American Diversity and International Distinction

American Diversity and International Background

"Diversity" is being defined in reference to the definition developed and used in University of Idaho's Certificate of Completion in Diversity and Stratification program. This definition draws on Marilyn Loden's conceptualization of diversity, as "those important human characteristics that impact individuals' values, opportunities, and perceptions of self and others" (Loden 1996). Diversity is thus broadly defined covering familiar characteristics involving gender, race, and ethnicity as well as characteristics of religion, sexual orientation, age, class and able-bodiedness. It reaches more broadly to include local, national and global cultural variation as well as to a variety of other manners in which individuals and groups are distinct in meaningful ways.

Human diversity is one of the key dynamics that effects "the flow of ideas, knowledge and experience in a society and around the world, but it can also lead to conflict and systematic social inequalities. Because some characteristics in human diversity are culturally more valued than others, individuals with diverse characteristics are culturally arranged in a hierarchy of groups, affecting resources and opportunities. This social stratification draws from discrimination and prejudice to create social inequalities, unequal opportunity and incivility" (Certificate of Completion in Diversity and Stratification brochure).

The United States is increasingly becoming more multicultural and pluralistic. According to the 2008 U.S. Census one third of Americans are people of color, with Whites in California and Texas comprising less than half of the population. By 2020 children of color will comprise the majority of Americans less than 18 years of age. By 2050, Latinos will represent 26% of the United States population, and in Idaho Latinos represent the fastest growing ethnic group. Not only in race and ethnicity, but diversity is also expressed in increasing attributes of culture, religion, language, able-bodiedness, socioeconomic status, gender, and sexual orientation. The "intersectionality" of these attributes (i.e., the particular mix of a person's ethnicity, gender, culture, religion, socioeconomic status, for example) "renders no individual an island," as if compartmentalized from the social interconnections of diversity and the differential allocation of resources and opportunities that emanate out of those diverse interconnections.

Everyone is directly affected by diversity in virtually every aspect of his or her life, throughout his or her life. In the business world, most large corporations as well as many private and public agencies are thus taking a lead in training existing employees as well as seeking new employees who are able to work, communicate, collaborate and problem solve effectively in diverse settings.

Diversity Education distinct from International Education. The diversity component within the General Education Core proposed here is not to be equated with an international component within the General Education Core. Each academic field of study represents distinct research and pedagogical agendas, with differing publication avenues through which its field of study has been disseminated.

Generally "diversity education" focuses on domestic diversity, the broad range of social differences (ethnicity, race, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, culture, sexual orientation, able-bodiedness, etc.), that have consequences in life chances, opportunities, and perceptions (of self and others). Often there is a focus on how such social differences lead to stratification, i.e., racial stratification, gender inequalities, heterosexism, etc. It also entails exploring the student's role and responsibilities in participating in and constructing diversity.

"International education" focuses on a global aspect, examining cross-cultural differences in language, behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions, intercultural conflict and resolution, and the broader political/legal implications of cultural/national perspectives. Note: Interestingly international education tends to be a more appealing subject for both academics and students. This is perhaps because many people believe that the U.S. as a meritocratic, equal opportunity society where race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, etc. no longer matter as much as it did in the pre-civil rights era. There is however significant empirical evidence of the ongoing salience of these socially constructed differences. It may also be the case that international education is preferred over diversity education because it's easier to learn, teach, and talk about international, cross-cultural difference, perhaps even more fun, in ways that are not as personally threatening.

International and its Criteria: As a component of the General Education curriculum, this is my understanding of its criteria. Seeks to provide a broad political, legal, cultural, and/or linguistic conceptual framework to explore and provide an understanding of: 1. diverse international/global human values, belief systems, world views, languages, 2. how international values, belief systems and social issues have contributed to historical and modern day international developments, conflicts and peace, 3. what has been the roles and interactions of American and International countries, influencing historical and modern international peace, conflict and development, as well as how has each contributed to the other's cultures and societies, 4. culminating in addressing the UI Learning Outcomes. 5. Effectively use oral and written forms of communication. 6. Taught by full-time, boardappointed faculty, if not, provide teaching experience qualifications that meet course expectations.

American Diversity and its Criteria: As this is a new component of the General Education curriculum, let me refresh myself with its criteria as well. Seeks to provide 1. a conceptual framework to explore and analysis the construction and the social, economic and political forces (i.e., social/cultural theory) that have shaped 2. one or more American 3. social/historical diversity attributes and characteristics (ability, age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status), 4. culminating in addressing the UI Learning Outcomes. Given the "intersectionality" of diversity, the Learning Outcomes #4 Clarify purpose and perspective and #5 Practice citizenship take on new relevance and thus criteria 5. exploring the student's roles and responsibilities for participating in and constructing diversity. 6. Effectively use oral and written forms of communication. 7. Taught by full-time, board-appointed faculty, if not, provide teaching experience qualifications that meet course expectations.