

# **A Successful Diversity Curriculum Transformation Model: The Case of Kent State University**

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No one in the United States is under the illusion that the recent Supreme Court's rulings will provide finality on the issue of race and diversity in the nation's schools, not when one of the Justices herself expressed hopes for a re-visitation of the case in 50 years' time. However, while colleges and universities continue to struggle toward their goal for diverse student populations through deliberate admission strategies, a more compelling need of society is educating students to appreciate human differences. Hitherto, many institutions have relied on an erroneous notion that if culturally different students are thrust together, the law of proximity will somehow nullify preconceived prejudices students bring to the campus. We now know better. To mitigate the constraints of limited socialization that every student brings to the campus, institutions need a deliberate strategy to work on their minds—strategically challenging preconceived fears and systematically eliminating ignorance, while promoting the understanding and appreciation of the common cord that binds humanity together. Indeed, this is the moral responsibility of every educational institution to its society, notwithstanding the position and courage of educational leaders to fulfill this hallowed responsibility.

Therefore, higher education institutions across the nation are beginning to wake up to the true challenge of diversity (i.e., educating students to appreciate and promote diversity through deliberate curricular construction and implementation). The purpose of this article is to provide a brief analysis of a successful adoption of diversity requirements at Kent State University.

## **Kent State University**

Kent State University's eight-campus network spreads across northeast Ohio. Founded in 1909 as a Normal School, Kent State has grown to become the second largest university in Ohio with a student population of over 36,000 and over 3,000 staff and faculty. Although Kent State is the home of the Liquid Crystal Research Center and world-class academic programs, the University is also known for the unfortunate incident that occurred on May 4, 1974. The death of four Vietnam War protesters on the campus put an indelible mark on the University's history—a history that the current administration believes provides the university community a deeper sense of responsibility toward non-violent conflict resolution, democracy, and humanitarian pursuits. Through hard work, Kent State continues to improve the diversity of student, faculty, and staff populations.

