DIVERSITY BREADTH REQUIREMENTS, commonly known as multicultural requirements, are increasingly common in American undergraduate education. That fact presents both opportunities and challenges to educators. In this essay we assess the goals of the multicultural requirement and the demands it presents to curriculum development; we identify potential problems endemic to comparative multicultural courses; and we suggest a framework for course design which we believe optimizes course effectiveness.

Although we focus on redesigning “the sociology of race and ethnicity” (which fulfills the requirement at the University of California, Irvine), we also address issues pertinent to comparative multicultural courses in general. Our central argument is that the conventional group-oriented course design can exacerbate potential weaknesses in comparative multicultural courses. We propose a concept-oriented framework as an alternative design and offer some suggestions for implementation. We offer our critiques in a constructive spirit. Indeed, this essay is inspired by the very importance of the multicultural requirement and its mission.

1 We surveyed 32 American colleges and universities regarding their diversity requirement. We chose them on the basis of representative sampling; they vary according to size, region, and public/private status. Of those 32, our survey found that: 18 have a diversity requirement; 10 do not have such a requirement; three require students to take a course in a non-Western culture; and one did not respond to our inquiry.

2 We use the term comparative multicultural course to refer specifically to courses fulfilling the multicultural, or diversity breadth, requirement, which address the experiences of more than one nondominant group in American society. We use the modifier comparative whether or not a systematic effort is being made to integrate cross-group comparisons into the course.

3 For the past two academic years, we have offered The Sociology of Race and Ethnicity at the University of California, Irvine, and have enjoyed generally positive responses from students. In spite of those responses, we have encountered certain weaknesses in the course that we have not been able to address. We have had to undertake a fundamental redesign of the course based on an assessment of student evaluations, informal interviews with other sociologists teaching similar courses, and our own evaluations of the effectiveness of the course.

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THE MULTICULTURAL REQUIREMENT: ORIGINS AND GOALS

The multicultural requirement sets explicit goals that affect curriculum development. To understand those goals, we must review the origins of the requirement and the purposes for which it was instituted.

Contemporary efforts to diversify the curriculum in higher education date back a quarter-century to specific gains made by the civil rights movement. The 1968 Ethnic Heritages Act, for example, which supported the study of American ethnicities, originated with students' struggles, which culminated in the Third World students' strike at San Francisco State University in that year. Such struggles and responses increased the availability of university courses that addressed marginalized peoples' cultures and experiences.

A quarter-century later, course availability was taken a step further; such courses increasingly are becoming required on the grounds that an understanding of the diversity of experiences in American society is essential to any educated person.4 Those requirements have been instituted in various ways; they began dramatically when Stanford University replaced its Western Civilization sequence with a more diversified Culture, Ideas, and Values sequence as mandatory for first-year students entering in fall 1989. The diversity breadth requirement is an increasingly common means of diversifying higher education.5

The multicultural requirement at UC Irvine is an example of such a requirement. UC Irvine's multicultural requirement took effect in fall 1990. The formal proposal to institute the requirement contained an explicit mission statement setting out the following three goals: 1) to "impart scientific knowledge" about the "culture, history, and development" of underrepresented minority groups in the United States; 2) to "develop student awareness and appreciation of cultural difference"; and 3) to "encourage cooperation and mutual understanding among all cultural groups and prepare our students to interact successfully in a culturally diverse society by eliminating ethnocentrism".6

Those goals impose certain demands on course design. The first stated goal may require a significant expansion of course content. Goals 2 and 3 present a broader challenge to curriculum development. They stipulate that the course foster "appreciation of cultural difference," "encourage cooperation," and "eliminate ethnocentrism." Such goals differ fundamentally from narrow academic requirements in that they embrace a wider social purpose.7 Taken together, Goals 2 and 3 constitute what we call the "supra-academic mission" of the multicultural requirement. That mission accounts for much of the excitement of such courses; it also presents formidable challenges to curriculum development.

Simply addressing cultural diversity does not automatically foster appreciation and eliminate ethnocentrism. We must design courses specifically with those goals in mind. Before we address strategies for fulfilling those goals, we consider briefly some of the dynamics that complicate the task.

