

HARDLY E306

Multiculturalism in a good way

After several years of multicultural feuding at the University, a reasonable plan has been offered. The University Council's Committee on Multicultural Education recommends that future students complete a six-hour multiculturalism requirement. The individual student would choose between the study of at least one minority culture within the United States, or a study of at least one non-Western or Third-World culture.

Which makes sense. Students would have more to gain if they studied one culture intensively rather than received a sketchy view of several. This would also help mitigate fears that instructors would indoctrinate students: They would be teaching about one culture, not searching for ideological uniformity among many cultures.

The policy would give the faculty of the department in which the course is offered the sole discretion as to whether or not a course should qualify as a multicultural course. Students could conceivably choose a class from English, History, Spanish, or any number of departments. At the same time it doesn't propose relieving the legislative requirement for 12 hours of American history and government.

These recommendations are a reaction to the demands of several student groups, particularly Black Students' Alliance and Todos Unidos. A multiculturalism requirement would be, as the faculty stated, a sort of affirmative action applied to cultures. Granted, the proposals resulted from political, not necessarily academic, pressure. But they do represent an honest attempt to reduce racial intolerance on campus and accommodate minorities, while enriching undergraduate education.

These committee's plan is not some radical diatribe, destined to wind up as an evidential footnote proving wacked-out politically correct excesses in Dinesh D'Souza's next exposé. Rather it is a compromise on the issues revolving around minority advancement. The University Council's recommendation, as proposed, would alleviate fears on all sides of the debate that intellectual freedom is at stake.

Some questions are as yet unanswered: How to add the 50 courses recommended by the committee; how to fit the extra hours into a degree plan; how to recruit and pay for the professors to teach the courses. But those, the committee says, are problems for the administration to handle.

Though the proposal is a reaction to racial tensions on campus, it offers more than classes on sensitivity. While it fails to give strong academic justification for studying different cultures, odds are students would profit from the added exposure.

—Matthew Connally