## **A Brief History of Diversity Efforts**

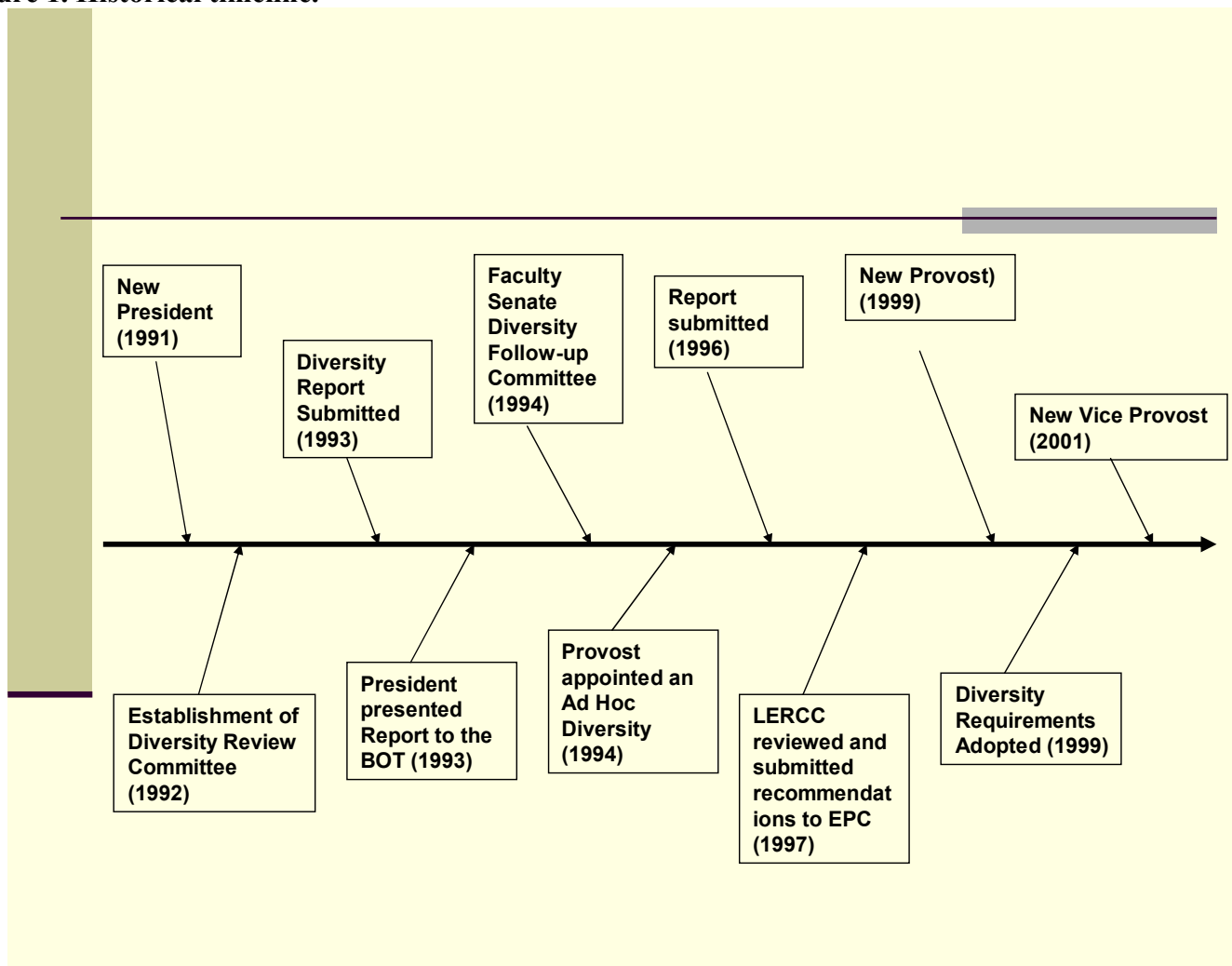
Curricular adoption is never done in a vacuum. There are important events that culminated in the successful adoption of diversity requirements at Kent State University. First was the appointment of a new president in 1991. As the President observed numerous times in her public speeches, expanding Kent State's diversity was one of the expectations of her presidency—an expectation that she was glad to make a top priority. Less than a year into her presidency, President Carol Cartwright established a Diversity Review Committee. The Committee submitted its report in March 1993, followed by a presentation of the report to the Board of

Trustees. A follow-up Committee was established by the Senate in 1994, and about the same time, the Provost established an Ad Hoc Diversity Committee. The Ad Hoc Diversity Committee proposed that the Liberal Education Requirements Curriculum Committee (LERCC) deliberate on the implementation of diversity requirements. With the arrival of a new provost in 1999, the University had a new impetus to aggressively move ahead to implement the proposed diversity requirements. Figure 1 provides a timeline approximation of events.

