

# Student Educational Requirement for Racial Justice and Equitable Futures

Summary of the WG-S [Final Report](#) to the Faculty Senate (4/5/2021)

We aspire for all Cornell students to thrive and lead in a multiracial democracy, to be critical thinkers and lifelong learners in all matters that concern race, indigeneity, ethnicity, and bias. The proposed student educational requirement framework aims to achieve this goal. The framework (a) identifies a pair of learning outcomes and incentivizes their fulfillment across all degree programs with adequate support from the central administration (b) makes effective use of faculty expertise in critical research areas, and existing infrastructure in matters that concern pedagogy and technology, and (c) respects college and graduate field authority over requirements.

**Learning Outcome 1: The Literacy Component. The student understands that structural racism, colonialism, injustice, bias, and their current manifestations have a historical and geographic basis. This requires engagement with scholarly content in the tradition of liberal arts education.**

A significant number of Cornell faculty have research expertise in areas that have a bearing on this outcome. Many are affiliated with one or more of these graduate fields, departments, and programs: (1) Africana Studies and Research Center (2) American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program (3) American Studies (4) Asian American Studies (5) Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies and (6) Latino/a Studies. Colleagues in these units represent various disciplines and are located in over twenty departments across multiple colleges. Resources must be made available so that high quality instructional modules are developed and maintained in collaboration with the University Library and eCornell. It must incentivize faculty participation across campus, e.g., the civil engineer who understands the sociology of the Flint water system, the immunologist who understands the connections between race and vaccination programs, the political scientist who understands the rooting of the filibuster in voter suppression, the business historian who traces accounting systems to practices adopted to track enslaved labor, and more.

**Learning Outcome 2: The Skillset Component. The student learns how to communicate and advocate across the differences that they are bound to encounter throughout their lives and careers. This requires challenging discussion and writing in the disciplines.**

Embedding the literacy component into the disciplines is key. The President's July 2020 letter to the community has already inspired considerable work in this direction across departments and [colleges](#). We suggest an experimental roll-out taking these developments and other considerations into account. Through all this course development, two centrally located units will play a key role: the Center for Teaching Innovation in supporting curriculum development and inclusive pedagogical practice, and the [Intergroup Dialog Project](#) in preparing the Faculty and TAs for difficult and uncomfortable conversations. Above all, academic units must be supported and held accountable in these efforts by the Deans and University leadership.

**Delivery Strategies: Menus must be carefully implemented, technology is critical for the infusion of the literacy content into the disciplines, and unfair burdens must not be placed on BIPOC faculty and students.**

Diversity-type course requirements often make use of menus, e.g., [CALS](#), [Arts and Sciences](#), [peer schools](#). Care must be exercised on defining criteria for getting on the menu, establishing a filtering mechanism that enforces the criteria, and a governance mechanism to maintain both aspects. Regarding technology, the vision for the "literacy component" is for video-modules produced by faculty experts who also provide discussion guides for nonexperts in the disciplines. Finally, the delivery of the requirement is not the responsibility of our BIPOC colleagues; it is a responsibility that must be equitably shared across the entire faculty.