Eighty-four percent of the respondents "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the experiences of African Americans were covered by the course, while less than 70 percent of the students claim they were provided with information on other groups, such as American Indians (69%), Asian Americans (66%), Mexican Americans (69%) and "other" ethnic groups (57%). The students were asked if the course included an analysis of three concepts: ethnicity, ethnocentrism, and racism. Again, the vast majority of students "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that these concepts were being covered, with 86 percent saying "ethnicity" is analyzed, 74 percent for "ethnocentrism" and 87 percent for "racism". Slightly lower percentages of students felt that the courses had given them a better understanding of these concepts, with 82 percent for "ethnicity", 70 percent for "ethnocentrism" and 83

percent for “racism”. Eighty-three percent of the student respondents “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the idea that the course “explained how the concepts of ethnicity, ethnocentrism and racism shape ethnic experiences in the United States”.

The student respondents also responded positively to an open-ended question asking them to comment on the extent to which the GE Race and Ethnicity course encouraged them to “develop an appreciation and understanding of a society whose diversity offers both rewards and challenges”. Out of over 2000 responses, only 65 were completely negative and 68 were neutral or a mix of positive and negative comments. Among the many positive comments, several themes emerged. Many praised the course for the balanced presentation of views and the overall quality, with comments like the following:

“Our instructor always presented both sides of every story no matter how controversial... he did so in a respectful manner.”

“I have had the opportunity to take three courses that fulfill the race and ethnicity requirement. They have, without a doubt, been the BEST courses I have taken.”

“The race and ethnicity requirement is the most valid requirement CSUS has to offer.”

“Best class I have had at Sac State.”

Many students wrote that they experienced personal growth and greater awareness because of the course, with one student saying, “We need to require MORE ethnic studies courses”. Several mentioned the lack of exposure to the histories and backgrounds of non-European ethnic groups that they received in their high school educations. Several students from minority racial/ethnic backgrounds reported feeling a greater sense of pride after taking the course and learning about the contributions of their group. A few students were even considering taking additional courses or adding a minor because of their experiences in this class. A few students were positive about the class, but point out that it opened their eyes to bias in the larger university. Many of the negative comments were course specific, offering critiques of the grading or teaching style of the professor. The GE requirement critiques suggested that the course needed to cover a greater number of racial/ethnic groups (typically, the courses were seen as focusing too much on the African American experience), that the course focused on the challenges rather than the rewards of diversity, or that the course needed to cover more points of view. A small number of very disturbing, including some racist, comments were also provided, that angrily contested this GE requirement. The vast majority of the written comments were positive and often enthusiastic about the GE Race and Ethnicity requirement.

The General Education Race and Ethnicity in American Society requirement is meeting its learning goals according to the data from the over 2000 students surveyed. The results from this review were also consistent with the previous review reported in October of 2001.