

Faculty name: Dana McDaniel and Wayne Cowart
Course name/number: LIN 185

Diversity Requirement

Course Approval Process 2011-2012

Deadline for full course proposals: March 18, 2011 and rolling

Review and approval of courses for inclusion in the USM Core Curriculum shall respect and give appropriate deference to the expertise and academic freedom of individual faculty to teach what they know and to determine the content, pedagogy, required student activities, and teaching practices of each course.

In cases of courses intended to count toward the major, minor, or other program, review by college, school, or other curriculum review bodies may be necessary. Such review is the responsibility of the faculty members proposing the course and/or their departments, as appropriate.

Diversity course proposals are due on March 18, 2011. Faculty submitting proposals will be provided with an estimated time frame for the review and will be informed of any action on their proposals within one week after the first review. Revisions and resubmissions will be read and acted on as soon as possible after they are received by the committee.

Name(s) of faculty developing the course:

Dana McDaniel and Wayne Cowart

Primary contact person:

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Names of faculty expected to teach course: Dana McDaniel and Wayne Cowart

Departmental Approval

 x Yes, I have notified my department of this proposal and have obtained department approval.

 No, I have not notified my department or obtained department approval but I will do so by _____(date).

Scheduling:

Expected number of sections: 1 or 2 a semester

Semester/days/times/campus(es) in which you plan to offer the course for the first time (all sections):

Portland and online. The Portland (face-to-face) sections are reserved for Linguistics majors.

Has this scheduling been approved by the department(s) involved? Y

After the first offering, what semesters do you plan to offer this course and how many sections will you offer per semester?

Fall 3 20_11_ Spring 2 20_12_ Summer 20_

Fall 2 20_12 Spring 2 20_13_ Summer 20_

Course Proposal

Course proposals should include the following:

1. A **narrative** describing the following:
 - a. how each of the learning outcomes and course characteristics will be addressed in the course
 - b. for each outcome, provide at least one example of an assignment students will complete to achieve the learning outcome and
 - c. how student learning will be assessed in relation to learning outcomes.
2. A **course outline** showing organization of topics, central questions, related readings and assignments, etc.

The learning outcomes and course characteristics of the Diversity requirement follow, as does the rubric used by the CCC to review proposal narratives.

Send proposals electronically to smcwilms@usm.maine.edu

Narrative:

Diversity Requirement: Since this is a linguistics course, the aspect of diversity we focus on is linguistic diversity. A central question of linguistic research is the extent to which human languages are free to vary, specifically whether the range of potential variation is

- limitless or
- bounded,
 - but only indirectly by language-external considerations such as memory limitations or exigencies of social interaction, etc. or also
 - bounded by a common core of specifically linguistic principles and/or functions that serve as the cognitive foundation on which all human languages are built.

The course introduces students to both sides of this dichotomy within a dichotomy. A major theme of the course has to do with widely held value judgments about the merits of particular languages, dialects, structures, and pronunciations. We challenge students to offer principled reasons for their (often strongly held) views about the intrinsic merits or deficiencies of certain linguistic forms, or certain language varieties, over others. We present evidence that many allegedly ‘ungrammatical’ forms or ‘lazy’ dialects are distinguished by social attitudes toward the users of these forms and dialects rather than by the linguistic properties of the linguistic forms and dialects themselves. We also try to show students that there are more and less proficient and effective ways to use language that in many instances cut across distinctions among ‘good’ and ‘bad’ language, as these notions are commonly understood.

The course is divided into two parts. The first half of the course consists of an introduction to linguistic analysis. We cover the core grammatical aspects of language: phonology (the sound system), morphology (the word-building system), and syntax (sentence structure). The second half of the course focuses on broad linguistic issues: the nature of meaning, the functions of language, how children learn language, how language evolved in the species, how languages vary, and linguistic equality. The linguistic background covered in the first half of the course serves as a foundation for consideration of these broader issues.

Learning Outcomes for the Diversity Requirement:

1. Students will recognize that one’s individual viewpoint is shaped by his or her experience and historical and cultural context, and is only one of many possible viewpoints.

This outcome relates most directly to the Sociolinguistics unit of the course (though the preceding units lead up to it). We encourage students to think about why people consider certain languages (e.g., American Sign Language), dialects (e.g., African American English, or ‘Ebonics’), structures (e.g., the ‘double negative’), or pronunciations (e.g., *ask*: [æks]) inferior.

The assignment for this unit (in addition to the assigned reading) is to contribute to a Blackboard discussion on the following topic:

If you were a fourth grade teacher, what would you do in the following type of situation and why?
Be sure to draw on the background provided in this unit and earlier. One of your students looks into an empty box and says, "I don't see nothing in this box."

We assess the students' understanding of the material by the justification they give for their proposed approach.

2. Students will apply conceptual frameworks (political, ideological, historical or cultural) to explain and analyze the origins of difference.

In the case of this course, the framework is primarily linguistic. The argument for linguistic equality consists of demonstrating that the arguments people make in justifying the designation of a linguistic form as superior are flawed linguistically.

