A Framework for Multicultural Learning within the URI Community

Endorsed by URI Academic Affairs Diversity Task Force on May 12, 2010

Rationale

The 21st century is characterized by a rapidly expanding demographic profile of our nation and a global society replete with cross cultural opportunities, communication, and exchanges. Issues pertaining to understanding, respect, inclusion, and equity are critical to creating vibrant and inclusive learning communities at URI as well as to promoting a viable and functional global society. Multicultural learning and competence is a critical element of this fundamental understanding that must be developed and advanced in order to achieve a truly inclusive and pluralistic learning environment and community on our campus and throughout the nation and world.

As a community, URI is making insufficient progress in its goal of becoming an inclusive, respectful, and just campus. According to a recent report developed by students attending the Equity Leadership Conference, some students from underrepresented groups experience disrespect, prejudice, and discrimination on our campus. Often the needs of these students are inadequately addressed, which may signify that many community members are ignorant of issues of social justice, including prejudice, discrimination, and hate.

In order to produce a community of learners who are educated about these issues and are prepared personally and professionally to live in a diverse world, the Diversity Task Force of the Division of Academic Affairs believes developing and enhancing knowledge pertaining to multicultural competence is critical. Furthermore, the Task Force believes the primary vehicle to create multicultural learning and competency is through the curriculum. URI students have also recognized that they need to better understand injustice and develop “cultural intelligence” to become productive global citizens. They have identified “lack of knowledge” about issues related to cultural awareness as one of the “biggest challenges” at URI and also emphasized that the curriculum is a primary means for providing that learning and awareness. The URI Academic Plan, Charting Our Path to the Future, also explicitly pushes us to “raise consciousness …. about privilege, bias, multiculturalism, and diversity” and “support learning about diversity throughout the curriculum.” Now is the time to enhance multicultural learning as a core value of our institution toward the larger goal of encouraging a deep and profound understanding of diversity for all at URI.

Multicultural Competency

Goal

The Academic Affairs Diversity Task Force proposes a set of ten Multicultural Competencies that will provide context for multicultural understanding at URI and serve as learning goals for all URI students and as core elements for multicultural curriculum development. The goals are to ensure that all students at URI develop knowledge, awareness, and skills in regard to diversity, equity, and multiculturalism and provide a foundation for individual transformation and the development of inclusive and pluralistic communities on campus and throughout the world. “Diversity” in this document refers to disenfranchised/oppressed groups in U.S. society, including (but not limited to): class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and physical/mental ability. We have identified the following multicultural competencies, which are pertinent to the enhancement of all individuals and groups of students, staff, and faculty:

Specific Competencies

Exposure/Awareness

• Awareness of the meaning of diversity and multiculturalism, including the legal and ethical aspects of affirmative action, prejudice, and discrimination;
• Awareness of identity formation and development, and how our own identities and those of others affect attitudes and behavior;
Development of a multidisciplinary appreciation of multicultural diversity and origins of American society as well as diverse cultures around the globe, including recognizing commonalities and differences across cultures;

Knowledge/Understanding

• Knowledge and understanding of power structures, privilege, and explicit and implicit prejudice and how they relate to American society, including within our University community;
• Knowledge and understanding of the history and patterns of difference, discrimination, and oppression with regard to different groups, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, and culture, and how they relate to American society, including within our University community;
• Knowledge and understanding of the social construct of race and its social, political, economic, and behavioral consequences;

Skills

• Development of problem solving and analytical skills about diversity as a means of constructing action plans for addressing diversity issues in the community and resolving conflicts linked to difference;
• Ability to carry out meaningful cross cultural discourse with people whose voices, experiences, and ideas are different from our own for the purpose of creating a shared vision of American and global society;
• Development of advocacy and change management skills for achieving social equity;

Transformation

• Developing the capacity for deep understanding, reflection, and empathy with regard to the current and past experiences of marginalized groups at URI and across the nation, including issues of discrimination, injustice, and hate, and summoning the internal courage to confront such issues.

Framework for Multicultural Learning in the Curriculum

After vetting these competencies with the broad URI community, modifying them as appropriate, and reaching consensus on a set of principles upon which they are based, the Task Force believes that URI is obligated to put in place mechanisms to support students, faculty, and staff in acquiring these competencies and advancing diversity in the URI academic community through curricula and co-curricula efforts.

The Academic Affairs Diversity Task Force recommends the:

• establishment of a new multicultural requirement for all undergraduate students defined by attainment of at least one of the above stated competencies from within each of the four categories;
• development of courses and/or experiential learning opportunities that serve to develop these competencies in our students and satisfy the requirement;
• establishment of a Faculty Senate Diversity Curriculum Review Advisory Committee to aid the Curriculum Affairs Committee and/or the University College and General Education Committee, as appropriate, in evaluating courses that appropriately address the agreed upon set of multicultural competencies.

An academic requirement for all URI students, built upon the agreed upon set of Multicultural Competencies, can be achieved through a general requirement for all students or by a set of courses or learning experiences offered through the perspective of the disciplines/professions associated with each college. In either case, the learning outcomes associated with the course/experience would need to explicitly address at least half of the defined competencies.