SUPERFICIALITY AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE OUTCOMES

In view of the social salience of issues concerning race and ethnicity in contemporary America, it should not be surprising that such courses seem to be intrinsically interesting to many students.8 In this case, students' interest is often intertwined tightly with strongly held preconceptions. Those preconceptions vary according to students' backgrounds, but often (as in the case of preju-

4 See, for example, Ronald Takaki (1989).
5 See Footnote 1.
7 This is not to argue that "academic content" alone is otherwise value-free; that is not the case. Purely academic requirements, however, do not suggest explicitly which values the subject matter should support, as does the multicultural requirement.
8 The increasing popularity of our own course, The Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, testifies to that interest. Demand for the course at UC Irvine is high; the course is offered twice annually and the overall enrollment surpasses 300 students.
dice and negative stereotypes) they directly contradict course materials and run counter to the mission of the multicultural requirement. One major influence is media representations of race and ethnicity in American life, which constantly bombard students. Any course that deals with those issues competes indirectly with such representations—a formidable challenge.

Course design must be informed by extracurricular influences, by students’ resulting preconceptions, and by the impact of these influences and preconceptions on class dynamics. For example, classroom discussion runs the risk of providing a forum for reproducing those popular images rather than for promoting critical thinking. Also, many students enter with notions about which positions to take on certain issues and what is proper to voice in a class such as this. This situation also can reduce the scope and impact of the course as students filter the information received and monitor the points they offer for discussion.

None of this is to deny the positive role of classroom discussion; we simply suggest that the potential for counterproductive outcomes is particularly acute in multicultural courses.

The goals of the multicultural requirement are undermined as well by time constraints. Such constraints are not unique to multicultural courses, but the combination of broad goals with the sensitivity of the subject matter makes these courses particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences. In Teaching Race and Ethnic Relations (Cunnigen 1990), it is immediately apparent that nearly all of the syllabi were developed for a semester sequence; even then, instructors must move quickly over the subject. This is an ambitious mission for a semester, and even more so for a quarter.

The response in course design is usually to focus sequentially on brief synopses of several groups’ experiences, highlighting the most salient aspects of those experiences. Such a focus often converges harmoniously with—indeed, usually is the basis of—popular misperceptions and stereotypes. The outcome is most often a simplified and superficial portrait of each group addressed; at best, it offers only a weak challenge to students’ misperceptions.

An example from our particular course is the presentation of Vietnamese Americans. With approximately three 1 1/2-hour lectures in which to present the wide diversity among Asian Americans, we were left with only about a half-hour to address Vietnamese Americans. In an attempt to offer something culturally distinct, we discussed the concepts of phu duc and astrology. As a result, many students left the class with a perception of Vietnamese as particularly superstitious. In trying to present something distinctive, we reproduced an exotic stereotype.

Instructors have little control over the input concerning their course content outside the classroom, but they risk undermining the goals of the course if they ignore their influence. Because of this delicate balance, course design becomes particularly crucial in assuring the overall effectiveness of the course. Unfortunately, course design typically is structured so as to increase the potential for counterproductive outcomes.

THE “GROUP-A-WEEK” FORMAT

Comparative multicultural courses commonly are organized and presented by group. Within that framework, and after a certain conceptual foundation is laid, the course addresses several groups sequentially. Sequential presentations minimize the potential for comparison; also, because of the time constraints, such a structure allows only superficial treatment of its subjects. We refer to the resulting sequence of relatively superficial presentations as the “group-a-week” approach.

The central problem with the group-a-week approach is that it can work against the mission of the multicultural requirement. It sacrifices complexity for superficial breadth. Because of the constraints, for example, it is impossible to present the tension between historical object and historical subject in the

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9 According to a review within our university of comparative courses (those which fulfill the multicultural requirement) in other disciplines, the same framework also pertains outside sociology.
experiences of nondominant groups—that is, the balance between victim and actor. The complex balance between those interpretations is key to understanding the experiences of any racially subordinated group. Courses typically vacillate wildly throughout the quarter as they try sequentially to present each group’s “victimization” as well as its “historical action” or resistance.

A basic part of the problem is that the compartmentalized structure of the group-a-week format is not conducive to scaling. Insofar as the course tries to “scale back” and address only the most important aspects of a group’s experiences (however those might be determined), the subtlety and complexity are lost. The group-oriented framework often leaves students with an illusory understanding of the subjects; thus, for example, students feel as though they have gained an understanding of “the” African American experience from a superficial historical sketch and a few 50-minute class sessions. Moreover, many students have some expertise (academic or otherwise) in the historical experiences of one particular group. Those students often are disappointed with the week devoted to the group of interest because of its superficiality. That situation, too, often discourages class participation by those students with the most to offer to discussion.

