



5 March 2020

Dear Colleague,

As members of the General Education (GE) Design Committee Task Force on Diversity, and as faculty directly involved with and committed to supporting efforts to make Brigham Young University a more inclusive and faith-promoting space for all our students, we would like to explain the motivation and process that went into the creation of the proposed GE requirement on Diversity, Equity, and Belonging, and how its incorporation into the new GE program fulfills the aims and missions of a BYU education.

Background

Our task force was organized at the request of the GE Design Committee in July 2020. This occurred shortly after President Kevin J. Worthen formed the Committee on Race, Equity, and Belonging (CoREB) in June 2020 to “review processes, policies, and organizational attitudes at BYU and to ‘root out racism.’”¹ As with the formation of CoREB, the exploration into the creation of a GE Diversity requirement was spurred by both longstanding discussions across the university involving students, faculty, and administrators, and by a series of high profile racist incidents at BYU and across the country during the winter, spring and summer of 2020.²

Process

Throughout August 2020, the GE Task Force on Diversity met to study, design, and seek feedback on the learning outcomes that form the core of the proposed GE requirement on Diversity, Equity, and Belonging. We began by evaluating how other public and private universities implemented diversity related curricular reforms, while also considering the unique mission and aims of a BYU education. The task force then designed four learning outcomes that guided further discussion of what the requirement could look like within BYU’s revamped GE program. The outcomes were shared with the GE Design Committee and the newly formed Committee on Race Equity and Belonging (CoREB). In late August, the task force met with CoREB to seek their input. As a result of this meeting, the learning outcomes were revised and resubmitted to the GE Design Committee. Having created the contours of the requirement, as well as some initial suggestions for how it would be implemented, the task force’s initial work

¹ CoREB, “Report and Recommendations of the BYU Committee on Race, Equity and Belonging,” February 2021, <https://brightspotcdn.byu.edu/12/58/d61b3164487da5946d13471e7567/byu-race-equity-belonging-report-feb21.pdf>.

² Kevin J. Worthen, “A Message from BYU President Kevin J Worthen,” *BYU News*, June 2, 2020, <https://news.byu.edu/announcements/a-message-from-byu-president-kevin-j-worthen>. See also Katie Shepard, “‘Why don’t we have a white history month?’: BYU Condemns ‘racist, anonymous comments’ aimed at black students,” *The Washington Post*, February 11, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/02/11/byu-condemns-racism/> and Lisi Merkley, “Racism continues to surface in the Church and at BYU,” *The Daily Universe*, June 3, 2020, <https://universe.byu.edu/2020/06/03/lisis-384-final/>.



was done. Then, in early January 2021, the task force was asked to draft a comprehensive report for the Faculty General Education Council (FGEC) that provided additional details on course characteristics, a list of existing and potential courses that served as models for what diversity courses would look like, and to suggest a means for approving additional courses to meet the Diversity requirement. This report was completed and submitted to the FGEC on January 25, 2021.

Diversity, Equity, and Belonging within the Redesigned GE Program

As members of the GE Task Force on Diversity, we are pleased to see that the proposal for the redesigned GE Program incorporates the issues of diversity, equity, and belonging as central components of a BYU education. As explained in the proposal, “Students [will] gain greater understanding and respect for the diversity of human experience in multiple courses,” including: “(1) the first-year seminar, (2) a distributed course designated to teach ‘Diversity, Equity, and Belonging,’ (3) a revised civics course [formerly American Heritage] with enhanced emphasis on diversity, and (4) a languages and cultures requirement.”³ Further, learning outcomes four and five of the new GE program emphasize the need for our students to “engage with diverse cultures, histories, and contexts; develop respect for different perspectives; understand global challenges [and] recognize the contributions made and inequities suffered by historically underrepresented people in the United States and across the world.”⁴ Tellingly, the enhanced focus on these issues foreshadowed CoREB’s recommendation that the university “Commit to curricular changes to general education, religion, and elective courses that educate students on race, unity, and diversity.”⁵

Achieving the Aims and Mission of a BYU Education

It is our belief that the new Diversity, Equity, and Belonging requirement will enhance the university’s goal to “develop students of faith, intellect, and character who have the skills and the desire to continue learning and to serve others throughout their lives.”⁶ As faculty that already devote a considerable amount of time and effort to teaching diversity, equity, and belonging in our classes, we have seen firsthand how eager our students are to learn from the unique perspectives, subjectivities, and contributions of underrepresented individuals and communities. Learning from diverse voices empowers our students with empathy, charity, and humility as they broaden their perspective beyond that which they are most familiar and comfortable with. Enlightened by this knowledge, our students are more likely to follow President Russell M.

³ See pages 2, 4, and 7 of “Proposal for Redesigned General Education Program,” Version 4.2, Brigham Young University, February 22, 2021, <https://ge.byu.edu/00000177-d0a6-dfa9-a7ff-d4eed9850001/ge-proposal-v-4-2-pdf>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ CoREB, “Report and Recommendations of the BYU Committee on Race, Equity and Belonging,” February 2021, <https://brightspotcdn.byu.edu/12/58/d61b3164487da5946d13471e7567/byu-race-equity-belonging-report-feb21.pdf>.

⁶ “Mission and Aims of BYU,” Brigham Young University, <https://aims.byu.edu>.



Nelson’s admonition to “overcome any burdens of prejudice” by striving to “build bridges of cooperation instead of walls of segregation.”⁷

We look forward to seeing the implementation of the new GE program, particularly the variety of courses that will be created and implemented as fulfillment of the Diversity, Equity, and Belonging requirement. More importantly, we believe our students will embrace these curricular reforms as a means of assisting them in their effort to develop Christlike compassion for all humanity both on our campus and in the world.

Sincerely,

David-James Gonzales
Assistant Professor of History
djgonzales@byu.edu

Lori Spruance
Assistant Professor of Public Health
lori.spruance@byu.edu

⁷ Russell M. Nelson, “President Nelson Remarks at Worldwide Priesthood Celebration,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, June 1, 2018, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/president-nelson-remarks-worldwide-priesthood-celebration>.