



13 May 2021

Dear Colleagues,

We write to support the Diversity, Equity, & Belonging (DEB) and Languages & Cultures (LC) requirements of the new proposed BYU General Education (GE) curriculum. We acknowledge the charge given by BYU President Kevin J. Worthen to re-design GE and thank the GE Design Committee and the Task Force on Diversity in particular—Lori Spruance, David-James Gonzales, and Rex Nielson. We are also grateful to the University Committee on Race, Equity, and Belonging, BIPOC students, and community members at BYU who have donated considerable time and energy to review, assist, and support these changes to the GE curriculum.

In this letter, we offer two main recommendations with supporting suggestions to strengthen the implementation of these requirements, and to ensure a successful transition among faculty who will teach these courses.

Our suggestions are based on feedback we have received in several conversations with those who teach potential DEB and LC courses, especially pre-CFS faculty, women faculty, and BIPOC faculty. Professors who teach possible DEB and LC courses will require support in order to achieve CFS and/or promotion. Our investment in their progress will facilitate their long-term contributions at BYU, thereby ensuring the success of the new GE. As members of the BYU Faculty Advisory Council Diversity & Inclusion Committee, our ideas represent the diversity of our disciplines including Family Life, Physics & Astronomy, German & Russian, Art & Art Education, and Sociology. Other co-authors from the Faculty Advisory Council have joined us from disciplines including Chemistry, History, Business Strategy, and Public Management.

Like the DEB task force members have noted in their letters to GE¹, we too have witnessed powerful benefits of inspiring learning based on the spiritual and intellectual aims of a BYU education in potential DEB and LC courses. We are excited that GE DEB designations and content may appear at up to four levels of GE coursework: “(1) the first-year seminar, (2) a [required] 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.”²

We reiterate our support of the call by President Russell M. Nelson and NAACP leaders to examine procedures to root out racism and to ensure “teachers to be the first line of defense” against “prejudice, hate, and discrimination.”³ In a BYU Devotional in 2018, Sharon Eubank

¹ See faculty letters in support of the new GE here: <https://ge.byu.edu/why-are-we-designing-a-new-ge>

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

³ Locking arms for racial harmony in America: What the NAACP and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are doing together (8 June 2020): https://medium.com/@Ch_JesusChrist/locking-arms-for-racial-harmony-in-america-2f62180abf37

advised that “forces of division” in society must be met with “an answering strong sentiment and skill set,” a sentiment and skill set exemplified by spiritually inspiring and intellectually enlarging DEB and LC courses.⁴ We emphasize that the world-class training in languages and cultures at BYU goes beyond proficiency or fluency to encompass cultural competency essential to thrive in diverse and interconnected communities, congregations, families, and workplaces.

As the University Committee on Race, Equity, and Belonging counsels, “Building bridges of understanding is the responsibility of every member of the BYU community.”⁵ To that end, we offer two main recommendations with supporting suggestions to achieve these goals. Our suggestions involve multiple campus entities and layers of transition, training, resources, and support for faculty to teach DEB and LC courses:

1. First, we suggest that larger institutional structures will create the conditions necessary for success. We list some specific changes we believe will support the new redesign, including those recommended by the Committee on Race, Equity, and Belonging.
 - Create a clear and transparent process for designing, approving, and evaluating DEB or LC designation. One way to do this is by publishing these steps on the GE website.
 - The BYU Committee on Race, Equity, and Belonging’s initial report includes 26 total recommendations.⁶ We support all of these recommendations but view the following as foundational. As such, we recommend these should be in place in the next two years to ensure the success of faculty who teach the new GE DEB and LC courses:
 - #1: “Create a central Office of Diversity and Belonging” at BYU.
 - #4: “Develop, implement extensive diversity and inclusion training.”
 - #5: “Commit to curricular changes to [GE] courses on race, unity, and diversity.”
 - #8: “Adopt statements on race, equity, and belonging that can be used in college and department operations”
 - #9: “Establish a standing university committee on Race, Equity, and Belonging”
 - #11: “Form a Recruitment, Admissions, and Student Success Committee to assist... vice president of student enrollment management and success”
 - #22: “Design a best practices model to identify qualified BIPOC faculty candidates”
 - #25: Develop a “strategic plan [to] assist with mentoring, training, supporting, recognizing, connecting, and developing BIPOC faculty at BYU”

⁴ Sharon Eubank, BYU Devotional Address (23 January 2018): <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/sharon-eubank/turning-enemies-into-friends/>

⁵ BYU CoREB Initial Report (25 February 2021): <https://race.byu.edu/00000177-d543-dfa9-a7ff-d5cfc1dc0000/race-equity-belonging-report-feb-25-2021> [PDF]

⁶ Ibid.

- Examine potential existing GE courses as frameworks for DEB courses and develop methods and models for experienced DEB faculty to train, mentor, and assist pre-CFS faculty:
 - Precedent should be analyzed closely. There exist GE courses that potentially meet DEB threshold that are already required for all graduates of certain programs which enroll 1,000 or more students per year (e.g., Elementary/Secondary Education, School of Family Life, Communications, and Sociology); this examination may identify best practices for teaching students in a required (vs. elective) DEB course.⁷
 - After the GE requirements receive final approval, there will be a transition period of two to six years before the new GE will apply to all undergraduate students. We view this as an excellent opportunity for colleges and departments to make specific plans that map onto each of these suggestions. We invite colleges and departments to invest in these preparations.
2. Second, we encourage departments/colleges to provide specific supports for faculty, particularly pre-CFS and BIPOC faculty, whose training and expertise make them ideally suited for teaching DEB and LC courses. For example:
- Colleges and departments should make formal commitments to pre-CFS faculty who teach DEB courses and, thereby, will likely receive systematically different student ratings, which ratings may be related to other factors such as course size, gender, and race of instructor.
 - Any commitments should be accompanied by a mix of funding, course release, and other terms to ensure junior faculty attain CFS while teaching DEB/LC courses.
 - Units should consider increasing Teaching Assistant (TA) funding to augment DEB or LC instruction. This will also serve to diversify the potential graduate student and faculty pipeline.
 - Because teaching DEB/LC courses can come with a burden and a cost, units should thoughtfully devise ways to valorize such instruction, such as embedding recognition in department documents and in awards and recognized lectures (among other ways).
 - Training, support, and enrichment of faculty who teach DEB/LC courses and their chairs, supervisors, and deans should be ongoing and involve the potential Office of Diversity and Belonging (to be charged with this type of strategic planning), Office of Undergraduate Education and GE Academy, the Faculty Center and Faculty Development Seminar, and colleges and departments.

⁷ Moreover, starting in 2014, the MCAT exam taken by pre-Medicine students at BYU has introduced 100-level Sociology/Psychology course work as a requirement, providing another lens to understand teaching in courses that feature DEB content to sets of students that are required rather than self-selected or exclusively electively enrolled.

- Colleges, departments, and the university should continue to improve Rank and Status documents to ensure the fair assessment of those who teach DEB and LC courses, especially women and BIPOC faculty.

We look forward to working with others to ensure the success of the new GE Diversity, Equity, and Belonging and Languages & Cultures requirements. We plan to assist with training, mentoring, and supporting other faculty and teaching Diversity, Equity, & Belonging and Languages & Cultures courses in the future.

Sincerely,

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