The group-a-week approach also fails to encourage examination of the differences between and within the groups addressed. Sequential presentations isolate the subjects’ experiences and disengage those experiences from their interactive context, thereby inhibiting comparison.

Clifford Adelman’s (1992) research on “cultural literacies and the college curriculum” offers insight into the common outcome of multicultural courses. His research concludes that the current approach to college education, specifically multicultural education, promotes only a superficial understanding of its subjects. Adelman asserts that the philosophy behind multicultural education too often parallels that of E.D. Hirsch (1988), which portrays “cultural literacy” as a disconnected list of decontextualized items. Adelman presents a different view of the goal of multicultural education and (multi)cultural literacy: “Immersion is real ‘multicultural’ education.... It involves establishing ‘cultural literacy’ in another community, not by being able to identify and define those items on a list, but by knowing how and when to use those items in complex situations” (1992:38).

Multicultural courses, Adelman asserts, treat their subjects and their students as if the purpose is to convey a critical mass of information. That critical mass is stretched thin by the breadth of its subjects; as a result, students become “tourists” in “foreign” cultures.

Adelman (1992) also points to the lack of a solid foundation in history and culture among university students. “Diversity” requirements contain the implicit assumption that students already have a solid foundation in a “dominant” history and culture; exposure to the cultures and histories of nondominant groups is designed to enlarge that foundation. Adelman’s findings show that students are largely unable to contextualize “nondominant” history; thus sequential and isolated presentations are all the more inaccessible to students.

Course design must be informed by Adelman’s caution against multicultural “tourism” and how the group-a-week format may promote it. It is apparent that textbook-structure is one central aspect of course design which reproduces the group-a-week approach.

Adelman does not distinguish between comparative multicultural courses and those which focus on the history or culture of one group. His conclusions, however, favor the latter, which more closely approximate “immersion” into another culture; he recommends this approach. Although we agree with his general critiques and assertions regarding the common weaknesses in multicultural courses, we believe that comparative multicultural courses have a valuable role, and that their weaknesses can be remedied by more systematic course design.

That implicit argument becomes clearer when one considers which groups are recognized as representative of “diversity.” Diversity is represented by those groups which can be described as “nondominant,” and by experiences characterized by marginalization. Most multicultural requirements (as at UC Irvine) specifically target groups that traditionally have been defined and subordinated on the basis of race: i.e. Native Americans, African-Americans, Asian Americans, and Chicano/Latinos (despite the ostensibly ethnic nature of the last group).
THE ROLE OF THE TEXTBOOK IN COURSE DESIGN

Textbooks are a mixed blessing to the instructor of any course. They provide structure to broad introductory courses; they offer direction to students in the absence of personal interaction which is usual in such courses. In that manner, textbook structure becomes the basis of course structure, and weaknesses in the former are replicated in the latter. Textbook selection—or the selection of alternative materials—therefore is central to course design.

Some of the problems with textbook structure have been addressed by Elaine Hall in the related context of issues of women and gender in sociology textbooks (1988). Hall argues that textbooks tend to break up subjects and material so that women are "ghettoized" in curricular content and divorced from other subject matter. She writes:

If we follow the organizational logic of the introductory sociology textbooks...the syllabus will include one week on women. What are the implications of separating women and women's issues into a separate topic? (1988:440)

She continues:

Textbooks having an eclectic or highly compartmentalized structure undermine an integrated and inclusive vision of society in which multiple forms of inequality interact with each other. The mechanical necessity of including a separate chapter on women in order to bring women in may be giving a message that counteracts the impetus behind creating a truly gender-inclusive sociology (441).

In comparative multicultural courses, such a compartmentalized group-oriented structure also has implications; it might equally "undermine" the "inclusive vision" at the heart of the multicultural requirement.

Virtually all sociology textbooks that address race and ethnicity display such compartmentalization. The textbook we have used for the past two years, Schafer's (1988) Racial and Ethnic Groups, presents central concepts well and offers brief historical overviews of racial and ethnic groups. We have found its organization problematic, however. A review of this text by Willie Melton (1989) attests to the problems stemming from its "organizational logic."