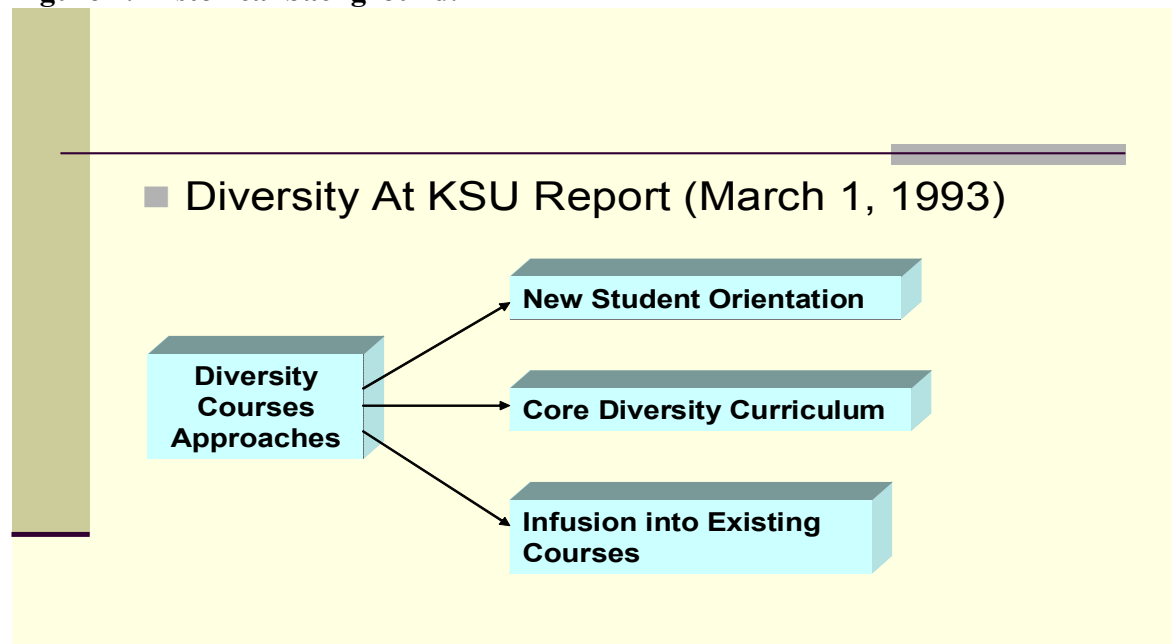
Perhaps the most important recommendation of the 1993 Diversity at Kent State University Report was the call for the introduction of diversity into curriculum offerings on the Kent and regional campuses. The Report urged the

University to offer new courses and incorporate diversity into existing courses. Figure 2 illustrates different approaches available to institutions contemplating curricular changes to incorporate diversity. The Report emphasized the need to integrate diversity workshops and training into new student orientation programs. The second aspect deals with a common set of diversity courses that all students, irrespective of major field, are expected to take before graduation. The third aspect calls for an infusion of diversity into existing courses, sponsoring special topics on diversity, internships and individual investigations that focus on diversity, as well as encouraging students to undertake group study projects, term papers, theses, and dissertations that focus on diversity issues.

**Figure 1. Historical timeline.**



**Figure 2. Historical background.**



### **Purpose of Diversity Requirements**

A successful adoption of curricular changes is predicated on a clear articulation of the goals for these changes. Hence, at Kent State University, the purpose of diversity requirements became a subject of university-wide discussion. Given that the purpose of a curriculum provides the context for content, pedagogical strategies, classroom activities, and expected outcomes, the University provided ample opportunities for open and honest conversations regarding diversity goals. Four goals were foundational to Kent State's adoption of a diversity-required curriculum:

1. There was a need to respond to an ongoing university goal to enhance student success. Student success could no longer be defined in the absence of adequate exposure to diversity issues.
2. There was a need to help educate students to live in communities permeated with cultural and ideological differences. To the extent that our society will continue to experience an increase in cultural and ideological differences,

diversity education becomes critical for living.

3. There was a need to raise student's consciousness about local and global differences, to explore shared values, to improve students' appreciation of their own cultures, and to encourage them to embrace and respect differences.
4. There was a need to ensure that Kent State's graduates are fully prepared to function effectively in an increasingly diverse society. Kent State's graduates should be prepared to accept job opportunities anywhere in the world.

### **Rationale**

Part of the deliberation of the purpose or goals that the required diversity curriculum was expected to achieve included a discussion of rationale. Since a large proportion of Kent State's students come from rural Ohio and neighboring states, educating students to appreciate the fact that we are living in an increasingly interdependent world becomes crucial. Also, business and industry leaders are clear

in their expectations and urgent in their calls for graduates with cross-cultural skills. Business leaders point to the fact that for them, diversity is a matter of business imperative.

