

# Required culture courses losing purpose

by Art Goldschmidt and Rayshaan Miller

In order to receive a bachelor's degree from Penn State, students must complete a course in both U.S. and international culture, but, although the requirement's original purpose was to stimulate cultural awareness, some say that somewhere along the way, it has lost its focus.

With more than 400 courses, including "American Masculinities" offered by American Studies, "Plants, Places, People" in Biology and "Introduction to Law" in Criminal Justice, it can be a challenge to understand the rationale behind a number

of courses meeting the "U.S. and international culture" requirement.

All Penn State undergraduates must complete a three-credit course in both U.S. and international culture though students may also meet this requirement by Study Abroad, internships or working in the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps or Teach for America. But in an effort to take as few classes as possible to graduate, many students are taking culture courses that can be accredited to both general education and major course requirements. Others are taking classes with material familiar to them.

Theresa Walrath, a supply chain and information systems student, fulfilled her

International course requirement when she studied abroad in Italy. She took the course to also meet her international business minor requirements.

"It was about Italian corporations' supply chain of a product," Walrath said. "Basically, where everything came from, if it was made in Italy and the quality of a product, but it didn't teach anything about the Italian culture.

"I took that class because I thought it would be easy but it was very thought provoking and it was a great course," Walrath said. "I learned a lot."

Critics say the U.S. and international culture requirements are only good in the-

ory.

"[The requirement] is easy to get around," Marcellus said. "If you want to step outside your comfort zone, you can, but if you don't want to, you can get around it," said Penn State student Valerie Marcellus, president of Club Kreyol, a Haitian cultural student organization on campus.

Amber Williams, a crime, law and justice student, agreed. She said students take courses in subjects they are already knowl-

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# PSU students launch coal-free campus campaign

by Tamara Conrad

Dumping 23 pounds of Kingsford charcoal at the steps of Old Main, students aligned with the Sierra Club kicked off the organization's new coal-free campus campaign at Penn State last month.

The Sept. 16 demonstration, along with the Sierra Club's simultaneous release of a national report detailing the problem of widespread coal use on campuses, set the campaign in motion.

The campaign at Penn State is one of

many at universities across the country.

Penn State produces over 73,000 tons of coal each year. That's 23 pounds of coal every five seconds, according to organizers.

Penn State is one of 60 universities with coal-fired boilers on campus, according to the Sierra Club which has hired 11 organizers to launch the campaign at different universities.

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Photo by Kevin May

Students at the coal-free campus demonstration dumped 23 pounds of charcoal at the steps of Old Main to illustrate how much coal the university uses every five seconds.

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To a crowd of less than 20, demonstrators held signs saying "Coal is dirty," and "We are...Polluting," and delivered the speeches against Penn State coal use.

Nathaniel Meyer, the Sierra Club's Penn State organizer, said that since the university is known for innovation and forward thinking, it should be doing more to promote clean energy.

Rally speakers emphasized that point.

"Penn State has some of the world's leading climate scientists," said Melissa Hannun in a speech during the demonstration. "We should be the ones driving this push toward a future of clean air, green jobs, and a safe climate."

An estimated 20 percent of Penn State's energy comes from renewable sources, Meyer said, and although this is good, it's "not nearly enough."

"The only way to be truly sustainable is to shut down coal plants," said Rose

Monahan, an intern with the Sierra Club.

Meyer said Penn State needs to "get off coal now so we're not poisoning people."

"We need everyone on campus to realize how important it is, because if we wait, it'll be too late," Monahan said.

Other schools have progressed in the Clean Energy Movement, Meyer said, and Penn State should do the same. Meyer said Penn State needs to find a clean energy source that works for it and go with that source as quickly as possible.

"[Penn State has] people who know the best options. It's just a matter of influencing and making that move from dirty to clean energy," Monahan said.

"It's a big opportunity to make a statement and say we're ready to lead into the 21st century," Meyer said.

The group delivered a copy of the Sierra Club report to President Graham Spanier's secretary.

Meyer said his organization is looking forward to working with the Penn State administration.



Photo by Kevin May  
Rose Monahan, with paper, talks to a small group about Penn State's need to move away from coal as its main energy source.

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edgeable of to get the grade and satisfy the required credit.

"I think the problem with diversity courses is that the students get to pick their own classes, and, being that it is an elective and needed, students pick courses that they would be more familiar with and not have so much trouble," Williams said.

There is no way to stop a Jewish student, for example, from meeting the international requirement by taking "Jewish civilization" even if a course on Chinese art might meet the intent of the requirement better, explained Laura S. Brown, an adviser in the Division of Undergraduate Studies. Ideally, the adviser should know the student well enough to help in the course selection process, but this rarely happens nowadays at Penn State and especially at University Park. Students often make their choices without consulting their adviser.

There has been some discussion about

the need for faculty to revisit the general education requirements, Ron McCarty, vice chair of the Faculty Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs, and chair of the U.S. and International Cultures Subcommittee, told Voices.

