

A Summary of the Working Draft for Revising the Comparative Gender & Multicultural Studies (CGM) General University Requirements (GURs)

From the Committee on Undergraduate Education (CUE)

Purpose

This document summarizes the four major proposals contained in the Committee on Undergraduate Education (CUE) summer task force draft report for updating the Comparative Gender & Multiculturalism (CGM) GUR requirements. We encourage you to read the full report for a more complete explanation, rationale, timetable and informational appendices at _____

Executive Summary

In their 2016 report for improving the GURs, the Academic Coordinating Commission (ACC) recommended changes to the CGM GURs that would introduce systemic equity and justice issues into the GUR curriculum and alleviate the necessity of categorizing a course as either CGM or HUM/SSC (Humanities or Social Sciences) by erasing the imposed geographical divisions in the current ACGM courses (primary emphasis outside North America and Europe) and BCGM courses (primary emphasis inside North America and/or Europe). ACC also suggested the university explore taking a “developmental” approach to offering these courses.

In the fall of 2019, ACC formally charged CUE with evaluating these recommendations and advising on the feasibility and sufficiency of the proposed approach by engaging in broad consultation with campus stakeholders. As detailed in the full report, CUE talked to as many different faculty and student representatives and groups as it could before the university shut down because of Covid-19. Feeling a sense of urgency to make headway on a plan before fall, CUE convened a summer taskforce to construct a working draft that could serve as the basis for discussion. This summary focuses on four recommendations from the draft report:

1. Change the name of the proposed requirement from Diversity, Equity, Justice (DEJ) to Power, Liberation, Equity, Justice (PLEJ).
2. Define a developmental sequence of two courses (PLEJ-1 and PLEJ-2).
3. Offer two conceptions for a PLEJ-1 foundational course.
4. Present three methods for structuring the requirement.

Desired Outcome

The review of the four recommendations by various stakeholders with the goal of gathering information in response to these questions:

1. Which features of this draft can you provisionally support?
2. What challenges do you foresee in implementing these recommendations?

The name: Power, Liberation, Equity, Justice (PLEJ)

"Diversity" courses and "equity-justice" courses ask different questions, serve different purposes, and produce different outcomes. The original CGM requirement was framed with "diversity" understood as "multiculturalism," which is, by current educational perspectives, a concept that has run its course. Equity and Justice are goals which the university is currently working to promote. In considering the name and purpose of this requirement, CUE sought to decouple "systemic equity-and-justice-related issues" from the study of diversity as multiculturalism.

After considering different terms and combinations, CUE selected "Power, Liberation, Equity, Justice" (PLEJ, pronounced "pledge") as the language that best evokes the spirit of this requirement and more accurately aligns with the stated values and goals of the university. In these courses, students will deepen their understanding of what equity and justice are and how they have been rendered at various times in history to certain groups while excluding and harming other groups. Ideally, students will also develop strategies for imagining and developing a more equitable and just future.

"Power" and "Liberation" replace the term, "Diversity," a word whose meaning has flattened through its ubiquity. Learning to recognize the ways that social, economic, and political power is sustained through individual beliefs and actions and institutional practices and policies, in turn, empowers students with understanding and agency. They begin to grasp what power is, how it works, and, hopefully, how to wield it to seek justice, and how to wield it justly.

Collective liberation acknowledges that multiple oppressions exist, and that when we work to undo oppression in ourselves, our families, our communities, and our institutions, we are more likely to create a world that is truly just and equitable. Thus, liberation suggests a more action-oriented approach, implying that these courses will also focus on ways to address injustices that arise from unequal distributions of power.

A Developmental Sequence: PLEJ-1 and PLEJ-2

PLEJ-1 courses are 100 or 200-level GUR courses that serve as a foundation for and prerequisite to a second, specialized or applied set of courses (PLEJ-2). Ideally, PLEJ-1 courses would be taken in the student's first year at Western (or before 60 credits).

PLEJ-1 courses introduce foundational core concepts and theories for understanding various structural forms of power, discrimination, and oppression that sustain social, economic, and political inequities in the United States.

The goal of PLEJ-1 courses is to equip students with an understanding of systemic theories of oppression, how they work to foster inequity, and to distinguish these structures, policies, and practices from individual acts, beliefs, and prejudices.

In PLEJ-1 course, the concepts and theories form the primary subject matter, and the topic serves to focus and illuminate students' understanding of how these theories work.

PLEJ-2 courses are typically 200 and 300-level courses that give students an opportunity to extend, deepen, and apply the knowledge they have gained in the foundational course. Students can extend their understanding into new areas, explore and examine topics in more depth and specificity, and/or apply their knowledge to specific contexts. These courses could focus on specific identities, cultures, events, organizations, institutions, policies, texts, etc. in the U.S. and/or the larger world.

The goal of PLEJ-2 courses would be for students to utilize the knowledge gained in their PLEJ-1 course to examine and analyze specific groups, topics, events, and situations, using the theoretical lenses they are beginning to acquire.

In PLEJ-2 courses, the topic forms the primary subject matter, and the concepts and theories support the learning of the topic of the course.

To be considered a PLEJ-2 course, the overall *focus* of the course must be on power, liberation, equity, and justice issues. An English course called "Young Adult Literature as a Vehicle for Racial Justice and Equity" might become a PLEJ-2 course. A young adult literature course that spends two weeks on this topic would not be classified as a PLEJ-2 course because it does not fulfill the focus criteria for PLEJ courses. However, it would be a welcome part of the culture Western hopes to build in which these ideas are infused throughout the curriculum.

