

Racial Justice and Equitable Futures  
*An Educational Requirement for Students*<sup>1</sup>

University Faculty Committee

May 2, 2021

***The goal of the requirement is for our students to become critical thinkers and lifelong learners in all matters that concern race, indigeneity, ethnicity, and bias, and who thrive and lead across diverse groups and communities in a multiracial democracy.***

## 1 The Working Group

President Pollack’s [statement](#) to the community on July 16, 2020 prompted the creation of the Faculty Senate’s [antiracism initiative](#). As part of that, [Working Group S](#) (WG-S) was charged to design a for-credit, educational requirement on racism, bias, and equity for all Cornell students.

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## 2 Background

The demand for having such an educational requirement for students was articulated by Black Students United in [2015](#), again in [2017](#), and yet again by DoBetter Cornell in [2020](#). Faculty concern that we are failing to properly educate our students in these issues has been periodically expressed through a number of reports (1975, 1987, 2003, etc.) that were reviewed. For example, the idea of having a team-taught interdisciplinary course on race and indigeneity was actively studied at the “task-force level” in the early 2000s and a course on “Race in America at Cornell” was part of a Provost-supported initiative around the same time. More recently, recommendation D.3 in the [2018 Task Force Report](#) argues for a university-wide diversity course requirement based on the menu-of-courses idea. The [CALs Diversity Requirement](#) and the [Arts and Sciences Social Difference Requirement](#) are college-level versions of this.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a modification of the Working Group S [Final Report](#)

The 2018 report also triggered adoption of a “skill acquisition” approach that recommends learning to communicate across difference to address diversity and climate issues. An important result of this is the two-and-a-half hour session that all undergraduate students are required to take during orientation through the [Community at Cornell](#) program designed and delivered starting in 2019 by the Intergroup Dialog Project (IDP) under the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education. Climate issues in classrooms and other workspaces remain a significant issue that came up repeatedly in discussions of all Working Groups associated with the Senate’s Antiracism Initiative.

President Pollack’s July statement asked the Colleges to review their curriculum, taking steps to eliminate instances of implicit bias that can negatively affect the design of a syllabus and its delivery by the instructor. Since then, departments and Colleges have made several changes and significantly expanded curricular offerings related to diversity and inclusion. This brief [overview of college-level activity](#) reflects the different approaches that are being put into place to address both educational shortfalls and issues of climate.

### **3 Learning Outcomes and the Notion of a Requirement Framework**

To realize the goal of the requirement we envision a framework with two parts. The first part would be focused on a literacy outcome and squarely rooted in the expertise of Cornell faculty whose scholarship is in the areas of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity. The second part involves a broader group of faculty across the disciplines who will work with their colleagues (faculty mentioned above, and staff in units such as IDP and CTI) as well as students to explore these issues in their departments and fields of study. The framework is designed to meet the following learning outcomes:

**The Literacy Outcome.** The student understands that structural racism, colonialism, and injustice, and their current manifestations have a historical and relational basis. This requires engagement with scholarly content in the tradition of liberal arts education. We also strongly recommend an intersectional approach that works across current categorizations of race and ethnicity, and takes hierarchies around gender, class and other markers into account.

**The Skillset Outcome.** The student learns how to communicate and advocate across the differences that they will encounter throughout their lives and careers. This leads to the creation of more inclusive learning environments for all students across all disciplines at Cornell throughout their time here.

The literacy and skill components are both necessary and equally important, but cannot supplant each other. We propose that structural and systemic racism and bias is most effectively challenged by individuals who understand its historical origins and current outcomes **and** are able to effectively engage with others who may have very different life experiences and perspectives. A requirement framework thus needs to “move the needle” in the direction of **both** outcomes.

The [University Bylaws](#) (Article XIV) leave graduation requirements to the units that grant the degree in question. Thus, for a university-wide requirement to be adopted at the undergraduate level, college level Academic Policy Committees (which often work closely with department level curriculum committees) would need to [approve a requirement in AAP, CALS, CAS, CHE, COE, ILR, CB and SHA](#). [Professional degree programs](#) are typically administered by a college, and requirements for such programs are also a matter for colleges to decide. Finally, at the PhD and research masters level, decisions on requirements are left to the graduate fields, with some engagement with departments and colleges at the masters level. The point being made here is that a university requirement is not something that can be unilaterally declared by the Central Administration. Requirements remain the purview of departments, graduate fields and colleges.