"Despite the faculty's lofty intentions, typically the student cares mainly about the time when the course meets, and doesn't use the U.S./I requirement as a means of expanding his or her understanding of the world," McCarty said.

How can Penn State make sure students learn about the wider world in which they will live and work? In the past, many Americans thought that instruction should encompass the skills needed to earn a living and that general education might consist of a smattering of arts, literature, social studies, and natural sciences. The focus was mainly on the American experience, with a nod toward Western civilization, which included the ancient I ear East, Greece, Rome, and medieval and modern Europe, largely limited to white, hetero-

sexual males.

For much of its history, Penn State's requirements for a bachelor's degree were set largely by academic departments and colleges.

In October 1989, following two forensic sessions on diversity at Penn State, the Faculty Senate finally addressed a course requirement for graduation. Few faculty members wanted to create a single course that would satisfy the requirement, a course in, say, black, women's, gay and lesbian or non-Western studies, according to those familiar with the deliberations at the time. A menu of possible courses seemed preferable, even if a student could earn credits by taking a course in his or her own reference group. The university's current requirements took effect for students entering the bachelor's degree program in the summer of 2005.

Marcellus said she feels some of the courses are "whitewashed."

"They give you just a little bit of information about another culture. They keep

you as an outsider

looking in," Marcellus said. "You're not forced to put yourself in their shoes."

McCarty said his subcommittee adds an average of five to six courses to the list every time it meets. The subcommittee rarely, if ever, removes a course from the list of cultures courses, he said.

Some faculty and students argue that the courses meeting this requirement ought to be more focused on issues, such as racial discrimination, but "most students just do it because they have to, not because they want to," McCarty said.

Ultimately, it is left to each student to seek out exposure to other cultures.

Marcellus said everyday life at Penn State teaches students most about other cultures, especially by joining organizations, meeting people and going to international programs. And some U.S. and international courses are, in fact, effective, she said.

"It's up to the students to make the most out of it," Marcellus said.



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# With change comes increasing racist activity

by Curt Marshall

As a minority member of the State College community for over 27 years, it has been my pleasure and pain to watch this community grow from one of a homogeneous population to an ever-increasing diverse community. We are now in an area that has an increasing population of second-generation minorities as well as children of multiracial backgrounds (like my children), who represent the fastest growing segment of society. These are all positive signs of change. However, with all change comes resistance.

With the rapid change of the social landscape, there will be more instances of discrimination and social injustices. The increasing number of racial militant groups is as high as it was in the early 90s, with a 56 percent increase from the year 2000, according to the Southern Poverty Law



Center. We will not be immune to this here in Pennsylvania, which ranks eighth among states in registered hate groups. What it means is that we will need to be even more diligent in our efforts to improve race, social and religious tolerance within our communities.

On Penn State's campus, the administration is striving to make our students aware of the intolerance we have for discrimination. We address this in our curriculums, diversity committees, with multicultural directors and deans, and the university's strategic plan, "The Framework to Foster Diversity." However, each year we admit over 7,000 freshmen to University Park and

over 14,000 university-wide. Within this cohort, you will find those whose upbringing has been tainted with the stains of intolerance and hatred. There is no way for PSU alone to wipeout 18 years of rearing. We as the State College community must make the students, and all staff and PSU affiliates, aware of our disdain for intolerance, and there in lies the challenge.

Many of the communities outside of State College are still homogeneous, and change is not easy, or wanted, by some in these communities. Many of us live in these areas and work at Penn State; how do we take that intolerance of discrimination from campus to our homes? I ask you: What have you done to make Centre County a welcoming and tolerant community?

The only place that I have ever been called the "N" word to my face was right here in State College. A young group of men, from a local community, deemed it acceptable to yell that to me as they drove by. I quickly approached the car (they ran into a red light) and "politely" asked them to exit the vehicle so that we could have a heated debate about their lack of respect and knowledge. As often is the case, bigotry has no guts when confronted with justice and morality. A black professor, over 50 years of age, is pulled over on campus

because a description of a black man was sent out for a recent robbery. A black staff member is followed in a store in the mall. A Hispanic student is asked at a local McDonalds "Can you afford to eat here?" by a worker.

During President Barack Obama's campaign, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright became a lightning rod for racial tensions in this country. He indicated that there were still racist elements in this country and was called un-American for this and labeled a racist. Yet, when Gov. Ed Rendell said, "The voters in Pennsylvania are not ready to elect an African-American president," he was not called on the carpet for saying his state was full of racists.

These are all disturbing signs that the work of creating a civil and welcoming community still has much work to be done. However, and I will leave you with this:

Earlier this month I made my daily pilgrimage to the annual Grange Fair in Centre Hall. My wife grew up in this fair, and so I have adopted it as well. After a quarter of a century hiatus, the 3-year-old King and Queen of the Fair competition was rekindled. My bi-racial son won that contest. Twenty-five years ago that would not have been the case. To quote the great Sam Cooke, "A Change is Gonna Come."



Curt Marshall

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