

2021-2022

Curriculum Committee Year-End Report

May 2022

The main task undertaken by Curriculum Committee in 2021-22 was to develop a proposal for a new curricular requirement addressing “diversity, equity, and inclusion” and “structural and institutional hierarchies and their impact” (President Cassidy, Nov. 2020). Continuing with the work begun in Spring 2021, CC consulted with a Working Group of faculty and students appointed by President Cassidy in Fall 2021. On the basis of this as well as feedback from discussions with faculty and students and a preliminary outreach to faculty to gather syllabi for courses that might potentially be tagged as fulfilling the requirement, we presented a proposal with two different options for what the requirement might look like in the February 2022 faculty meeting. After discussion in that meeting, and considering feasibility and fairness to departments, the committee streamlined the proposal which was then brought for discussion and amendment in the March 2022 faculty meeting. The proposed requirement was then voted on twice by the faculty in March and April. CC’s process and rationale, and the language of the requirement and its learning goals, are outlined in the proposal that was presented in the March 2022 meeting (included below). With an eye to building up the curricular offerings at the College that might fulfil the new requirement, CC also put out two calls, one in December and one in May, for faculty proposals for course enhancement or course development funding.

CC also continued to do its regular work of reviewing proposals for new curricular initiatives and changes to major requirements, including proposals from Chemistry, Math, Classics, Creative Writing, History of Art, and Gender and Sexuality Studies.

-
-

Proposal for a New College-Wide “Power, Inequity, and Justice” Requirement

This document lays out the rationale, proposed learning goals and structure for a new college-wide requirement centered on issues of power, inequity, and justice, to be considered as an addition to the existing college-wide graduation requirements.

We bring this proposal to the faculty for discussion and a vote on the premise that our curriculum needs to foreground more explicitly a basic ethical component of a twenty-first century education: an understanding of the ways that power dynamics and hierarchies shape the production of knowledge and access to opportunity, as well as engagement with histories and futures of social transformation and justice. Our College mission highlights equity and inclusion

as guiding principles, stating that “a commitment to racial justice and to equity across all aspects of diversity propels our students, faculty, and staff to reflect upon and work to build fair, open and welcoming institutional structures, values, and culture.” College-wide requirements articulate and operationalize the basic values of our institution. We acknowledge that there is already much valuable research, teaching, and learning happening at Bryn Mawr that engages issues of social power, inequity, and justice. The new requirement proposed here would recognize, support, and build on that ongoing work, while articulating priorities around which further support can be provided to faculty and students to creatively, productively, and collaboratively explore these issues.

In establishing a new requirement, it is crucial that we (faculty, administration, and the institution as a whole) uphold the principles of academic freedom. Our Plan of Governance foregrounds the “preservation and protection of academic freedom,” while our Mission Statement states that our educational programs foster “a thirst for knowledge, open inquiry... and innovation,” and our academic community “cultivate[s] intellectual curiosity.” The goal and method of a Bryn Mawr education is the open exploration and discussion of complex, challenging questions and topics across all fields of inquiry, in a community with students and faculty of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and positionalities. The proposed new requirement should emerge organically from faculty interests and expertise, and not be used to prescribe particular content, methods, or perspectives beyond the general learning goals articulated below.

Note on Process:

Responding to President Cassidy’s charge to review the possibility of adding “a new distribution requirement that includes diversity, equity, and inclusion education and/or courses that address structural and institutional hierarchies and their impact” (Nov. 2020), Curriculum Committee (CC) has undertaken a year-long process that has included: discussing different possibilities for content-based approaches to education on issues of power, inequity, and justice; gathering and evaluating relevant courses and requirements in place or being developed at other institutions; consulting with a Working Group of faculty and students appointed by President Cassidy in Fall 2021, charged with envisioning possible structures and content for a new College requirement; consulting with faculty, students, and relevant campus organizations (undertaken by CC in Spring 2021 and by the Working Group in Fall 2021); and eliciting from faculty syllabi and descriptions of courses that they would propose to count toward this new requirement.