Feedback from graduates suggests that, irrespective of their specializations, job interviewers are increasingly demanding that they describe their experiences with diversity and demonstrate their ability to function effectively in a diverse setting. Today, the marketplace demands graduates who possess important cross-cultural skills. In addition, given the historical background of Kent State University, a commitment to liberal education as well as to comprehensive education is of top priority. Teaching and learning about appreciation of human differences are central to the kind of education the University professes. Lastly, there have been several campus committees and task forces that consistently recommended curricular transformation to embrace diversity. Green (2002) indicated the United States cannot make the common claim to have the best system of higher education in the world, unless our graduates can free themselves of ethnocentrism bred of ignorance, and navigate the difficult terrain of cultural complexity. Similarly, Kent State University cannot claim to be one of the best universities in the nation, unless its graduates are equipped to embrace the world to its fullness. With these rationales, Kent State University was set firmly on its path to institutionalize diversity requirements.

### **The Characteristics of the Diversity Requirements**

After much deliberation, it became obvious that one required course would not sufficiently provide opportunities for students to grow in all aspects of diversity. For example, there is a type of diversity that is unique to the United States that students should understand thoroughly. Beyond that, there is another type of diversity that characterizes the world in which we live.

Two three-credit courses with one focusing on domestic diversity and the second focusing on global diversity were proposed and approved for implementation.

In order to build in flexibility for students, these courses could be taken in any semester from freshmen to senior years. It was determined ahead of implementation that the adoption of two more courses shall not result in an increase in course load necessary for graduation. As a matter of fact, Kent State University was discussing a reduction in the overall course load at the time that the required diversity courses were being contemplated. Finally, the University decided that these diversity courses should be selected from a substantial list of diversity courses on campus. However, courses approved to meet diversity requirements should be those that can be harmonized with the Liberal Education Requirements (LER) courses.

As mentioned above, Kent State was in the process of reducing the overall LER course load (from 39 credit hours to 36 credit hours) at the time the University was deliberating on the adoption of two course requirements. A creative solution was found because the philosophy of LER already embraced diversity. Therefore, one of the two diversity-required courses was embedded in the existing LER, while the second diversity required course could count toward another LER, major, minor, or elective.

### **Implementation**

To help with the management of University required courses, the University established the University Requirements Curriculum Committee (URCC). A charge of the URCC is responsibility of overseeing all university-wide curricular requirements. The Committee periodically reviews and recommends changes in existing curricular requirements (LER, Diversity, and Writing Intensive), reviews new course and program proposals and makes recommendations on

them, and assesses student learning outcomes in required courses.

The University made a deliberate effort to simplify curriculum review and to develop criteria for diversity courses approval. The URCC issued calls to academic units for diversity course proposals that were reviewed and recommended to the EPC.

### **Learning Outcomes**

In order to be able to identify courses that may meet the diversity requirements, it became necessary to identify the learning outcomes expected from these courses. Courses that satisfy the diversity requirements aim to give students significant opportunities to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Address diversity issues, particularly those involving unequal and/or discriminatory treatment.
2. Compare positive and negative implications of various parochial or "...centric" perspectives.
3. Confront racial or ethnic perceptions, attitudes, and stereotypes.
4. Encourage global awareness and sensitivity.
5. Examine patterns and trends of diversity in the United States.
6. Explore ways to communicate and participate constructively in a diverse community.
7. Foster appreciation of aesthetic dimensions of other traditions and cultures.
8. Learn systematic approaches to understanding cultural differences and commonalities.
9. Participate in special programs that promote understanding of other peoples.
10. Study Western and non-Western cultures in a world context or from a comparative perspective.
11. Understand how one's own culture shapes one's perceptions and values.

Classroom activities are expected to enable students to "inquire, reflect, learn, grow, and act"—a curriculum mantra of Kent State's educational efforts.

### **Incentives for Change**

Seasoned administrators are quick to point out that in higher education as in any sector, leaders reap what they reward. Organizational and curricular change requires attention to incentives that anticipate implementers' logistical and motivational needs.