After covering the first five or six chapters on concepts and theories in a text organized like Schafer's, I usually have trouble deciding how to use the remaining chapters dealing with specific racial and ethnic groups. This is true particularly if the emphasis in these chapters appear to provide a historical profile of some groups, with only marginal attention to reinforcing explicitly the major concepts and theories introduced in the earlier chapters. Should one cover each group? In the quarter system this is often difficult, so one selects three or four groups (e.g., Hispanic, black, Native, and Jewish Americans) for class discussion. ...The comparative approach to intergroup relations needs to be given considerably more attention than it receives in this and most introductory texts on the subject (1989:384; our emphasis).

This insight into textbook structure and how it affects course design is crucial to comparative multicultural courses. The central problem is that numerous texts have been designed for use in comparative multicultural courses, but very few texts are truly multicultural.

DuBois and Ruiz (1990) address the problems of text structure in their introduction to a multicultural reader in U.S. women's history which they edited. They write, "[A] kaleidoscopic approach undoubtedly runs the risk of fragmentation" (xiii). Their solution is based on the structure of presentation: "Rather than segregate and group our selections by race...we have tried to integrate them within a synthetic sweep of women's history" (xiii). We are trying to approximate such a "synthetic sweep" at the level of course design.

The group-a-week course structure, then, is prevalent not only because ostensibly it is the most immediate way to fulfill the goals of the multicultural requirement, but also because it is the prevalent structure of...
At least until a new generation of textbooks is available, the constraints of text design limit course design.

A CONCEPT-ORIENTED APPROACH TO COMPARATIVE MULTICULTURAL COURSES

In our earlier offerings of the sociology of race and ethnicity, our framework was very similar to that described by Melton in the review cited above—an initial conceptual introduction followed by group-oriented presentations. We found that such a brief presentation of fundamental concepts prohibited adequate empirical reinforcement. Consequently those concepts remained thoroughly abstract for students, and the (sub)disciplinary content of the course was compromised. Other weaknesses, already pointed out, minimized our effectiveness in regard to the goals of the multicultural requirement.

Given the challenges that arise in multicultural courses, and because comparison is central to our purpose, we argue that an advantageous alternative to the group-oriented framework is the concept-oriented framework. Such a framework organizes the course around the presentation and examination of key aspects of race and ethnicity (e.g., race and ethnicity, prejudice and discrimination, forms of resistance, structures at these groups from a multicultural perspective, we can comparatively analyze their experiences in order to develop an understanding of their differences and similarities.... A broad comparative focus also allows us to see how the varied experiences of different racial and ethnic groups occurred within shared contexts" (1993:10).

Nevertheless, Takaki’s presentation is still organized primarily in sequential fashion, thus compromising the “synthetic sweep” cited by DuBois and Ruiz (1990). This is a fine historical synthesis, offering a broad background for multicultural courses. It relies largely on archetypes, however, to accomplish the ambitious task of providing “a history of multicultural America,” and is more informational than analytical.

of intergroup relations, minority group formation). The course uses those aspects to explore the sociohistorical significance of race and ethnicity and related social processes, employing historical evidence as a foundation for understanding. That historical evidence (i.e., empirical examination of the experiences of racially and ethnically defined groups) is introduced concurrently from a number of sources in order to illustrate and clarify those aspects. In that way, the concept-oriented course encourages comparison more directly.

In contrast, nothing in the group-oriented framework inherently promotes comparison. Moreover, the concept-oriented framework is not forced to present ostensibly complete (but actually incomplete) historical synopses for the sake of manageable presentation. Rather, the guiding principle is to convey an understanding of the complexity of racial/ethnic dynamics in society, and thereby to discourage the illusory understanding cited above as a common outcome of the group-a-week framework. In the concept-oriented course, students are presented with structural complexity. They are left with a basic understanding of that complexity, and with a framework for pursuing further information on the subjects.

Nondominant groups’ experiences and perspectives are presented so as to focus attention on their relevance to the dynamics of race, ethnicity, and intergroup relations generally, rather than on their pertinence to that specific group’s history (although the latter is encouraged as well).

The main advantages to the concept-oriented approach, then, are that it integrates comparison more thoroughly into the course, avoids superficial historical representation, and is guided instead by the complexity of racial/ethnic dynamics.