In response to these two issues, the WG-S proposal aims to provide guidance to departments, fields and colleges around a **centrally supported requirement framework** that promotes both literacy and skill-set learning outcomes, for all undergraduate and graduate students across Cornell. **Hereafter in this report “the requirement” means “the collection of requirements that are implemented across all degree programs for all students, meeting both outcomes.”**

#### **4 Three Further Realities to Keep in Mind during Implementation of the Requirement**

How do we identify, produce, and deliver the literacy content? How can disciplines and professions build on the literacy content even as they are producing and building their own courses and materials? And how might all of these activities be incentivized? Before proceeding, we identify some issues to keep in mind.

##### *“Roll Out” Will Take Time and the Requirement Will Keep Evolving, and That is Good*

Having the requirement in place for AY2021-22 is unrealistic. Nevertheless, we suggest that next year should be the first of several years of exciting requirement-related projects supported by seed money. There is enthusiasm for experimental collaborations between the six core units<sup>2</sup> identified as key to the development and delivery of the literacy component, and within other departments and colleges. We have all learned a lot through the difficulties of pandemic-related teaching as well. Creative out-of-the-box teaching experiments should be encouraged and assessed for efficacy in meeting both learning outcomes and goals. Content takes time to develop, and Version 1.0 of the framework should be encouraged to continue to evolve, while keeping in mind considerations of how core six programs and faculty taking up these issues in the disciplines would need an infusion of resources to meet the learning needs of all students.

##### *Not Placing Unfair Burdens on BIPOC Faculty and Students*

The delivery of the requirement is the responsibility of all faculty and must be shared equitably, with full recognition of subject expertise that a smaller group of faculty hold on core issues. This is particularly important in discussion venues that are designed to teach students how to “talk across differences” where an unfair burden is sometimes placed on BIPOC students to explain issues to their white and other POC classmates or on BIPOC TAs to help facilitate discussions. The same holds true for additional expectations placed on BIPOC and early career faculty. The importance of making sure that the work of delivering the requirement is spread equitably across all instructional staff, and of making sure that they are adequately supported is critical.

##### *Menus Are Both Attractive and Unattractive and Need Careful Governance*

Diversity-type course requirements often make use of menus. The [CALS Diversity Requirement](#) and the [Arts and Sciences Social Difference Requirement](#) are examples of such approaches at Cornell. Review of comparable requirements at [peer schools](#) also reveals a propensity for the menu approach. Their appeal is obvious; they spread the instruction workload, they can accommodate one-time-only offerings, and they give the student choice. On the other hand, they require clear criteria for getting on the menu, a filtering mechanism that regularly reviews and enforces the criteria, and a governance mechanism to maintain both aspects. This is not easy and explains why menus tend to grow in ways that undermine or do not fully meet the very requirement they are supposed to serve. At Cornell, an added challenge is that every college approves its own menu of courses, including courses created by other units in other colleges. We are also advocating for an intersectional approach. To address all these challenges, we suggest that any use of menus in the requirement be reviewed by a university-wide panel of knowledgeable faculty under the auspices of the

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<sup>2</sup> [Asian American Studies](#), [Africana Studies and Research Center](#), [American Indian and Indigenous Studies](#), [American Studies](#), [Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies](#), and [Latina/o Studies](#).

proposed Center for Racial Justice and Equitable Futures, and by the Educational Policy Committee of the Faculty Senate.

## **5 The Literacy Component of the Requirement Framework**

To move the literacy component of the requirement framework forward we propose two pathways that would clarify content and define a baseline literacy outcome that departments, fields and colleges must aim to meet as they proceed to develop the requirement for their students.

### **5.1. Meeting the Literacy Outcome**

We draw on the “Proposal for Racism, Colonialism, Antiracism and Decolonization Course” submitted by the Chairs and Directors of AASP, Africana, AIISP, AMST, FGSS, and LSP, to articulate how the literacy component could be delivered to all undergraduate and graduate students.

#### *A Central Course-based Framework to Meet the Literacy Outcome for Undergraduate Students*

The centerpiece of the literacy component for all undergraduate students would be a large-enrollment for-credit, semester long course co-taught by faculty members representing each of the six departments/programs (AASP, Africana, AIISP, AMST, FGSS and LSP). The aim of the course will be to develop an intellectual framework for the integrated teaching of these disciplines. Involving some video lectures and in-person discussions, this course would be offered each semester for 3-4 credits with a letter grade, and be open to all undergraduates. The course will be developed over AY-2021-22, following which it will be offered on an experimental basis in fall 2022 and spring 2023. During AY 2022-23, it will be evaluated and fine-tuned for a final launch of lectures, including video, and in-person discussion sections, starting Fall 2023 and every subsequent semester.

