

COMMENTS TO BE READ
FACULTY SENATE APRIL 2, 2012 MTG
PEDRO CABAN

I am Pedro Cabán- Senator elected by my colleagues in the Department of Latin American, Caribbean and U.S. Latino Studies (LACS).

On December 14, 2010 the department submitted to the General Education Task Force a statement enumerating the reasons for its opposition to the proposed Gen Ed revisions under consideration at the time. There is no need to reiterate the elements in that document, since it is part of the record. However, I will mention that Senate Bill 1112-15 reaffirms the original Gen Ed Task Force report, and ignores the concerns raised by LACS.

I will vote against the Bill for a number of reasons, but will mention only two, given time constraints.

1. The academic rationale for the Gen Ed revision that eliminates the category of U.S. Diversity and Cultural Pluralism is vague and flawed. For example, *The World Within Reach: Global Challenges in the 21st century* is a problematic category since it lacks coherence or a set of unifying academic themes. Moreover, I cannot ascertain the academic rationale for simply asserting equivalence among a variety of content subjects and interdisciplinary approaches as proposed in *World Within Reach*.

The challenge that historically unprecedented demographic transitions pose for national unity and the exercise of democratic practice in the United States, which is one of the most salient issues of the moment, is arbitrarily positioned in the same category as social interaction (whatever that maybe). A serious conceptual liability in the *World Within Reach* category appears in footnote 13, where the report recommends the “recasting” of the History of the Civil Rights Movement or Race and Ethnicity as the Civil Rights Movement or Race and Ethnicity in the 21st century. I assume the report is referring to the civil rights movement/race and ethnicity in the United States.

A student of the U.S. civil rights movement can raise any number of reasoned objections to the proposed recasting. The most elementary criticism is that the 21st century has just entered the second decade so, to put it mildly, it is premature to embark on a historical analysis of the young century’s civil rights movement. Indeed, I am tempted to ask where is the 21st century U.S. civil rights movement taking place? Or is the Gen Ed revision suggesting that courses on global civil rights movements should be offered?

More importantly, how can one seriously entertain the idea of studying what is arguably one of the most transformative events in the formation of this nation without any historical grounding? How can we presume that a course on Race and Ethnicity in the 21st century is an adequate substitute for this momentous episode in U.S. history?

The lack of intellectual coherence in the Challenges for the 21st Century is apparent in the report’s statement that “any department may offer these courses,” while simultaneously referring to this kaleidoscope of courses as a “University at Albany signature course.”

The University community and future generations of University at Albany students would be much better served if the U.S. Diversity and Cultural Pluralism category is retained.

2. It is the University at Albany's responsibility to prepare our students to have meaningful and productive lives and ideally to contribute to the betterment of our society. This responsibility is particularly urgent if the majority of the graduates of this taxpayer- and tuition-dependent institution choose to reside in our culturally and ethnically diverse metropolitan region.

The United States is experiencing a profound cultural transformation as a consequence of sweeping and continuous demographic changes. What is the university doing to prepare students to succeed in this challenging domestic environment that is persistently being shaped by the forces of globalization?

It's my impression that the Gen Ed revision assumes social and cultural uniformity among our students. In this instance I think the Gen Ed proposal is woefully out of touch with the experiences and sensitivities of the current generation of students.

Some of our students live in racially and ethnically diverse urban communities, but many do not. As educators it is incumbent on us to create learning environments in which students acquire the knowledge, skills and competences to successfully adapt to the domestic cultural and social changes wrought by the forces of globalization.

This ability to adjust to and succeed in a culturally shifting environment is not achieved simply by living in close proximity to those who differ from you. The knowledge, skills and competencies students acquire in college are indispensable to achieve understanding and cooperation across cultural and ethnic divides.

The new Gen Ed Requirements will do little to prepare our students for the challenges they will face in one of the most diverse metropolitan regions in the world, nor do the requirements equip them with an understanding of the richness and complexity of the formation of the United States.

For this and other reasons, I urge my colleagues to vote no on Senate Bill 1112-15.