The adoption of a concept-oriented approach has important implications for the organization and structure of the course, and ultimately for what students take away from the course. Next we highlight some of the salient features of the redesigned course and its presentation.
A CONCEPT-ORIENTED “SOCIOLOGY OF RACE AND ETHNICITY”

In our revised curricular strategy we have sought to strengthen the disciplinary component of the course while fulfilling more effectively the goals of the multicultural requirement. Our goal is to fully integrate the presentation of historical experiences into the presentation of central concepts. Below we offer an annotated syllabus for the introductory section of our course, illustrating how we plan to implement the concept-oriented course design.14

“SOCIOLOGY OF RACE AND ETHNICITY”: A SAMPLE COURSE DESIGN

At the beginning of the course, a fruitful point of discussion to place before students concerns the implications of maintaining race as a subject of study and of social discourse. As a point of departure, we highlight Montagu’s (1942) arguments in Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race. The title itself is enough to make students think critically about race as a concept for study: perhaps this concept itself perpetuates racism, and in an effort to move beyond racism we might be best advised to drop the concept of race altogether. We contrast this idea with the position, taken (for example) by Takaki (1987) that regardless of its social construction, the social significance of the concept of race makes it essential to an understanding of American society. Along those lines, we bring up the neocorporalist implications of the “color-blind society,” and compare that discourse with the origin of the doctrine of color-blindness in Justice Harlan’s dissent in the Plessy decision. At some point we bring into the discussion Montagu’s assertion that ‘the term ‘race’ may be justly and scientifically used—but only by those who clearly understand what it means. The right to use significant words should be earned by the work expended in understanding their meaning’ (1942:284).

For several reasons, we find this a useful discussion with which to begin the course. First, it points out the social significance and the socially constructed nature of the subject we are addressing. Second, it is a multifaceted debate, and thus minimizes the extent to which students’ preconceived notions might dictate their position. Third, the suggestion that the use of the term race can be “earned” only by serious study presents the students with a challenge. All of these elements set a positive tone that can be carried through the course.

Next we address the definitions (or parameters) of “race” and “ethnicity” which we use for the course, and discuss related fundamental concepts such as “minority” and “culture.” We first explore the significance of race, distinguishing biological from social construct perspectives. We wish to convey the idea that race is 1) socially constructed and 2) continuous, not discrete. The central reading for this section is Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s (1986) chapter “Racial Formation” from Racial Formation in the United States. That reading helps students to begin to see the subjective nature of race.

We have found that students’ understanding is enhanced by drawing out the conceptual parallel between race/ethnicity and nature/nurture. Because we have already pointed out the socially constructed aspect of race, students’ understanding is clarified by the observation that racial differences have been understood largely as “innate,” whereas ethnic differences have been understood as “acquired.” At this point, both for conceptual purposes and for historical and chronological logic, we focus on the initial meeting of Europeans with Native Americans and on the debate about the status of Native Americans.

Our next task is to address the distinction between race and ethnicity. We base that distinction on two readings from Ronald Takaki’s (1997) From Different Shores: Nathan Glazer’s “Ethnic Patterns” and Takaki’s “Reflections on the Racial Pattern.” Those readings highlight the differences between racially and ethnically defined groups’ experiences and treatment.

In making the race/ethnicity distinction clear to students, we supplement our intro-

14 Full tentative syllabus outlines are available on request.

15 See, for example, Omi and Winant (1986:126-35) for a discussion of the reactionary racial politics of the 1980s.
duction with readings chronicling American immigration history: these discuss open immigration, exclusion, quotas, restrictions, and so on. Again, conceptual purposes are served by a topic that is also beneficial from a chronological/historical standpoint. First, this topic speaks to the broad history of demographic change and diversity in the United States. Second, it highlights the differential treatment (especially as to race versus ethnicity) in immigration statutes. Furthermore, those statutes illustrate poignantly the social construction of race. For example, we have found that a useful point for discussion is the representation of southern and eastern European groups as racially distinct from other European groups during the nativist crusades prevailing around World War I. That discussion gives students an idea of the malleability of the concepts: the idea that European groups could be defined as racially distinct runs counter to contemporary student's intuition, thus illustrating dramatically the processes of social construction.

Joan Jensen's (1988) chapter "Brown Is Not White: Naturalization and the Constitution," from her book Passage from India, documents the paradoxes and contradictions in the history of racial definitions. It also illuminates the difference between immigration and naturalization. The social construction of race is illustrated by examples such as the Thind decision, which held that Asian Indians were Caucasian but not white according to a "common man's definition." In that chapter, Jensen looks critically at a succession of racial definitions of "white" based on "popular conceptions," on culture, and on geography.