Learning goals

Courses tagged as fulfilling the requirement will achieve one (or possibly more) of the following goals:

- Identify and understand the societal, physical, and/or psychological effects of racialization, racial discrimination, dispossession, and exploitation caused by systemic structural inequality and structures of power;
- Identify and understand the societal, physical, and/or psychological effects of being defined by one's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, class, nationality, disability, religious beliefs, and/or culture; and/or other forms of systemic structural inequality;
- Gain knowledge of and critical perspective on histories and legacies of colonialism and/or imperialism, including but not limited to exploitation, enslavement, displacement, genocide, and extraction;
- Develop understanding of how axes of power and difference – such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, class, nationality, disability, religious beliefs, culture, etc. – interact to produce inequalities and hierarchies;
- Critically examine disciplines and fields of study in order to recognize and address racial and other forms of bias or differential access that are not otherwise surfaced through conventional approaches;
- Critically examine how forms of discrimination and inequity can be both perpetuated and challenged through diverse modes of cultural expression (literary, visual, musical, linguistic, etc.);
- Gain theoretical and methodological tools to study and document drivers of systemic inequity and/or responses to inequity in contemporary and historical contexts;
- Gain theoretical tools and vocabulary to use embodied knowledge and life experience as a basis for critical thinking and creative work;
- Develop skills and vision for undertaking reparative, restorative, and liberating work for the self and in the local and broader communities.

The plurality of learning goals articulated here reflects our commitment to diverse ways of engaging with issues of power, inequity, and justice. The manner and method of addressing these goals, as well as the evaluation of their effectiveness, will remain the prerogative of individual faculty members.

Structure and mechanics of the proposed requirement

The proposed new requirement will take the form of a one-unit college-wide distributional requirement fulfilled by taking a single course that focuses on issues of power, inequity, and justice by addressing one (or more) of the learning goals articulated above. Such courses:

- Can be double-counted with courses that fulfill other college-wide requirements and modes of inquiry;
- Can be double-counted with courses that fulfill major, minor, or concentration requirements;
- Can be at the 100-, 200- and 300-level.

Stipulations for students:

- Students should complete the requirement before their senior year;
- The requirement will go into effect for the class of 2027;
- Existing distributional and College-wide requirements will remain intact.

Faculty considerations:

- As with other area attributes, tagging a course for this requirement is entirely opt-in for faculty; faculty are not required to designate their courses as fulfilling this requirement;
- Individual faculty will be free to determine which learning goals their course fulfills and how;
- When submitting a course to be tagged as fulfilling this requirement, faculty will be asked to submit to the Registrar a brief statement (one paragraph) explaining which learning goal(s) they anticipate the course will address and how;
- Faculty are encouraged to include this statement in their syllabus as a way of clarifying course goals and expectations for students.

Support and further development

A meaningful engagement with issues of power, inequity and justice in our curriculum should provide students the opportunity to engage with these topics at multiple points during their academic careers, across diverse departments and programs. The proposal outlined above should be considered a base upon which further initiatives can be considered and piloted to support and build on the learning goals proposed above, including:

- Supporting departments' efforts to include courses or sections of courses in their major requirements that deal with issues of power, inequity, and justice so as to enable students to fulfill this requirement in their major when possible;
- Facilitating sessions for faculty to come together and workshop syllabi for courses envisioned as fulfilling this requirement;
- Creating and/or further developing non-conventional academic experiences, including those outside of the classroom, that can contribute to the above learning goals (e.g., through Praxis courses; 360 Clusters; or building "learning portfolios");
- Considering the development of a new minor or concentration at Bryn Mawr focusing on issues of power, inequity, and justice;
- Developing team-taught, multidisciplinary courses in and across divisions of the undergraduate curriculum that engage with issues of power, inequity and justice in different contexts and from different perspectives (supported through committing FTE resources and administrative support to help envision and administer these courses, as

well as compensating departments to maintain existing curricular offerings and requirements).

The successful integration of this requirement and the possibilities outlined above requires commitment, support and investment from our institution.

- CC emphasizes the need for substantial support from the Provost's office in the form of time and financial resources for current faculty and departments to develop these curricular offerings, including support in the form of training sessions, working groups, inter-departmental partnerships, faculty-student partnerships, course development grants, course releases, etc.
- CC strongly encourages the Committee on Academic Priorities, the Office of the Provost, the Office of the President, and the Board of Trustees to invest time, energy, and funds in the creation of new TT and CNTT faculty lines to develop and teach courses that will fulfill a power, inequity, and justice requirement and contribute to broader curricular initiatives in these areas.

Respectfully submitted by the Curriculum Committee

Faculty: Amanda Weidman, Chair; Anita Kurimay; Collin Rice; Qinna Shen; Alicia Walker

Ex officio: Michael Allen, Kirsten O'Beirne, Judy Balthazar, Jennifer Walters

March 8, 2022