While this course is in development, students interested in courses on racism, colonialism, antiracism, and decolonization this coming academic year (2021-2022) can be directed to the following roster of introductory courses offered by the core six programs as listed below:

- AAS 1100: Introduction to Asian American Studies
- AAS 2130/AMST 2640/HIST 2640: Introduction to Asian American History
- AAS 2620/AMST 2620/ENGL 2620: Introduction to Asian American Literature
- AIIS 1100 / AMST 1600 / ANTHR 1700: Indigenous North America
- AIIS 1101 / AMST 1601: Indigenous Issues in Global Perspective
- AIIS 2100: Indigenous Ingenuities as Living Networks
- AIIS/ANTHR 2XXX: From the Swampy Land: Indigenous Peoples of the Ithaca Area
- AMST 1101: Introduction to American Studies
- ASRC 1500: Introduction to Africana Studies
- FGSS 2010: Introduction to Feminist, Gender & Sexuality Studies
- LGBT 2290: Introduction to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies
- FGSS 2421: Worlding Sex and Gender
- LSP 2100 Introduction to Latina/o/x Studies
- LSP 1802 Introduction to Latinos in US History (crosslisted with HIST 1802, AMST 1802)
- LSP 2720 Introduction to Latina/o/x Performance (crosslisted with PMA 2720)
- LSP 2400 Introduction to Latina/o Literature (crosslisted ENGL 2400, AMST 2401)

The central course (in development) and the range of courses listed above, will be supplemented by a series of high-quality videos and podcasts (along the lines of TED talks, minidocumentaries, and dialogue-based podcasts) organized around basic inclusive topics. These will be produced starting in Summer 2021 and made available throughout Fall 2021 and Spring 2022, and offered to the full campus community similar to this year's "Racism in America" panels.

#### *A Framework to Meet the Literacy Outcome for Graduate Students*

We suggest that departments, fields and colleges use the videos and podcasts that the core team of faculty will produce to build out the educational requirement for graduate students across the disciplines and professions in a manner that best fits their curriculum (some programs are as short as one year, others extend to four or more years and requirements vary greatly across the hundred or more graduate degrees offered). This will require faculty in the disciplines and professions to get involved in thinking through questions of delivery, a process that we note is already underway across colleges.

## **5.2 Required Resources**

Additional resources will be required to create and help deliver the literacy component across the entire university. We suggest the following as important considerations

- Summer salary for the group of faculty who will create content for the high-quality videos and podcasts to be shared in Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 to compensate them for their time and effort (for use by the entire university community)
- Course release for (a) the faculty group in the six core units who will teach the pilot courses in Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 in both the semester prior (to plan for the class) and the semester of the class (to concentrate their efforts on the exploratory course) and (b) faculty across the university producing courses in the disciplines and colleges. Course releases also imply course replacement funding for impacted programs and departments.
- Funding and support for Cornell-affiliated units who will collaborate with faculty on the production of all videos and audio components (i.e. studio time & space, filming, editing, etc.) as well as provide assistance in production of pedagogical materials identified by faculty.
- Building in a systemic regular evaluation cycle of literacy components of the educational framework: the large-enrolment course, as well as college level requirements to see what is working, what needs to be re-evaluated and perhaps revised. This need to "update" course content on a regular basis speaks to the ongoing and everchanging conversation around these topics and is comparable to the updating of textbooks for introductory courses in other fields. Along with the role played by the teaching faculty of these courses, we see roles for the Center for Racial Justice and Equitable Futures, and the Educational Policy Committee of the Faculty Senate

Over the long-term, to sustain this level of effort in creating an innovative university-wide requirement, we suggest that the university consider additional support, especially for the units involved in creating the literacy component. Considerations include additional tenure track hires, as well as hiring of teaching assistants and new administrative staff to provide adequate support for both the initial roll-out starting in Fall 2022 and the permanent courses that will be offered each semester, starting in Fall 2023.

## **6 The Role of Technology**

Technology will be critical for delivering the many forms (described above) that the literacy component will

take as we ensure that it reaches all students across disciplines, professions, and graduate fields. The pedagogically appropriate forms of materials created will be decided by faculty producing courses. In a recent [article](#), the Interim Director of the [Society for the Humanities](#), Professor Annette Richards, speaks to the importance of a new podcast, the [Humanities Pod](#), which brings additional visibility to the humanities that have always been critical to what Cornell is and does, despite the visibility of the sciences.

Happily, there is a developing tradition at Cornell of video-based content from areas relevant to the literacy requirement. Some examples to learn from could include [Fictive Witness: Accounting for Integration](#) (Noliwe Rooks), [Reparations, Knowledge, and the Decolonial University](#) (Carole Boyce Davies), [Taking a Hard Look: Is Cornell a Land-Grab University](#) (Kurt Jordan, Jon Parmenter), and [He Said, She Listened: Mansplaining, Gaslighting, and Epistemic Entitlement](#) (Kate Manne). A particularly salient example produced by a group of faculty are the teach-in video resources for a recent [Toni Morrison Event](#), which includes seven clips that could each be the basis for interesting faculty-student dialog in the classroom. The Library's [Chats in the Stacks](#) program as well as various webinar series sponsored by some of these [centers and programs](#) as well as the podcasts [Dark Laboratory](#), [What Makes us Human?](#) and other Cornell-based podcasts listed [here](#) offer additional examples.