Another fruitful point for discussion in this context is offered in the debate addressed by David Montejano (1987) in the "Foreword" to his Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas. Montejano considers whether Chicanos are to be considered a racial or an ethnic group. Essentially he argues that the question is historical, not taxonomical. Jewish experiences provide similar insight into the artificial border between race and ethnicity.

To conclude that section, we address intersections of race and ethnicity with other influences on one's experiences and identity. We consider intersections such as gender, class, and sexual orientation, and factors such as region, and recency of immigration. Our purpose here is to convey to students that race and ethnicity in themselves are not comprehensive in shaping either identity or experience. For example, there are numerous African-American experiences, not just "the black experience." By infusing such "intersectionality" into the introductory section of the course, we can carry that theme throughout the quarter rather than adding "a week for women" at the end, as did textbooks such as Schafer's.

**THE TEXTBOOK PROBLEM**

As we suggested above, numerous textbooks are designed for use in multicultural courses, but there are few truly multicultural textbooks. Achieving the "synthetic sweep" requires selective supplementation with readings from varied sources. We find a text advantageous largely for presenting sociological concepts.

After reviewing a number of textbooks, we have tentatively selected Hubert M. Blalock's (1982) Race and Ethnic Relations. Blalock's is a short introductory text (127 pages), which is highly readable and does not suffer from theoretical overload. By design it is very short on empirical reinforcement, but as a consequence it allows ample opportunity for assigning supplemental readings.

Blalock's own goals for the text mirror closely those which we seek in a text. He states his priorities as "theoretical" rather than "detail-factual," so as to provide a theoretical roadmap for "the big picture"

Furthermore, we emphasize intersectionality—how each aspect of identity interacts with each of the others—rather than an "additive analysis." This distinction is notable in the field of feminist theory—for example, in Bernice Johnson Reagon's (1988) essay "Gender & Race: The Ampersand Problem in Feminist Thought." As the title implies, an analytical framework that merely heaps up layers of oppression is problematic. Specifically, it obscures the fact (for example) that African American women experience sexism very differently than white women.

Examples of such readings are found in DuBois and Ruiz (1990). Other possibilities include, excerpts from Gloria Anzaldua's Borderlands/La Frontera, William Julius Wilson's writings on race and class, and Marlon Riggs's video "Tongues Untied," which explores race and sexuality.
and to infuse an introductory text with some of the complexity of the study of race and ethnic relations (1982:x).

An alternative is John E. Farley’s (1988) *Majority-Minority Relations*. Farley’s text is more thorough than Blalock’s, and provides empirical background. It is also commensurately longer, and thus minimizes opportunities for supplemental readings. Farley might be more appropriate for semester courses, which provide enough time to cover a wider range of concepts and to assign a heavier reading load.

Our choice of texts was based largely on organization. Both Blalock and Farley focus on concepts throughout the text, and offer opportunities to reinforce and supplement those concepts with readings (outside and/or included in the text). Our textbook search was broad, though not *exhaustive*. On the basis of that search, we believe that Blalock’s and Farley’s texts represent the organization that will complement our course design and priorities most effectively.

**ASSESSMENT OF COURSE DESIGN**

In several ways, the substitution of a concept-oriented for a group-oriented framework fulfills our goals (those of the multicultural requirement as well as those of disciplinary introduction). First, the basic concepts in the sociology of race and ethnicity are reinforced and grounded much more thoroughly in a concept-oriented course than in a group-oriented course. The result is a foundation for addressing diverse perspectives and experiences, which provides the means for negotiating diversity.

Second, we believe the concept-oriented framework offers more opportunity for systematic comparison (as well as implicit comparison), and ultimately fosters a greater understanding of the differences as well as the similarities between the groups addressed.

Finally, the goals set by the multicultural requirement are not compromised by superficial presentations. We aim to give students an appreciation of the complexity of the issues—even if not a full comprehension of the histories—rather than a superficial and illusory understanding.

**ADDRESSING THE SUPRA-ACADEMIC MISSION**

The supra-academic mission of the multicultural requirement can be fulfilled in limitless ways. Discussion of all sorts, we believe, is the most important classroom exercise for this purpose. In addition, we have added a separate component to our course structure. Here we suggest one of various possible solutions that might be tailored to other classes.

