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Do I Belong Here? (In)Visibility in the Curriculum

Stephen Paul Thompson
st125415@umconnect.umt.edu
Do I Belong Here?

(In)Visibility in the Curriculum

Stephen Thompson
Methods

General Education Requirements

Group X - Cultural & International Diversity

- 51 total courses listed in Group X
- 35 Syllabi available
- Course Descriptions & Objectives
  - Geographical Region
  - Identity
  - Historical Context
  - Inequality
Students at the University of Montana do not receive adequate education on issues of diversity and inclusion. Many marginalized groups are largely underrepresented or completely excluded from Group X course curricula. Lack of visibility in the classroom causes students of marginalized communities to feel devalued by the university. There is little guarantee that students will receive any diversity education from the courses required by the University of Montana’s General Education Requirements. Upon graduation, students are likely unprepared to join the workforce of a diverse and globalized society.
What does **Group X** claim to teach students?

- Demonstrate an understanding of the diverse ways humans structure their social, political, and cultural lives;

- Interpret human activities, ideas, and institutions with reference to diverse cultural, historical and geo-political perspectives and physical environments; and

- Recognize the complexities of inter-cultural and international communications and collaborative endeavors, and relate this to the complex challenges of the 21st century.

Each student is only required to fulfill three credits —just one course— from Group X.
Findings

Geographical Region
Identities in North America:

- Of the eight courses focusing on people in North America, seven look at Native American populations.
  - Of these seven courses, only two describe people who lived within the last 100 years.
    - Just one of these courses has been offered in the last year.
  - The eighth course discusses the African-American experience.
Findings

Identity

Group X – Identity

Number of Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersectionality</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic Status</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

Racial Identity

“Diversity in curricula is about more than just teaching a full view of history; it is proven to empower students of color.”

– Samantha Washington
Findings

Group X - Religious Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Identity</th>
<th>Number of Courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Religions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who is missing?

- Identity Groups Completely Missing From the Curriculum:
  - Gender Identity
  - Gender Expression
  - Ability

- Unrepresented Religious Identities:
  - Muslim
  - Jewish
  - Atheist/Agnostic

- Unrepresented Racial & Ethnic Identities:
  - Middle-Eastern
  - White
## Underrepresented Identities

Who are students not learning about?

- **2 courses discuss topics about gender**
- **1 course discusses sexual orientation**
- **2 courses discuss intersectionality**
- **1 course discusses aging populations**
- **1 course discusses socio-economic status**
- **No courses discuss immigration**
- **Only 4 courses discuss issues of inequality**
Fall 2017 – Diversity, Inclusivity & Equity at the University of Montana research study

- 61 student interviews
  - Lack of visibility in curriculum negatively impacts student performance, causing students from marginalized groups feel alienated.
  - Students of diverse communities are often tokenized in the classroom, being burdened with obligatory representation of their culture.
“Being talked at as if you know my kind, and being isolated and alienated when I don't fit that mold of what you think I am. I am criminalized as if I am going to steal something.”

“It’s tough being on the asexual spectrum.. I had a nurse practitioner at Curry tell me my asexuality will pass.”
“In the fight for racial equity in the classroom, we must stress the importance of students learning from a curriculum which reinforces that their own histories, and, by extension, their own identities, matter.”

– Samantha Washington
• Celebrations and events intended to educate the campus community about diverse cultures were seen as foreign, resulting in low student involvement.

• Student experiences indicate a negative and uncomfortable campus climate.
“The findings suggest that well-intentioned attempts to create a more inclusive campus may unwittingly reinforce practices that support exclusion and inequity.”

— Susan VanDeventer Iverson
**Student Body Diversity**

**Fall 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-time Undergraduate Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Headcount</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Full-time Undergraduates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3,358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4,086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7,444</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By Race/Ethnicity:

- Caucasian: 5,864 (79%)
- All Ethnic Minorities: 1,079 (14%)
- African American: 81 (1%)
- Asian/Pacific Islander: 82 (1%)
- Hispanic: 330 (4%)
- American Indian/Alaska Native: 232 (3%)
- Two or more races: 333 (4%)
- Native Hawaiian: 17 (0%)
- Nonresident Alien: 167 (2%)
- Not Reported: 336 (5%)

**Recipients of a Federal Pell Grant**: 2,703 (36%)

**Successful Completers**

Fall 2011 Cohort

First-time, Full-time Bachelor Degree-seeking Students
How should the university improve upon its diversity education requirements?

• Review course curriculum to ensure it meets Group X standards.
  • Remove outdated courses.
  • Include more courses that qualify under Group X requirements.

  “We have been trying get [one of my classes] added to Group X for a few years now, but there’s a complicated process for that.”

  — University of Montana Faculty Member

• Require more than one course in diversity education for all students.
• Train faculty and university staff on strategies to create a more inclusive campus environment.
• Listen to students’ experiences of exclusion and marginalization on campus, then take aggressive action to address these issues.

Conclusion
Conclusion

Quotes From Student Interviews

“There should be a well balanced way to encourage students to perform the type of critical thinking that allows you to talk to others outside of your own religion and ethnicity.”

“The university does try but, they don't do it in a manner that works, they need to change their strategy to something more successful... Maybe they should have something where there are more talks on different types of minorities.”

“I think it would be good to along with alcohol education that students would have to take an Ally Training.”
“A lot of different flowers make a bouquet.”

— Muslim Origin

Research Team
Dr. Eliot Graham
Turquoise Devereaux
Erin Flores
Emily Gillispie
Salena Hill
Jazzlyn Johnson
Stephen Thompson
Jarrod Tippens, Jr.
Danielle Vazquez