The pandemic has shown us how to use technology and digital learning to effectively adapt our pedagogies and work collaboratively to meet urgent needs in classrooms that span the world. We have done this successfully across disciplines and professional fields. That experience and the speed with which we responded inspire confidence that technology can play an important role in helping deliver the student educational requirement across the university in pedagogically appropriate manners.

## **7 The Skillset Component of the Requirement Framework**

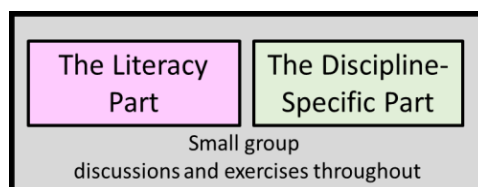
Ensuring that students learn how to communicate and advocate across the differences that they will encounter throughout their lives and careers is the second outcome for the educational requirement. It is also an important outcome for the faculty educational requirement articulated in a separate [WG-F proposal](#). Together, these outcomes will lead to the creation of more inclusive learning and work environments for all students and faculty, across all disciplines at Cornell throughout their time here.

This does not deny the possibility of students choosing to take additional courses in the six core units whose faculty will be responsible for producing the literacy component, and we support initiatives to encourage that outcome. However, we also recognize that the work of ensuring long-term success, particularly as related to graduate students, is the responsibility of individual departments, graduate fields and colleges outside these units.

As noted already, the process of creating new courses is already underway across colleges in response to President Pollacks call for curricular review in July 2020. We suggest building on this further by inviting interested colleges, departments and graduate fields to create courses to demonstrate how they would incorporate the materials produced by the core faculty group (as described in section 5 above) and adapt them across their disciplines and professional fields, especially for professional masters, and research graduate students. Smaller colleges like College of Human Ecology (CHE) and College of Architecture, Art and Planning (AAP) with their wide range of disciplines, professions, and fields have expressed willingness to engage in conversations to take this idea forwards and would provide fertile ground for creative experimentation.

We offer some examples of course adaptations here as suggestions. Some of the discipline-focused

examples noted here strive for a single integrated course that can be visualized using this framework:



One example of discipline specific course development is provided by [Entomology 4040](#) (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in STEM: The Science Behind Bias Seminar), which is currently taken by advanced undergraduates and graduate students. This is a new one-credit offering co-developed with graduate students who use IDP training to help facilitate required in-person discussions. Current weekly topics include understanding how racism and bias against people of color, women, LGBTQIA+ and lower income people has informed and shaped the sciences, as well as the STEM disciplines in the academy. Actions needed to counter current trends are also discussed. The instructional team sees a clear pathway to making this a three credit course for 100-150 students, with in-person discussion, which would integrate materials produced by the faculty group responsible for “literacy component” at the very start of the course. Another example is [CRP 5190](#) (Urban Theory), a graduate level core course in a professional urban planning masters program with required weekly in-person discussion sections, where issues related to how issues of gender, race, indigeneity and ethnicity shape urban environments currently occupy the middle third of the course. This course too would follow the same strategy as ENT4040, incorporating videos and podcasts produced by Cornell faculty experts into its core instruction. Other examples of discipline and profession specific developments include graduate proseminars, incorporation of skill-sets and practice into an introductory course for a major at an undergraduate level, and a half semester-long course focused on diversity and inclusion in a professional masters program, as well as shorter workshops.

This novel approach should be explored and prototyped across disciplines and professions as the core introductory course focused on undergraduates is being developed during 2021-22. Details about credit hours and audience would need to be developed by individual programs and faculty in departments and colleges. Incentives, in the form of course release for development of material or summer salary can facilitate the engagement of instructional faculty in their home departments. The associated benefit to doing this work broadly across the university is that faculty often speak to how their teaching and research inform each other, and to how teaching becomes both a way to learn new materials, and examine how their disciplines and professions work as they push to create new knowledge. This is a venue where all of this could play out.

## 8 Conclusion

The educational requirement for students is proposed as a framework with two components, which gets built out taking into account where faculty subject expertise around race, indigeneity, ethnicity and bias sits at Cornell, the institution’s decentralized structure including with regard to curricular approvals, and deep culture and core value of academic freedom. As imagined, it will be unique in its ability to educate our students to understand that structural racism, colonialism, and injustice as well as its current manifestations are intersectional and have a historical and relational basis, even as they learn how to communicate across the differences that they will encounter throughout their lives and careers.