



VirginiaTech

College of Liberal Arts  
and Human Sciences

**Bernice L. Hausman, Ph.D.**

*Chair, Department of English  
Edward S. Diggs Professor in the Humanities  
540/231-8466, bhausman@vt.edu*

**Department of English**

323 Shanks Hall (MC 0112)  
181 Turner St., NW  
Blacksburg, VA 24061

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Dean Stauffer  
Chair, CUSP  
Associate Dean and Professor  
Fish and Wildlife Conservation (0324)

Menah Pratt-Clarke  
Vice President for Strategic Affairs  
Inclusion and Diversity (0216)

James Collier  
CLAHS rep, CUSP  
Associate Professor, STS 0247

Dear all:

I am writing to you with regard to Resolution 2016-17G, the resolution to revise the Pathways General Education Curriculum to include a new core outcome, "Critical Analysis of Equity and Identity in the United States." As you know, the English department has been involved since fall 2016 in supporting this resolution and the new outcome, meeting with members of the Office of Inclusion and Diversity to rethink some of the indicators of learning so that English courses could be used to meet this requirement. The English department is in favor of a requirement like this one in the general education curriculum, and we have looked forward to putting our Pathways courses through governance for approval in this core outcome area.

However, we have two difficulties with the proposed indicators of learning that were presented at CUSP on January 23rd. One has to do with the wording of some of the indicators. This is what we would call a minor problem, in that the wording could easily be changed to clarify the indicators and to make them relevant to the content of courses offered in the English department. We recommend the following change for the first indicator of learning:

- Original: Analyze human experience in the United States (particularly or in comparative perspective) as a reflection of interactions between social identities, statuses, space, place, traditions, and histories of inequity and power.
- Recommended: Analyze how social identities, statuses, space, place, traditions, and histories of inequity and power shape human experience in the United States (particularly, or in comparative perspective).

We recommend the following change for the fourth indicator of learning:

- Original: Demonstrate how interesting identities, statuses, space, place, formal traditions, and/or historical contexts in the United States are reflected in aesthetic and cultural expressions (particularly, or in comparative perspective).

***Invent the Future***

- Recommended: Demonstrate how aesthetic and cultural expressions mediate the intersecting identities, statuses, space, place, formal traditions, and/or historical contexts in the United States (particularly, or in comparative perspective), by contributing to, reflecting on, and transforming them.

These changes would at least allow *some* courses in the English department to fulfill the majority of indicators of learning as set out in the proposal.

However, the English department must state that even if the indicators were changed to this wording, only 7 of the 56 or so courses that we will be putting through governance for Pathways credit would be able to meet the requirements of this core area. The sole focus on the United States is not compatible with our curriculum, which includes many valuable courses in British literature and a few courses in world literatures. Significantly, none of our lower-level literature classes (Introduction to Poetry, Introduction to Short Fiction, etc.) would be able to meet this requirement—and these courses are very popular with first and second year students fulfilling general education requirements in the humanities. We actually do not understand why the indicators have included this restriction to the United States, since social and political inequities have occurred and continue to occur in virtually every country. We are especially sad that, as a consequence of the restriction, taking courses in Shakespeare would not be a way for students to meet the requirements of this core area, even though negotiations of difference, power, race, and gender are a focal point of Shakespeare's drama and recent scholarship on it. The same could be said of other courses in our curriculum, such as the Postcolonial Novel.

Significantly, the proposed new outcome unnecessarily mandates a narrow view of social inequity and intersectionality, one which is not broad enough to accommodate the variety of ways that literature engages, represents, and imagines societal differences, power struggles, and diverse cultural traditions. For example, our recommended revision of the fourth indicator of learning is based on the idea that literature is not simply a reflection of social reality. Not all writers believe in or express an intersectional view as they imagine oppressive realities or create visions of new worlds. The view that social identities are intersectional emerges out of sociological thinking—it is not wrong, but it does not apply to all creative expression that addresses or represents or imagines social inequity and its remedies. If the purpose of this core outcome area on equity and inclusion is to open our students' eyes to a variety of ways to understand, imagine, and transform inequitable social reality, then literary study offers a rich and valuable context to do so. But we cannot significantly contribute to this core outcome area as it is presently imagined, both because of its focus on the United States and because of its narrow model of diversity, inequity, and identity along intersectional lines.

We believe that to be successful this core outcome area will need robust participation by the English department, and we are disappointed that its current conceptualization precludes our wholehearted support for this resolution. I hope that these comments will be taken as they are meant—as a recommendation for revision that will improve this important effort to better educate our students and that will ensure the inclusion of important and diverse disciplinary perspectives on inequality, power, and identity.

Yours sincerely,

BH

Bernice L. Hausman

*Chair, Department of English*

*Edward S. Diggs Professor in the Humanities*

*Professor, Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine*

Cc: Gary Kinder, Governance Coordinator, Office of the University Registrar  
Dan Thorp, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Affairs, CLAHS