

Center for Instructional Development and Research

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Information for People who Teach
at the University of Washington

Transforming a Course

UW places special emphasis on “expanding students’ abilities to think critically about issues of diversity” (Faculty Senate Class “C” Resolution on Cultural and Ethnic Diversity, 1996). One way to accomplish this goal is through curriculum transformation. Curriculum transformation is the process of incorporating across the curriculum new research on race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexualities, and other dimensions of human identity. It includes teaching practices that create a positive learning environment for all students.

– Betty Schmitz, Ph.D., Director of the Curriculum Transformation Project,
Guest Author for this edition of the Bulletin

“Teaching is also learning. Teach what you need to learn.”

– Audre Lorde

WHAT ARE THE STEPS IN TRANSFORMING A COURSE?

(1) Define Learning Goals

What do students in your field need to know about:

- the history of diverse groups; their writings, theories, and patterns of participation
- the social dynamics of identity formation and change
- structures of power and privilege in society; prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping
- patterns of communication and interaction within and among different cultural groups
- theories of personal, institutional, and societal change

(2) Question Traditional Concepts

- Have traditional ways of organizing content in this course obscured, distorted or excluded certain ideas or groups?
- What new research is available that addresses past distortions and exclusions?
- How will the course change if I include this new research?
- How might a change in this syllabus affect its relation to the rest of the curriculum?

(3) Understand Student Diversity

- What kinds of diverse perspectives and experiences will students bring to the class?
- How can I assess students’ prior knowledge of race, class, gender, etc.?
- How can I incorporate diverse voices without relying on students to speak for different groups?
- How will my own characteristics and background affect the learning environment? Will some students see me as a role model more readily than others? How can I teach to all students?

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(4) Select Materials and Activities

- If the course topics remain the same, what new research, examples, writings can illustrate these topics?
- Is there a new thematic approach to this material that will help to foreground cultural diversity?
- How do I integrate new material so that it's not simply an "add-on"?
- What teaching strategies will facilitate student learning of this new material?

HOW DO I PREPARE TO TEACH A TRANSFORMED COURSE?

- What are my strengths and limitations relative to the new content and teaching techniques?
- How will I assess student learning in the transformed course?
- How will I handle difficult or controversial subjects in class discussion?
- What resources are available to assist faculty members in transforming courses?

For help, contact the Curriculum Transformation Project at 206-685-8276, by e-mail at schmitz@u.washington.edu, or visit the web site at: <http://depts.washington.edu/ctcenter/>

HOW CAN CIDR HELP?

At CIDR we can provide individual consultations and resources on course design and working with diverse groups of students. We have an extensive collection of books and videos available for checkout from our Diversity Collection.

For more information, visit our web site: <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb>



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CIDR promotes excellence in teaching and learning at the University of Washington through its work with individual faculty and TAs, departments, campus-wide initiatives, and University leaders. CIDR staff are available year-round to collaborate on the design, implementation, and assessment of ways to advance teaching and learning for all students in the diverse UW community. Consultations are confidential and offered at no charge to UW faculty, TAs, and departments.

If you have questions about teaching and learning, or you would like to find out more about working with CIDR, you can call us at 543-6588, send a message to cidr@u.washington.edu, or visit our web site:

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