The first area of attention was course development. A fellowship program was proposed to assist interested faculty in completing diversity-related projects. Three types of projects were of interest: (a) those that enhance diversity in courses or academic programs; (b) those that strengthen faculty development in relevant ways; and (c) those that diversify the knowledge base within the campus and the broader community. Faculty could use their fellowships to complete projects with the following purposes:

1. Change an existing course to incorporate, augment, or refine diversity content, or to enhance teaching methodology to illuminate diversity content.
2. Create a course focusing in substantial measure on diversity content or an instructional methodology designed to illuminate diversity content.
3. Prepare instructional materials designed to facilitate incorporation of diversity content into a new or existing course.
4. Create a department, program or disciplined-based faculty development initiative designed to strengthen the capacity of faculty in the unit to achieve a more diverse curriculum.

5. Create or refine community-based instructional programs to facilitate diversity awareness.

During the first academic year, a total of 10 fellowship awards were provided consisting of \$2000 each. Each recipient could also apply for an additional \$1000 to cover cost of research materials as well as conference attendance.

While it is part of faculty expectations that they attend academic conferences regularly, faculty were especially encouraged to take this opportunity to attend diversity-related presentations. Currently, the Office of the Vice Provost for Diversity and Academic Initiatives is planning an internal conference for all faculty members teaching diversity required and diversity-related courses. The proposed conference will serve as one more incentive for faculty to make their teaching public and affirm best practices. Part of the encouragement includes limited financial assistance to also attend external conferences that emphasize diversity curriculum development.

### **Guidelines for Course Development and Selection**

The following further guidelines were provided to help with course development and course selection decisions:

1. Both lower division and upper division courses may be proposed.
2. A course must have been offered at least once before consideration. This guideline enables decision makers to have some basis for course evaluation before approving the course.
3. Courses within a single discipline as well as interdisciplinary courses may be proposed.
4. With respect to foreign language instruction, elementary language acquisition courses are not eligible. More advanced language courses may be submitted for consideration.

5. With respect to the formal approval process, the Department/School Curriculum Committee, College Curriculum Committee, an appropriate subcommittee of the Educational Policies Council, Educational Policies Council, and Faculty Senate must approve the diversity curricula proposals.
6. In some degree programs, diversity has been made an integral part of the curriculum. If breadth and intensity of diversity across the curriculum can be demonstrated by the academic unit, program completion will satisfy the requirement.
7. Finally, with respect to the review cycle, the diversity requirement and designated courses/programs are to be periodically and systematically reviewed for conformity to the objectives and criteria. Review by an appropriate subcommittee of the Educational Policies Council will occur every five years.

### **Challenges Encountered**

As mentioned earlier, the first challenge encountered in the process of required diversity course adoption was the need to prevent an addition to the overall graduation requirements of undergraduate programs. To complicate matters, the University was already deliberating on how best to reduce the overall graduation credit requirements; hence, the discussion of diversity course requirements needed to comply with the agenda on the table. The second challenge was to ensure that all units have contributions toward the diversity course list. Of course, without this, it was going to be a politically difficult proposal to sell. Third, change sponsors encountered the challenge of demonstrating that diversity courses actually bring benefits to hard sciences. Why should a computer science student, a biomedical science student who could benefit from more science courses

spend their “precious limited time” to undertake a six-credit hour course on diversity? Convincing science faculty who did not undertake such an educational experience during their college days was not a trivial challenge.

In addition, there was the challenge of how best to proceed and respond (or not respond) to criticisms. Criticisms ranged from the university’s deliberate efforts to “impose” liberal ideas and agenda on students to the university’s deliberate efforts to “water down” university education.

