

## The Race and Ethnicity Requirement – History and Rationale

In considering a diversity requirement, Emory College engages in a national conversation about ways to help students gain the skills they need to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, particularly as they encounter an increasingly diverse and complex world. Several national organizations focused on higher education emphasize the importance of learning about diversity as a key component of a liberal arts education.

After careful consideration over the past six years, and in ongoing consultation with faculty, students, and administrators, the Emory College Faculty Senate and the Working Group on the Undergraduate Curriculum concur that Emory University has a particular obligation and opportunity to focus a diversity requirement on the crucial role of race and ethnicity in shaping our institutions, and in furthering students' understanding of current domestic and international political and social relations. This is especially the case given our own history and the deep history of the city of Atlanta, which many of us consider home,

The Emory College Faculty Senate proposes the following Race and Ethnicity General Education Requirement. Additional information regarding the history and rationale for this requirement may be found below.

### **Race and Ethnicity Requirement**

The Race and Ethnicity requirement provides students with opportunities to consider racial, ethnic, and cultural dynamics; political, economic and social exclusions; and social difference, inequality and identity more generally, to gain an awareness of how these affect structural inequality amongst individuals and communities. The requirement focuses on understanding how historical, political, and cultural processes, as well as literary and aesthetic forces, among a range of factors, shape concerns about race, ethnicity, and immigration—both domestically and in the global arena. Courses offered in this area should examine the processes and/or consequences of historical, political, or social power dynamics among historically marginalized and dominant populations in society, and in addition to race and ethnicity, may optionally further engage analysis of such factors such as language, religion, class, ability, nationality, sexuality, age, and gender. While courses fulfilling this requirement may originate in any discipline or department, they share a common commitment to exploring the many ways that race and ethnicity shape our world and affect our understanding of it.

To meet the requirement, a course must include three of the following four learning objectives:

- Develop a critical awareness of how racial and ethnic antagonisms and inequality develop historically through individual, institutional, and cultural forces.
- Discern how racial and ethnic power dynamics shape and may be reflected in intellectual inquiry across disciplines.
- Recognize the ways in which race and ethnicity intersect with other group identifications or ascriptions, such as language, religion, class, ability, nationality, sexuality, age, and gender.
- Adopt tools to communicate more effectively and respectfully with others from various racial and ethnic perspectives.

Courses fulfilling the Race and Ethnicity requirement may also fulfill other general education requirements.

### History and rationale for this requirement

Emory College of Arts and Sciences, in past general education requirements, required students to take a course offering “a perspective on American diversity.” When those requirements were established in the 1990s, the faculty discussion sought to address some of the same issues addressed in this race and ethnicity requirement. Though intended to give students the opportunity to engage with diversity in the US, there was general agreement among both students and faculty that most courses offered did so in a cursory way. This requirement was

removed in 2009 when general education requirements were refined and reduced in number.

At various times in Emory's history, student protests or faculty actions have highlighted conflicts related to race and ethnicity. This included significant protests in 1969, 1988, 1993, 2003, and 2015 (probably an incomplete list of such actions). In 2003, the protests led to the development of Transforming Community, an initiative supporting dialogue about race among faculty, students and staff.

In 2015, an ad hoc group of students, Black Students of Emory, petitioned for multiple actions to be taken to address serious concerns regarding the climate for racially and ethnically diverse students on campus. One of the demands was to institute a general education requirement on racial and ethnic diversity. This request was made in light of the seemingly sudden political tumult that had occurred in November of that year. It was also a reflection of the continued and intensified alienation and precarity that Black students and students of color have experienced on Emory's campus.

This demand dovetailed with multiple conversations already ongoing within the faculty that diversity issues on campus needed to be addressed. As we strive to meet this goal, it seems important to acknowledge that one of the fundamental obligations we have is to prepare our students for their role as the next generation's leaders, for which they must have a basic knowledge of the ways that race and ethnicity have affected the shaping of the United States and its relation to the global arena.

Through multiple faculty committees, forums, and discussions, there is faculty consensus (although not unanimity) around a diversity requirement. In discussing what form this requirement should take, faculty groups have noted that the history of race and ethnicity have a notable impact and importance, some particularly relevant to Emory, Atlanta, and our broader society. For example, Georgia was at the center of the removal of the Cherokee peoples at about the same time as Emory was founded. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, enslaved persons were part of Emory's community and Emory faculty provided justification of slavery in their scholarship. Atlanta was the center of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, and Emory participated in efforts to desegregate colleges and universities in Georgia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Race and ethnicity continue to be relevant in politics and society today, connected to public policies as diverse as immigration, war, and trade, to social movements like Black Lives Matter, as well as to other expressions of violence and conflict in society. Gaining a better understanding of race and ethnicity is important to our students as citizens. This also offers Emory University opportunities to connect students with Atlanta's history and culture in meaningful ways, a goal of the Emory University Strategic Framework.

Echoing the general comments from the 2019 Working Group Report on the Undergraduate Curriculum about a requirement focused on race and ethnicity:

“Adding a diversity requirement to the GERS is important for a number of reasons. First, scholars continue to discover and generate new knowledge about the diversity of cultural traditions and histories and the contributions of this diversity to our understanding of the natural world, human culture and interaction, and artistic expression. We need—and want—to share this knowledge with our students. This is especially important as our student body becomes more diverse, bringing more perspectives and varied individual histories into the classroom. Finally, Emory is part of the culturally and historically rich city of Atlanta, a center of the civil rights movement, so diversity is part of our institutional and community heritage.

Emory must join the national conversation. For example, The Association of American Colleges and Universities “understands diversity and equity as fundamental goals of higher education and as resources for learning that are valuable for all students, vital to democracy and a democratic workforce and to the global position and wellbeing of the United States.”<sup>1</sup> And the American Council on Education has issued

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<sup>1</sup> Association of American Colleges and Universities. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive Excellence. <https://www.aacu.org/resources/diversity-equity-and-inclusive-excellence>

a number of reports suggesting that including classes focused on diversity can create a stronger, more resilient and more united campus.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the general benefits offered by studying diversity, Emory University, as it is socially and historically situated, has a specific responsibility to teach about race and ethnicity, not simply descriptively, but in terms of origins, politics, history, and other approaches. Students benefit from understanding the origins and consequences of racial and ethnic dynamics, tensions, and inequality. Thus, the Emory College Faculty Senate proposes a general education requirement focused on Racial and Ethnic Diversity.

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<sup>2</sup> American Council on Education. Institutional Effectiveness. <https://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/ACE-Research-Report-Explores-Lessons-Learned-from-University-of-Missouri-Crisis.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Georgetown University. Engaging Diversity. <https://college.georgetown.edu/academics/corerequirements/engaging-diversity>