

A Model for Diversity in the Curriculum: Oregon State University's Difference, Power, and Discrimination Program

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For the past decade, Oregon State University (OSU) has required every undergraduate student to fulfill a baccalaureate core requirement that specifically addresses issues of diversity and social inequality. As a complement to OSU's other curricular and extracurricular efforts to support diversity, the University's Difference, Power, and Discrimination (DPD) Program has become a central mechanism for teaching students to understand how power and privilege function across differences in American society (the baccalaureate core also contains cultural diversity and global issues requirements that focus on cultures other than Western). The Program's success is affirmed both by the students who have taken DPD courses and the faculty who have participated in the DPD faculty seminar and developed DPD courses.

History

When concerned faculty members and students created the DPD Program in the early 1990s in response to a series of racist incidents on campus, the DPD Task Force agreed that students needed courses that examined the roles of power, privilege, and difference. Rather than developing a single course for all students, the Task Force called for faculty members across campus to create a series of courses within their disciplines that dealt explicitly with issues of power and difference. Recognizing that most faculty have not received formal academic training in diversity, the Task Force also established a position for a Program Director who would provide regular educational opportunities for faculty members desiring to create DPD courses.

In the late 1990s during a typical state-funding crisis, OSU's administration announced that they had cut funding for the DPD Program, arguing that there were DPD courses on the books and therefore no need existed to continue

the Director position. Students and faculty, recognizing the ongoing need for new courses and further faculty training as new faculty members came to campus, organized and demanded that the Program be funded. Not only were they successful in restoring funds for the Program, but their activism led to the formation of a Faculty Senate Task Force on DPD that recommended a strengthened rationale and set of course criteria for DPD courses, and an ongoing commitment to the faculty development and campus engagement responsibilities of the DPD Program.

In 2000, the Faculty Senate overwhelmingly endorsed the new course criteria. Each baccalaureate core requirement offers a rationale for its inclusion in the curriculum. The revised rationale for the DPD program approved by the Faculty Senate decidedly situates the emphasis of DPD courses within the context of social inequality, rather than an overview of multiculturalism (as is the case in many institutions). The rationale for DPD courses as a part of the baccalaureate core states:

The unequal distribution of social, economic, and political power in the United States and in other countries is sustained through a variety of individual beliefs and institutional practices. These beliefs and practices have tended to obscure the origins and operations of social discrimination such that this unequal power distribution is often viewed as the natural order. The DPD requirement engages students in the intellectual examination of the complexity of the structures, systems, and ideologies that sustain discrimination and the unequal distribution of power and resources in society. Such examination will enhance meaningful democratic participation in our diverse university community and our

increasingly multicultural U.S. society (Nunnemaker, 2000, Difference, Power, and Discrimination Task Force section).

Faculty support of such strong language about power and privilege came through a long process of campus engagement. A very powerful, committed core of faculty members who actively champion the DPD program worked thoughtfully and carefully with other faculty members across campus. While the majority of DPD activists are in the College of Liberal Arts, the Task Force intentionally sought conversations with faculty members in other colleges. Because OSU is a land grant institution, the University has large colleges of agriculture, forestry, engineering, and health and human sciences. While these are not often the places diversity advocates look for cooperation, the DPD Task Force specifically engaged faculty members from these colleges and developed a groundswell of support. Additionally, the DPD Director made a point of recruiting faculty members from colleges other than Liberal Arts to participate in the DPD Faculty Seminars, and these faculty members became significant advocates for the importance of understanding power and privilege across the disciplines for all students.

DPD Courses

In addition to adopting the revised rationale, the Faculty Senate (2000) also approved a strengthened set of criteria for DPD courses. The revised criteria emphasized the centrality of the study of inequality within disciplinary content and clarified the expectation that DPD courses would examine the intersections of various systems of oppression within disciplinary content. The criteria section for the DPD baccalaureate core requirements state that Difference, Power, and Discrimination courses shall:

1. Be at least three credits.
2. Emphasize elements of critical thinking.
3. Have as their central focus the study of the unequal distribution of power within the framework of particular disciplines and course content.
4. Focus primarily on the United States, although global contexts are encouraged.

5. Provide illustrations of ways in which structural, institutional, and ideological discrimination arise from socially defined meanings attributed to difference.
6. Provide historical and contemporary examples of difference, power, and discrimination across cultural, economic, social, and political institutions in the United States.
7. Provide illustrations of ways in which the interactions of social categories, such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and age, are related to difference, power, and discrimination in the United States.
8. Provide a multidisciplinary perspective on issues of difference, power, and discrimination.
9. Incorporate interactive learning activities (e.g., an un-graded, in-class writing exercise; classroom discussion; peer-review of written material; a web-based discussion group) (Nunnemaker, 2000, Difference, Power, & Discrimination Task Force section).