### **Reflection on the Reasons For Success**

Scholars of educational change are often cautious in recommending a generalizable recipe for success. Insofar as context plays an important role in the overall success of any change, readers must examine the relevance of suggestions provided in this article. In the case of Kent State University, the following nine factors contributed to the success of the diversity requirements adoption:

1. Context for Change - It can be argued that the context for diversity requirements adoption was ripe for Kent State University. First, the blood-tainted history of the University provides a conducive environment to dialogue on democratic values, which include freedom, tolerance, inclusion, and respect for divergent perspectives. Second, the arrival of a president who was committed to a new diversity experience on campus enhanced the seriousness the community started to pay to diversity issues. For example, 78% of all faculty and 100% of minority faculty responded in a survey that the University should expand efforts to increase diversity on campus. Third, almost all internal reports made reference to the need for Kent State to improve its attention to diversity.

2. Strong Leadership Commitment - One can say with certainty that a major curriculum change, especially one that involves controversial subjects, cannot be achieved without the support of institutional leaders. This is true in the case of Kent State University where the President, the Provost, as well as the Faculty Senate provided very strong leadership commitments to diversity requirements adoption. Commitment was expressed through every opportunity that involved public address, through approval of resources in support of implementation, and through personal actions and support for organizational change. In a letter to the Board of Trustees, President Carol Cartwright indicated that the University must expose students to a variety of cultures and international perspectives, make all members of our community feel welcome by fostering a positive balance between the democratic values of civility and the freedoms of inquiry, speech and beliefs, and infuse academic and extracurricular programs with such values as respect for others and social responsibility.
3. Lengthy Process - The timeline illustrated in Figure 1 reveals that the adoption of diversity requirements at Kent State University took over six years from the initial conception to full implementation. Other universities need not take this long. However, change sponsors should be prepared to go through a lengthy process of deliberation. A lengthy process that spreads over several years is not necessarily a bad thing because opportunities are available for people to discuss almost exhaustively the implications of the change. The more people participate in deliberation, the more they are

likely to feel a sense of ownership of the outcome. A rushed deliberation may anger the community and suggest that change sponsors are trying to impose their will on the stakeholders.

4. Link to Institutional Mission - Kent State's Mission Statement provides the most powerful source of credence, authority, and justification for diversity related activities on campus. The Mission Statement is clear in its description of the kind of graduates the institution hopes to produce and the context in which these graduates are expected to live. It makes sense for the University community to ensure that the curriculum offerings align with the vision envisaged by the community. To do otherwise would mean false representation and misleading marketing communication to prospective students. Indeed, the first task before higher education institutions contemplating curriculum reform to incorporate diversity is a reexamination of their mission statements. The mission statement describes the reason for existence of an institution. It conveys to the public certain expectations and communicates institutional obligations. An appropriate institutional mission lessens the level of acrimonious wrangling associated with curriculum debates.
5. Creation of the Office of Vice Provost for Diversity and Academic Initiatives - Kent State University elevated the priority given to diversity by creating a senior level official to lead the diversity agenda for the University. The Vice Provost is a member of the President's cabinet and a member of the provost's staff. It is particularly strategic in that the office is located

within academic affairs and the responsibility of the office is broadened to include academic initiatives. In this way, the office is able to lead curricular discussion and initiate academic changes to promote diversity knowledge among students and faculty. The Vice Provost serves as a consultant to the URCC on matters relating to diversity curriculum. The Vice Provost also explores ways to support faculty members who teach diversity-related courses. Having a visible leadership position for diversity on university campus has many advantages. It conveys the university's seriousness to the community, it ensures that whoever is charged with the responsibility is able to eke out accountability procedures for the campus, and locating the position within the Provost's office enables diversity to be woven throughout the academic fabric of the institution.

6. Establishment of the University Requirements Curriculum Committee- The establishment of a university-wide committee to oversee the requirements curriculum turned out to be a very wise strategy. Members of the committee are natural advocates for these courses and they focus their diverse expertise on promoting and enhancing diversity related courses. As mentioned earlier, the committee is also charged with reviewing the effectiveness of the diversity requirements in order to ensure continuous improvement. Institutions should avoid the temptation to staff diversity committees with minority members or females only. Often, diversity initiatives are left in the hands of minority faculty and staff. Both majority and minority members have much to contribute and since no one



is born with innate cross-cultural knowledge, it is incumbent upon all of us to acquire diversity knowledge and skills.