We assess students' understanding of this through the Blackboard assignment mentioned above, as well as through a final project and the final exam. The final project is focused around a true/false quiz that is handed out the first day of the semester. At that point, students attempt the quiz, but are not expected to know the answers. The quiz consists of the following questions:

1. Most of the world's languages have no established writing system. (True)
2. The reason each of us knows a language is that our parents and teachers (and other members of our community) taught it to us when we were children. (False)
3. By carefully studying the way members of two different communities talk, a linguist (researcher who studies language) can determine whether the communities are using separate languages or two dialects of the same language. (False)
4. English has very few grammatical prefixes and suffixes (relative to other languages). (True)
5. "I didn't see nothing" is an incorrect way to say "I didn't see anything". (False)
6. Certain areas of the brain are dedicated to certain language functions. (True)
7. People can determine the meanings of sentences without using common sense. (True)
8. English is gradually deteriorating. (False)
9. In every human language known to linguists, the number of possible sentences is infinite. (True)
10. The sound waves that are produced when the word 'tab' is uttered consist of three distinct parts. (False)

Question #5 directly addresses the concept of linguistic equality, but the other questions relate to it, especially #1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9. For the project, students retake the quiz at the end of the semester (at which point they should know all the answers) and give the quiz to one volunteer, an adult not taking the course. (Note that this project was accepted by USM's Internal Review Board.) They are asked to discuss the quiz with the volunteer and then to write a reflection on Blackboard about the volunteer's responses.

We assess their understanding by their score on the true/false quiz and (more importantly) by their contribution to the Blackboard forum. Students who understand the

material base their discussion of their volunteer's performance on the linguistic concepts they learned in the course.

The final exam is largely focused on linguistic equality. Here is an example of a question on that topic:

Suppose that you learn that some speakers of a language say [gob] for 'table', whereas others say [go]. Which of these two pronunciations would that society's prescriptivists consider 'correct'?

- A. [go].
- B. [gob].
- C. You can't tell without knowing more of the language's vocabulary.
- D. You can't tell without knowing more about the phonology of the language.
- E. You can't tell without knowing more about the society where the language is spoken.

3. Students will analyze the consequences of differences as they manifest in systems of power, the production of knowledge and/or access to resources in the U.S. and/or in global cultures.

This comes up primarily in the unit and assessments discussed above.

[**Addendum/revision submitted on Sept. 23, 2011:** We discuss the alignment of social, political, and economic privilege with language forms in societies, and the consequences for groups and individuals that natively use stigmatized forms or dialects. The Blackboard assignment mentioned in #2 that is associated with the final project reliably elicits from students' interviewees a wide range of often intensely hostile attitudes toward various commonly stigmatized linguistic forms in American English. The assignment then provides us with the opportunity to assess and respond to students' understanding (or misunderstanding) of the consequences and implications of these attitudes as well as the way those attitudes implicitly, but powerfully, reinforce existing power structures.]

4. Students will engage in respectful dialog that values diversity, while recognizing forces that promote misunderstanding and disrespect.

The Sociolinguistics unit, discussed above, is the primary place for this as well. However, all the preceding units lead up to this. We are very careful throughout the course to discuss linguistic variation without value judgment. For example, in the very first unit, on Phonetics, the class does an exercise that makes it clear that 'g-dropping' is an inaccurate description of the pronunciation of 'ing' that is spelled 'in' (as in *fishin'*). The students count the phones to see that the two pronunciations (*fishing* and *fishin'*) have the same number of phones and that neither contains the sound [g]. We use similar descriptive terminology in the morphology and syntax units. The unit before Sociolinguistics is Language Variation, where we focus on the ways languages vary and the limits of variation. Here, we show that statements like 'X is just a dialect of Y' are

meaningless. The Blackboard discussion question for this unit focuses on what might be called 'linguocentricism', a tendency to think one's own language (especially if it is spoken by a dominant group) is more complex than other languages. The discussion question is specifically:

People often say that English is the hardest language in the world to learn. Does this seem right to you? In what sense? Or does it seem wrong? Why? Can one language be harder to learn than another? What evidence have you encountered in this course or elsewhere that's relevant to this question? Explain how the evidence you have encountered relates to the claim.

Wherever possible in the course we strive to make it clear that linguists generally take an attitude toward linguistic diversity that is analogous to the attitude biologists take toward biological diversity. Just as variation across species is informative about the fundamental biological principles that account for the emergence of species-specific forms from DNA, so linguistic diversity is informative about the nature of the language-specific cognitive mechanisms that appear to constrain the forms that languages may take.

5. Students will demonstrate skills of effective communication and analysis.

Students must write clearly in order to get full credit on Blackboard discussion postings, which are assigned weekly. (In the face-to-face class, these are replaced by class discussions combined with weekly homeworks that serve as the basis for further class discussion.)

Course Characteristics for Diversity Requirement:

1. Where possible, diversity courses should provide opportunities for students to experience or act upon the issues of diversity in addition to reading about them.

The final project, discussed above, requires students to discuss the true/false questions with their volunteer. In our experience, the volunteers often are quite resistant to the students' explanations of the concepts, especially concerning the questions relating to linguistic equality. This gives students the opportunity to use their knowledge of linguistic concepts to address linguistic bias.

2. Any prerequisites established by the home department apply unless waived by the instructor.

The course has no prerequisites.

CCC: Diversity Proposal Review: Outcomes and Characteristics Checklist

Course Number and Name: _____

**Indicate with a check whether the course proposal satisfactorily addresses the following.
Check “??” if the proposal provides insufficient information for you to decide.**

Learning outcomes

Students will:

	Y	N	??
1. recognize that one’s individual viewpoint is shaped by his or her experience and historical and cultural context, and is only one of many possible viewpoints;			
2. Apply conceptual frameworks (political, ideological, historical or cultural) to explain and analyze the origins of difference;			
3. Analyze the consequences of difference as manifested in systems of power, the production of knowledge and/or access to resources in the U.S. and/or in global cultures;			
4. Engage in respectful dialog that values diversity, while recognizing forces that promote misunderstanding and disrespect;			
5. demonstrate skills of effective communication and analysis.			

Course Characteristics: The course will

	Y	N	??
1. Where possible, diversity courses should provide opportunities for students to experience or act upon the issues of diversity in addition to reading about them.			
2. Any prerequisites established by the home department apply unless waived by the instructor.			