

Diverse Communities Course FAQ

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Submitting a proposal for a Diverse Communities (“J”) course? Please read the following Frequently Asked Questions to learn more. Proposers are also encouraged to consult the [Diverse Communities Handbook](#) and the latest [Diverse Communities Course Criteria Checklist](#) for additional information.

Does a Diverse Communities course have to focus on *multiple* marginalized groups at once—e.g., African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinx Americans—or can it focus on just one?

Although many Diverse Communities courses do cover multiple marginalized groups in a single course, it is certainly possible to teach a J course on just one specific group. For example, *WRH 333: African American Autobiography* carries a J attribute but focuses on African Americans, and *ARH 419: Women in Art* centers on women. However, even single-group J courses must pay attention to the intersecting sub-categories that exist within any studied group. For example, the category of “African Americans” is cross-hatched by gender, sexuality, class, geography, ability, and other markers of difference, as is the category of “women.” This heterogeneity should be a core part of any J course.

What is CAPC looking for when it requires J courses to incorporate a “recognized theoretical approach or framework”?

The Diverse Communities Course Criteria checklist asks for a “recognized theoretical approach or framework that *provides an analysis of structural inequalities.*” This means that your chosen theory will enable your course to move beyond merely exposing students to “diversity” or “difference” as ends in themselves. Instead, the theory will help students understand “how a dominant practice emerges, creates structural inequalities, exploits those structural inequalities to marginalize other practices and maintain its dominance,” and how marginalized groups resist these practices (J Handbook). In other words, Diverse Communities courses should not simply be celebratory catalogs of difference but rather should offer a critical framework that enables students to grasp the systemic forces and power dynamics that shape the experiences of the studied groups.

What are some examples of theoretical frameworks used in J courses?

Diverse Communities courses use a wide range of theoretical approaches. Examples include but are not limited to: Intersectionality Theory, Critical Race Theory, Queer Theory, Feminist Theory, Social Conflict Theory, Symbolic Interaction Theory, Cumulative Inequality Theory, Minority Stress Theory, and so on. These frameworks are relevant to courses in the humanities, social sciences, health sciences, and more.

Can I use more than one theory in my J course?

Yes. It may be that a given J course makes use of two or three different theories, depending on the needs of the course and how those theories work in concert. For example, *HIS 414: History of Health and Medicine* uses both social constructivist and post-modernist theories to explain how the practice of medicine has historically been bound up in language-driven hierarchies of power and dominance.

How much detail about my theoretical framework do I need to provide in my course syllabus and narrative?

Successful proposals will offer a clear explanation—in both the narrative and the syllabus—of how the theoretical framework informs the course. CAPC is not asking you to teach an entire course “on” theory, and the theory should be explained in terms that are accessible to students. But the narrative and syllabus should make clear how the theory provides a guiding perspective for your class. Ideally, evidence of the theory’s importance to the course will also appear in the course calendar, in the form of an assigned reading or in-class discussion of a theoretical concept.

How do I make sure I’m including the right Diverse Communities goals and student learning outcomes (SLOs) on my syllabus?

Proposers are strongly urged to refer to the most current [General Education program description](#), housed on the [CAPC Gen Ed website](#), as well as the [Diverse Communities Course Criteria checklist](#), for complete information about the goals and SLOs that all Diverse Communities courses must meet. For preparers’ convenience, we list those relevant goals and SLOs below as well. Please keep in mind that for Gen Ed goal 1 (“Communicate effectively”) and Gen Ed goal 2 (“Think critically and analytically”), your syllabus need only address one of the accompanying SLOs for each of those goals. However, for Gen Ed goal 5 (“Respond thoughtfully to diversity”), your syllabus must address *both* of the accompanying SLOs: (a) “Discuss the historical practices leading to the marginalization of diverse groups”; and (b) “Identify and analyze structural inequalities using a recognized theoretical approach.”

1. Gen Ed Goal: Communicate effectively
SLOs: Address at least one of the following:
 - a. Express oneself effectively in common college-level written forms
 - b. Revise and improve written and/or presentations
 - c. Express oneself effectively in presentations
 - d. Demonstrate comprehension of and ability to explain information and
 - e. ideas accessed through reading

2. Think critically and analytically
SLOs: Address at least one of the following:
 - a. Use relevant evidence gathered through accepted scholarly methods, and properly acknowledge sources of information, to support an idea

- b. Construct and/or analyze arguments in terms of their premises, assumptions, contexts, conclusions, and anticipated counterarguments
 - c. Reach sound conclusions based on a logical analysis of evidence
 - d. Develop creative or innovative approaches to assignments or projects
5. Respond thoughtfully to diversity
- SLOs: Address both of the following:
- a. Discuss the historical practices leading to the marginalization of diverse groups
 - b. Identify and analyze structural inequalities using a recognized theoretical approach

What else do I have to do besides just naming the goals and student learning outcomes on the syllabus?

CAPC is looking to see not just a listing of goals and SLOs, but also a *meaningful explanation* of how course activities provide instruction and assessment of those goals and SLOs. This explanation can appear when you list the relevant goals and outcomes early in the syllabus, and also when you describe your assignments in more detail later in the syllabus. Either way, it should be clear to students, faculty, and potential reviewers that there is a meaningful link between the course activities and the goals and SLOs they are intended to achieve. The link from Gen Ed Goal → Specific SLO → Assessment must be made explicit.

How should I format all of my assessment information—the goals, student learning outcomes, and assignments—on my syllabus? Should I use a table, a bulleted list, or narrative paragraphs, or some combination?

Any of these approaches can work equally well, as long as you provide a meaningful explanation of how course activities provide instruction and assessment of course goals and SLOs. That said, if you do opt for a table format, please keep in mind that merely providing a grid of numbers and letters that requires the reader to cross-reference multiple times—and lacks any real explanation of how the goals and outcomes are actually being met—is not sufficient. Again, preparers should strive to offer a clear description of how course assignments and activities enable students to achieve the advertised goals and learning outcomes.

I notice that the Diverse Communities Course Criteria checklist also requires preparers to include two additional statements indicating how the course might “foster an informed and reasoned openness to, and understanding of, difference” and also “further the university’s goal of graduating students who are committed to creating a just and equitable society.” Do these two statements count as extra SLOs, or something else? And is it enough to just copy and paste them onto my syllabus, or do I need to explain how my course actually achieves them?

These two statements are not official Gen Ed goals or SLOs, but they do express important aspirations of Diverse Communities courses at WCU. Accordingly, you should not merely paste them into your syllabus and leave it at that, but also try to explain at least briefly (i.e., in

one or two sentences) *how* your course’s overall approach achieves them. These statements and accompanying explanations could fit nicely into the closing sentences of your course description (i.e., if your syllabus already includes a course description that expands on the official catalog description), or they could be inserted below the section you’ve devoted to goals and SLOs. Wherever you place them, try to do so in a way that makes reasonably clear that they grow organically out of your J-course’s overall approach.

Can I see a sample syllabus and narrative so that I know what a successful Diverse Communities proposal looks like?

Yes, you can access sample J-course proposals [here](#).

Why are Diverse Communities courses called “J” courses?

The J stands for “justice” and reflects the designation’s emphasis on a social justice approach to diversity.

What other resources can I consult for planning and proposing a Diverse Communities course?

CAPC encourages you to read the [Diverse Communities Handbook](#) and view the sample syllabi. You can also contact the current chair of the Diverse Communities Subcommittee by checking the current [list of committee members](#) on the CAPC website.