7. Minimal Disruption to Existing Structures - Efforts were made at Kent State University to ensure that the adoption of diversity requirements resulted in only minimal disruption of existing academic activities. Because courses that satisfy diversity requirements are spread across all colleges, credits generated from these courses are also spread across contributing colleges. The adoption of the diversity requirements did not result in greater graduation requirements for students. Therefore, students did not feel particularly burdened to take these courses.
8. Comprehensive Definition of Diversity - It was particularly insightful to ensure that the adopted definition of diversity was a broad one. While issues of race are fundamental to diversity knowledge and skills, other issues such as religious, gender, and socio-economic differences, as well as issues relating to sexual orientation are included in the diversity requirements. At Kent State University, diversity is defined as broadly as it can be—encompassing all human differences. More importantly, diversity requirements cover issues relating to America's journey, which includes slavery, civil war, segregation, Jim Crow, Civil Rights Movement, integration, and efforts to consciously accept, promote, and celebrate human diversity.
9. Ensuring Course Availability - Once students are required to take certain courses, it is incumbent upon the university to make sure these courses are available to students. Serious

attention was given to student convenience in scheduling required courses. Tables 1 to 4 present the courses offered during fall of 2002 that satisfied the diversity requirements and the number of students who enrolled in each course. Courses with large enrollment had several sections. As the tables reveal, most students took the diversity requirements during their first year, followed by the second year, and third year. Only a few of students seemed to delay taking the required courses to their fourth year. The burden for fulfilling diversity requirements was made easier for students by ensuring that courses are available at the convenience of students.

## **Conclusion**

Higher education has played a significant role in advancing western civilization. Through science and technology, we have explored the deepest ocean, dissected what lays at the belly of the earth, and ascended to Mars. We have brought unprecedented sophistication to the arts—music, fine art, architecture, etc., and we have brought depth to our knowledge of humanities. However, while we have been successful in taking a person to the moon, teaching him or her to walk across his lawn to know and “love thy neighbor” has remained a challenge.

At the root of all wars lie the demons that have plagued humanity—the fear of cultural differences, the ignorance of human diversity, and the failure to discover the common cord of humanity. For the first time, higher education institutions are rising to this challenge. Indeed, we should question the benefit of any education that trains the hands to work, but fails to stir the heart to love; we should all question the utility of an education that prepares the intellect to reason, but fails to coach the

mind to appreciate, accept, and promote human diversity. The 21<sup>st</sup> century environment demands a university education

with a mission to bring advancement to our global civilization, progress to humanity, and peace on earth.

**Table 1**  
**Fall 2002 Level 1 (1<sup>st</sup> Year) Courses and Enrollment.**

| Department                            | Course Name  | Enrollment |
|---------------------------------------|--|------------|
| Anthropology                          | Introduction to Cultural Anthropology              | 470        |
| Geography                             | World Geography                                    | 564        |
| History                               | History of Civilization I                          | 919        |
| History                               | History of Civilization II                         | 421        |
| History                               | History of the United States: The Formative Period | 1547       |
| History                               | History of the United States: The Modern Period    | 914        |
| Philosophy                            | Introduction to Philosophy                         | 400        |
| Political Science                     | Introduction to Conflict Management                | 192        |
| Politics                              | American Politics                                  | 572        |
| Politics                              | Comparative Politics                               | 111        |
| Politics                              | Diversity in American Public Policy                | 56         |
| Politics                              | World Politics                                     | 319        |
| Sociology                             | Introduction to Sociology                          | 2339       |
| Theatre & Dance                       | The Art of Theatre                                 | 628        |
| Honors                                | Colloquium: American Politics                      | 16         |
| Honors                                | Colloquium: History of Civilization I              | 18         |
| Honors                                | Colloquium: U.S. History I                         | 18         |
| Total Enrollment in Diversity Courses |  | 9504       |