Two Models for the PLEJ-1 Foundation Course

In Model A, PLEJ-1 courses would use race, racism, and anti-racism in the U.S. as the primary lens to learn and understand concepts and theories of systemic and structural discrimination and oppression.

In Model B, any marginalized, underserved identity group or community could serve as the primary lens for examining concepts and systemic theories of power, discrimination, and oppression to satisfy this requirement; for example, courses that focus on gender, sexuality, or disability, etc.

Both models encourage an intersectional examination of power, equity, justice issues as they affect the targeted community or group in the US. (*Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. It identifies advantages and disadvantages that are felt by people due to a combination of factors.).

Brief Discussion of Two Models

See page 11-12 in the full report for a more complete explanation.

Model A PLEJ-1 Course: Race, Racism, Anti-Racism	Model B PLEJ-1 Course: Multiple Identity Categories
<p>To be truly “culturally literate” today, one must also be racially literate and understand the connections between race and power and how they operate in the U.S. as a result of long-standing and endemic institutional and structural policies and practices. By putting issues of race, power, liberation, equity, and justice front and center, this version offers the boldest and potentially most transformational revision to Western’s GUR program.</p> <p>However, this model is also likely to be the more resource-intensive option, requiring new hires and more courses and/or sections of existing courses than Model B. Nonetheless, adopting this version of CUE’s proposal would ensure that all students who complete the entirety of their education at Western will have taken at least one course in race, racism, and anti-racism.</p>	<p>This model would open the foundational course to a wider choice of subjects that could be used to satisfy this requirement. In addition to race, these courses might use LGBTQ+ groups and/or gender, sexuality, disability, etc. as a lens for introducing concepts and systemic theories of power, discrimination, and oppression. The goals for Model B would be the same as for Model A: to introduce foundational core concepts and theories for understanding various structural forms of power, discrimination, and oppression that sustain social, economic, and political inequities in the U.S.</p> <p>Model B may require fewer new resources, but because CUE is proposing a two-course sequence, and the second course could accommodate all of these categories, CUE favors model A for the foundation course.</p>

Three Alternatives for Structuring the PLEJ Requirement

Structure 1: Create a new PLEJ GUR category.

In this version, the CGM GUR would be replaced with a new PLEJ GUR category. Students would take a PLEJ-1 and PLEJ-2 course just as they now take an ACGM and BCGM course. While some current CGM courses could become PLEJ courses, this version also opens opportunities for other interested departments inside and outside of CHSS to propose PLEJ courses. Credit requirements for the humanities and social sciences would remain at their current levels (12 credits or 3 courses).

Structure 2: Label specific GUR courses with “PLEJ” tags.

This version labels qualifying GUR courses with a PLEJ-1 or PLEJ-2 tag. Theoretically, any department could propose a PLEJ-tagged course; however, it is likely that most of these courses would come from humanities and social science GURs. Therefore, CUE suggests increasing the humanities and social science credits from 12 credits to 16 credits, or from three courses to four courses each. In keeping with current practice, students could take no more than two of their humanities and social science courses from the same department. This structure also allows students to take as many PLEJ courses as they wish to fulfill their Humanities and Social Science requirements (as long as two of them are from a different department or departments).

Structure 3: Combine models: PLEJ-1 GUR course + PLEJ-2 tagged-course

This version is a combination of the first two options. The first course would be a PLEJ GUR standalone course and the second course would become a graduation requirement that students could fulfill by taking either a “tagged” GUR course in the Humanities, Social Sciences (or another GUR category) or a “tagged” course in the major. This option would not increase current humanities or social science credits.

While no department or college would be required to offer PLEJ-tagged courses in the major, allowing for the possibility does open opportunities for departments. Some students have suggested adding courses in the major that could help them develop their academic and professional identities by understanding how systemic inequities play out in their fields (such as history of science courses, for example). Structure 3 incentivizes the creation of these types of courses.

Making the second course a graduation requirement would also make this a requirement for transfer students with DTAs who are exempt from WWU GUR requirements. If this option is selected, further discussion would be needed to discuss how to handle the PLEJ prerequisite for these students.

Comparison of Three PLEJ Structures

Features	Structure 1	Structure 2	Structure 3
Developmental sequence	PLEJ-1 is a prerequisite to PLEJ -2		
Humanities Description	Require a revision in the Humanities description to include all human experience (with no geographic boundaries).		
PLEJ category or tagged courses	New PLEJ GUR category replaces CGM category	Tagged PLEJ courses appear in other GUR categories	GUR PLEJ category for PLEJ-1; tagged PLEJ-2 courses in GURS or Major
Changes in HUM & SSC credits	No increase to HUM & SSC credits	Increase to HUM & SSC credits from 12 to 16 credits (from 3 to 4 courses)	No increase to HUM & SSC credits
Benefits	Any department could contribute GUR courses to the PLEJ category.	Students could take more than the required number of PLEJ-2 courses while fulfilling other GUR requirements.	Transfer students with DTAs would need to meet the PLEJ graduation requirement. Any department could contribute PLEJ-2 tagged GUR or Major courses. Students may be able to satisfy a GUR with a Major requirement.

Acronyms used in this Document

ACC	Academic Coordinating Commission
CUE	Committee on Undergraduate Education
General University Requirements (GURs)	
CGM	Comparative Gender & Multicultural Studies GUR category
ACGM	CGMs with primary emphasis outside North America and/or Europe
BCGM	CGMs with primary emphasis inside North America and/or Europe
HUM	Humanities GUR category
SSC	Social Science GUR category
DEJ	Diversity, Equity, Justice (ACC's proposed name for the new GUR category - 2016 report)
PLEJ	Power, Liberation, Equity, Justice (CUE's proposed name for the new GUR category)