Each DPD course proposal must address all criteria. While each course reflects its own disciplinary content, its central focus is how difference and power operate within that discipline. For example, a DPD course in forestry still examines forestry issues, but from a perspective focused on difference, power, and privilege in forestry. Additionally, DPD courses must look at how various forms of difference intersect and shape one another within that content. Therefore, a DPD course cannot focus simply on one form of difference (say, race or gender) as if it exists apart from other forms of difference. For example, WS 223 (Women: Self and Society) is a DPD course in the Women Studies Program, and, while the primary topic of the course is women, the examination of gender issues is always complicated by issues of race, social class, sexual orientation, age, and ability. DPD courses must also provide historical context for understanding issues of difference and must approach the subject from multidisciplinary perspectives.

The only contentious criterion on the list was the U.S. focus. Initially, some faculty members wanted courses with primarily international content to qualify, but the DPD Task Force successfully argued that the point of the DPD requirement was to help students look at these issues in the context of their own lives. The Task Force feared that a focus on other countries would, in fact, reinforce students' ethnocentrism while allowing them to ignore and deny the systems of oppression in which they participate as Americans (by far, the majority of OSU students are white Americans). The Task Force did agree that global comparisons, however, would be appropriate.

The Faculty Senate did approve one criterion that had been rejected in the original approval of the DPD requirement—the incorporation of interactive learning activities. Initially, some faculty had complained that such a requirement was tantamount to telling them how they had to teach, and so the Senate dropped the criterion. By the time the revision of the DPD criteria occurred eight years later, most faculty members had realized that DPD content could not be taught most effectively by lecture alone. As one student reported, “with a lecture format the environment was not one that encouraged people to actively think about the issues—students were just concerned to keep up and take notes” (Gross, J., Lonergan, C., Henderson, L., & Ford, S., 1999, p. 36).

A 1999 evaluation of the DPD Program by the Director at the time found widespread support among both students and faculty for the DPD requirement (Gross, et al., 1999). In interviews, students reported that the DPD courses communicated course content in such a way that it had a high level of personal impact on them. “It was clear throughout many interviews that the success of a DPD course was centered, in the students' views, on this transformative, experiential aspect of integrating abstract knowledge in a palpable way with their worldview” (p. 34). In particular, the evaluation found the DPD courses were important for OSU's ethnic minority students, for whom the program is a personal issue. For ethnic minority students, DPD courses represented a curricular

component attentive to and validating of their experiences. One student explained, “As a Mexican student, if they took away these type of classes, I would feel that they are not giving a complete education. If I am paying as much as anyone else, why wouldn't I demand that classes which have to do with my culture be given” (p. 38). In fact, a number of student respondents suggested that more than one DPD course be required. As one student suggested, “Even a minimum of two courses would reinforce the issues. One class may focus in on one aspect of oppression, but taking another class can offer a more comprehensive view of oppression. There is not a lot of time and money, but we have to ask what do we value” (p. 39)?

The DPD Faculty Seminar

One of the unique aspects of OSU's DPD requirement is that it asks faculty members to develop courses within their disciplines that focus on issues of power and privilege. For example, MB 330 (Disease and Society) examines how difference, power, and privilege affect the ways diseases are transmitted at the microbial level. Other approved DPD courses include: (a) an agriculture course on ecosystem science of “Pacific Northwest Indians,” (b) an apparel course entitled “Appearance, Power, and Society,” (c) anthropology's “Language in the USA” course, (d) a fisheries and wildlife course called “Multicultural Perspectives in Natural Resources,” (e) a political science course on “Gender and Race in American Political Thought,” (f) a “Multicultural American Theatre” course, and (g) a history course on “Lesbian and Gay Movements in Modern America.” Presently, more than 50 courses have been approved as DPD courses.

One of the great successes of the DPD Program is its ability to attract interested faculty members from across the University. Key to this success is the faculty seminar. Typically, the seminar enrolls 15-20 faculty members who participate in a five-week training program that involves two hours of seminar time each week. Most participants feel that more training is

needed. Originally, the DPD seminar involved 30 hours of training and provided participants with a \$2,500 stipend. Due primarily to budget concerns, the seminar was cut back to 10 hours and a \$250 stipend. Unfortunately, this decision has meant that the seminar provides less time for processing material and focusing on the specifics of developing a DPD syllabus. To address continuing needs of faculty participants, DPD has offered brown bag series and other educational opportunities to allow faculty members to continue conversations about teaching DPD.

Still, the seminar remains the primary activity for helping faculty learn to teach about difference, power, and discrimination. The goals of the faculty seminar are to:

1. Introduce disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship and perspectives on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other institutionalized systems of oppression in the United States.
2. Provide resources for planning, revising, and teaching courses for the DPD requirement.
3. Develop pedagogical strategies for incorporating issues of diversity in the classroom;
4. Increase awareness and sensitivity to difference.
5. Provide the basis for an ongoing community discussion in which issues of difference can be addressed among colleagues across disciplines.