**Table 2**  
**Fall 2002 Level 2 (2<sup>nd</sup> Year) Courses and Enrollment.**

| Department                            | Course Name                                   | Enrollment |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------|
| English                               | Introduction to Ethnic Literature of the U.S. | 19         |
| English                               | Introduction to Women's Literature            | 35         |
| Modern & Classical Language Studies   | The Greek Achievement                         | 46         |
| Pan-African Studies                   | Black Experience I: Beginnings to 1865        | 287        |
| Pan-African Studies                   | Black Experience II: 1865 to Present          | 75         |
| Philosophy                            | Comparative Religious Thought                 | 45         |
| Philosophy                            | Introduction to Ethics                        | 310        |
| Psychology                            | Multicultural Psychology                      | 52         |
| Sociology                             | Social Problems                               | 510        |
| Communication Studies                 | Criticisms of Public Discourse                | 93         |
| Journalism & Mass Communication       | Media, Power, & Culture                       | 595        |
| Exercise, Leisure, & Sport            | Sport in Society                              | 61         |
| Family & Consumer Studies             | The Family                                    | 300        |
| Music                                 | Music as a World Phenomenon                   | 813        |
| Theatre & Dance                       | Dance as an Art Form                          | 114        |
| Total Enrollment in Diversity Courses |   | 3355       |

**Table 3**  
**Fall 2002 Level 3 (3<sup>rd</sup> Year) Courses and Enrollment.**

| Department                            | Course Name                                       | Enrollment |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------|
| Arts & Sciences                       | Colloquium on Women's Studies                     | 73         |
| English                               | African-American Literature                       | 26         |
| English                               | Women's Literature                                | 82         |
| Geography                             | Cities & Urbanization                             | 38         |
| Geography                             | Geography of Europe                               | 47         |
| Geography                             | Geography of East & Southeast Asia                | 39         |
| Justice Studies                       | Minorities in Crime & Justice                     | 72         |
| Justice Studies                       | Women in Crime & Justice                          | 62         |
| Pan-African Studies                   | African and African-American Philosophies         | 4          |
| Pan-African Studies                   | The Black Women: Historical Perspectives          | 28         |
| Philosophy                            | African and African American Philosophies         | 7          |
| Sociology                             | Family and Other Intimate Lifestyles              | 135        |
| Sociology                             | Inequalities in Societies                         | 117        |
| Economics                             | Economics of Poverty                              | 37         |
| Communications Studies                | Gender & Communication                            | 95         |
| Communications Studies                | Intercultural Communication                       | 36         |
| Exercise, Leisure & Sport             | Inclusions of People with Disabilities in Leisure | 27         |
| Total Enrollment in Diversity Courses |   | 925        |

**Table 4**  
**Fall 2002 Level 4 (4<sup>th</sup> Year) Courses and Enrollment.**

| Department                            | Course Name                                    | Enrollment |
|---------------------------------------|--|------------|
| Anthropology                          | Human Behavior Ecology and Evolution           | 17         |
| Anthropology                          | Kinship and Social Organization                | 31         |
| Politics                              | Constitutional Law: Civil Rights and Liberties | 23         |
| Sociology                             | Race and Ethnic Studies                        | 12         |
| Sociology                             | Sociology of Changing Gender Roles             | 23         |
| Art                                   | Art of West Africa                             | 29         |
| Total Enrollment in Diversity Courses |  | 135        |

### **Reference**

Green, M. (2002). Internationalizing undergraduate education: Challenges and lessons of success. In D. Engberg, & M. Green (Eds.), *Promising practices: Spotlighting excellence in comprehensive internationalizing* (pp. 7-20). Washington, DC: American Council on Education.



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