



25 Feb. 2021

Dear Colleagues,

I have spent the past year working on the new GE proposal as a member of the design committee, the Faculty General Education Committee, and several sub-committees tasked with working out specific aspects of the proposal, including citizenship. Citizenship is close to my heart. I spent a decade teaching American Heritage, and I feel strongly that BYU should help prepare students to be ethical, engaged citizens in their communities, nations, and the world.

One of the things I love about the new GE proposal is its expansive approach to citizenship, which it links with discipleship. As disciples of Jesus, we seek for a better world, not just in the next life, but here and now, and not just for ourselves but for every person, "black and white, bond and free, male and female" (2 Ne. 26:33). Pres. Nelson's recent plea to members of the Church to "abandon attitudes and actions of prejudice" and "promote respect for all of God's children" has strongly guided our thinking about the new GE program. His words are a call to both individual change and public action, combining discipleship with citizenship. As members of an increasingly global Church, our circumstances vary greatly, as does our access to opportunity. The tithing contributions of members throughout the world, rich and poor, support BYU. We owe it to these members to provide an education that recognizes and values the global diversity of the Church and prepares the students who come here to go forth and serve ethically in their home communities, nations, and wherever they may be called in the world.

A number of the elements of the new GE are designed to provide this preparation for learning about and serving in a diverse world. One is the theme of "diversity, equity, and belonging." This theme is woven throughout the GE experience, not just in a single class. It appears first in the freshman seminar, again in the GE Explorations course on "Citizenship, Stewardship, and Community," and finally in an additional GE course that carries the "diversity, equity, and belonging" designation, meaning that the course meets the learning outcomes for that requirement. We hope that the repeated appearance of this theme will prepare students to understand the unequal experiences that have shaped and continue to shape our communities, the Church, and the world and to grow in respect and love for people whose life experiences differ from their own.

The languages and cultures requirement is another facet of citizenship. We see languages not just as acquired skills, but as windows into diverse ways of thinking and being. Increasingly, language instruction is intertwined with instruction about the cultures of those who speak the target language. So, while learning a language, students will come to know different cultures as well, increasing their respect and understanding for global diversity as well as their ability to interact positively with people across language and cultural barriers.

Finally, the new GE program will include an updated version of the American Heritage course, which is essentially a civics course, as one of the primary options for fulfilling the "Citizenship, Stewardship, and Community" Explorations requirement. American Heritage has a reputation among some members of the BYU community as a flag-waving class on American exceptionalism. It hasn't been that for a long time, if it ever was. All of the instructors I observed in my decade of teaching American Heritage



addressed both the strengths and the weaknesses of the American system of government and brought in comparative examples from other governments. The revised course will, similarly, be comparative (although built on a foundation of understanding American Constitutional government). It will also have a strong diversity, equity, and belonging theme, addressing how we create unity from diversity, what barriers to a just and equitable society persist in the structures and attitudes of our governments and communities, how race and other markers of difference shaped society in the past and continue to impact people today, and what disciples of Christ can and should do to support just and equitable societies for all.

I believe that the citizenship aspects of the new GE proposal will play a vital role in meeting Pres. Nelson's charge. BYU, representing the worldwide Church, should be a place where discipleship and citizenship come together, where we can learn about past and continuing inequities, practice overcoming them in ourselves and in our societies, and model a community where all can achieve their potential as children of God and "fellow citizens with the saints" (Eph. 2:19).

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jenny Pulsipher".

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