Seminar participants receive a packet of readings that cover a range of issues: (a) curriculum transformation, (b) Oregon's history of difference, power, and discrimination, and (c) the vocabulary of difference, learning styles, and liberatory pedagogy. The seminar itself devotes time to examining these issues through brief lectures by the DPD Director, learning activities that model diversity teaching, and group discussion. A primary goal of the seminar is to help faculty learn to teach about difference, power, and discrimination within their disciplines. Therefore, a great deal of attention is given to assisting faculty in applying DPD

concepts to their disciplines. For example, the seminar allows faculty to begin to examine the ways in which disciplinary assumptions are gendered or racialized. It helps faculty look at how issues of difference impact who participates in what ways in their fields. It encourages faculty to evaluate the ways in which difference is reflected in the content of their courses. A math Professor who took the seminar a few years ago told the Director about three weeks into the seminar that she really enjoyed what she was learning but didn't know what it had to do with math. The next week, however, that Professor came to the seminar and announced to the Director that she "got it." She explained that she had begun to look at how the discipline of math had been constructed and by whom and at alternative systems of math that had emerged at times in other cultures. Two bioengineering Professors took the seminar and then created a course that focused on ethics in engineering with specific attention to issues of difference. A public health Professor developed a course on "Women's Health Policy" that centers on how the intersections of difference create disparities in women's health outcomes.

Evaluations of the faculty seminar found that a number of faculty members take the seminar because of their interest in the subject, even though they will not be able to develop DPD courses themselves because of lack of institutional support from the departments and/or colleges. As one faculty seminar participant puts it, "I think [the DPD seminar] was good for me, and I learned some things, and it's hopefully going to change some of the things that I do, but I don't see myself developing a DPD course, especially now in terms of where I am with my career. I am halfway through the tenure track process. I know that the powers that be around here would frown upon that in terms of taking me away from my research focus" (Goodall & Jacks, 2001, p. 9).

To this point, involvement in the DPD Program has been completely voluntary. The University does not require any college or department to offer a DPD course, and that has been problematic. Most of the DPD courses are

offered in the College of Liberal Arts, and many other college deans and/or department heads do not see DPD courses in their units as a priority. For several years, the DPD Director and the Advisory Council have encouraged the Provost to make diversity a part of the evaluation of deans and department heads. Thus far, that request has not been fulfilled. Therefore, a number of faculty members who have taken the DPD seminar are interested in developing courses but are unable to do so because of the lack of commitment by deans and/or department heads. Conversations with administrators about central support for the Program are ongoing.

Because faculty members coming into the DPD seminar are self-selected, most already support the goals of the DPD Program. Nonetheless, almost all faculty who have taken the seminar report positive outcomes (Goodall & Jacks 2001; Gross, et al. 1999), and many suggest that all faculty members should be required to take the seminar. Participants reported: (a) “[The seminar] gave me an academic response to students rather than personal experience,” (b) “[The seminar] gave me language to address students’ issues,” (c) “I am able to provide a safe classroom environment for students to speak,” (d) “I am more aware of interacting with others [who are] not like me,” (e) “[The seminar] gave me courage to address students,” (f) “[The seminar] reinforced my current teaching material,” (g) “[The seminar] enabled me to have a place to start talking about [DPD issues] with students” (Goodall & Jacks, 2001, p.19).

One faculty member commented, “Taking the DPD seminar was absolutely the most valuable professional development experience I have had in my 22 years in higher education. I learned more about relating to students and faculty about issues of difference and discrimination than I could have possibly learned from just life experiences” (Gross, et al, 1999, p. 18).

Conclusion

After 10 years, OSU’s Difference, Power, and Discrimination Program seems firmly

entrenched in the University’s baccalaureate core. More than 100 faculty members have participated in the faculty seminar, and the Program has developed a growing national reputation as evidenced by invitations for DPD participants to present and write about the Program. Certainly, the Program seems to have contributed to a developing consciousness of difference and power on campus, and the Program’s Directors have participated in facilitating structural changes that will enhance the University’s diversity efforts. For example, two years ago, OSU’s Provost announced that a demonstrated commitment to diversity would become a requirement listed in all job announcements, and the University is currently in the process of hiring a Director of Community and Diversity who will sit on the President’s cabinet.

Work remains to be done, however. More accountability should be developed for deans and department heads and more funding provided to enhance opportunities for greater depth of study in the faculty seminar. More courses need to be developed outside the College of Liberal Arts, and more incentive provided for faculty to participate in the seminar and to teach DPD courses. Nonetheless, the DPD Program seems to be a step in the right direction to help faculty and students learn to live better with one another in an increasingly diverse nation. As one student puts it, DPD is “a good requirement because if you can drive something home or get it, you have a chance for somebody to learn something that’s gonna make the world an easier place to live in, and that’s great!” (Gross, et al, 1999, p. 45).

References

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