On the basis of the argument that the multicultural requirement imposes supra-academic demands on the course, we are petitioning the administration to allow the addition of a one-unit section to the regular course structure (which already includes a discussion section). In this extra section we will show films pertinent to the themes of the course. We will choose these films to stimulate discussion of the social applicability of those themes. We plan to complement the weekly film section with a discussion led by a group of student facilitators selected from past courses. (We also may propose conducting this section with other courses that fulfill the multicultural requirement.)

We have chosen such a format for two reasons. First, we believe that the medium of film is comfortable and enjoyable to students; in our experience, that stimulates participation and discussion. Moreover, we agree with Loewen’s comment: “In this video age, our students construct much of their understanding of race relations from visual material”; consequently, “[s]tudents need to learn how to examine this material” (1991:82). For both of these reasons, film presentations with discussion help students to enhance their critical thinking.

The films we present each week will be selected on the basis of their relevance to the themes addressed during that week. Possibilities include the following: *Avalon* (portrays ethnic assimilation, acculturation, upward mobility, and movement away from ethnic roots); *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (depicts the aftermath of the Anglo conquest...
of the southwest; the consequences of cultural misunderstanding are central to the plot); *Incident at Oglalla* (illustrates violence used to suppress strategies of resistance against the American Indian Movement); *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (addresses Asian stereotypes, “model minority” myth, racial tensions increasing in times of economic competition); *Daughters of the Dust* (exemplifies African heritage in African-American culture; focuses debate about African-American family structure); *Salt of the Earth* (portrays unionization as a strategy of resistance to oppression; depicts gender roles in culture change); *Ethnic Notions* (offers history of African-American stereotypes and their uses to reinforce structures of exploitation); *The White Dawn*19 (illustrates cultural contact and conflict in the Arctic in the late eighteenth century when three whalers are shipwrecked). Many other films also are candidates for inclusion.20

The objective of our film/discussion section is to encourage students to place concepts from the course in a nonacademic context. After the course is over, such contexts are likely to be common sources of input and encounter in regard to race and ethnicity.

The supra-academic mission of the multicultural requirement should not be segregated from academic content. We recommend this additional section not to separate informal discussion from the course in a nonacademic context. After the course is over, such contexts are likely to be common sources of input and encounter in regard to race and ethnicity.

The supra-academic mission of the multicultural requirement should not be segregated from academic content. We recommend this additional section not to separate informal discussion from the course, but in recognition of the need for extensive discussion, which might compromise other goals if integrated into regular course sessions. Our purpose in emphasizing the *supra*-academic nature of the requirement is to legitimate the necessity of extracurricular measures.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Although we have focused here on the sociology of race and ethnicity, our general points are meant to apply to other comparative multicultural courses, both inside and outside the discipline of sociology. Other courses might employ a similar structure organized around other disciplinary concepts.

Course design is only one component of an effective course. No design accomplishes course objectives on its own or guarantees that the course will not misrepresent its subjects. We believe that the concept-oriented framework minimizes those ever-present risks while seeking to fulfill more completely the potential of comparative multicultural courses.

Our argument has an empirical as well as logical basis. Our course redesign is based on our own responses to, and evaluations of, previous course offerings—essentially, what seemed to work and what did not. Furthermore, the pedagogical approaches we suggest here are those which produced the greatest success for us—that is, for our students.

In the long run, however, we need more systematic research into the success of this course design than is permitted by isolated course offerings and experiences. Presently we are developing a broad study that will address students’ responses to either of the curricular frameworks (group- or concept-oriented) in comparative multicultural courses, in order to acquire more empirical evidence on their relative merits.

We hope that this essay will be included in an ongoing and expanding search for pedagogical strategies to fulfill the mission of the multicultural requirement more effectively. We also hope that it 1) underscores the need for truly multicultural texts and 2) clarifies the supra-academic mission of the multicultural requirement and supports measures to fulfill it properly. Instituting the multicultural requirement is only an initial step toward meeting the goals that inspired it; support for creative means of fulfilling those goals is still necessary.

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Dennis J. Downey is a doctoral candidate in the Program in Comparative Culture at the University of California, Irvine. His research focuses on the processes of global economic restructuring as they concern racially-defined communities and intergroup relations, and on the role of culture and multiculturalism in responding to those processes.

Ramon S. Torrecilha is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Irvine, and the Director of the Minority Affairs Program at the American Sociological Association. His research focuses on Latinos in the United States, poverty, and the elderly population. Direct correspondence to Ramon S. Torrecilha, Minority Affairs Program, American Sociological Association, 1722 N Street NW, Washington, DC 20036.