Feedback Report

UCA Core Council Assessment sub-committee

February 2020

Re: Review of LD Core Diversity Course Offerings

Thank you for providing the information requested by the sub-committee. The assessment sub-committee is diligently reviewing all courses in the Lower Division Core that assess under the Diversity Core Competency in order to assure that our students are receiving a shared, common experience across the university as regards this Core competency. Your participation is greatly appreciated in this endeavor. The sub-committee would like to provide you with this feedback report as an informational item. If you have questions, concerns, or comments please direct those to, Jake Held (jmheld@uca.edu)

**Course Prefix and Number: CRWR 2310**

**Course Title: Introduction to Creative Writing**

*The committee was provided materials from multiple faculty. On the whole, we found the materials provided by Drs. Conner and Trimble to be exceptional in various ways, and in fact provide model examples for how to intentionally design a syllabus and course assignments to engage the learning outcomes under Diversity rubric C. However, this was not noted consistently across sections, and insofar as any student taking CRWR 2310 should receive an exemplary experience in this area, we would like to underscore the importance of intradepartmental conversations and cooperation when it comes to offering multiple sections of a course in order to assure students are receiving a consistent experience across sections.*

**Syllabus**: Any syllabus for a course in the UCA Core must include language indicating the courses relative position within the UCA Core. The boilerplate language can be located here: <http://uca.edu/academicaffairs/publications-information/>

The course syllabi were inconsistent, however some did have the required language. Please verify that all course syllabi, for all sections, included the required language.

**Lower Division Core standards:** Does 50% of the course content directly align to the Core outcomes for the goal under with the course assesses? (NB: This is calculated by considering course objectives, readings, lecture/discussion, and assignments as indicated by the course syllabus and provided work.)

CRWR 2310 is categorized under Goal C of the Diversity competency. The outcomes for Goal C are:

* **Theory/Criticism/Technique**: The set of concepts/principles used to create or evaluate creative works.
* **Themes and Ideas**: The concepts expressed in the creative work that are representative of diverse cultures/perspectives.
* **Context**: The personal, social, cultural, and historical influences on the creative work.
* **Reflection**: The articulation of a personal response to the experience of a creative work.

The full rubric can be located here: <http://uca.edu/core/assessment/>

As a lower division Core course, this course ought to provide students with a foundational experience to begin developing the skills indicated by the outcomes under the rubric. In order to provide such an experience it is necessary that students be consistently exposed to these ideas and offered multiple opportunities to develop these skills. The committee found that overall CRWR 2310 offers students ample opportunity throughout the semester to be introduced to and develop these skills. However, the committee made some observations we’d like to share to help direct future conversations within your department and perhaps inform future iterations of sections of CRWR 2310.

One point that the committee would like to stress is that, although we are appreciative of the position articulated in the brief prefatory statement provided -“However, what cannot be reflected in each syllabus is that because this is a workshop class, and because the students who populate this class represent diversity of race, class, gender, and sexual identity (among other intersections of identity), our students are constantly reading creative works that represent voices other than their own.” - relying on students to do the heavy lifting of bringing the diversity to the course does not guarantee a consistent or persistent engagement with diverse issues. Given the demographics at UCA and these courses one can’t rely on the student population to be representative of diverse views nor can or should one expect that the students will themselves be responsible for exposing others to and encouraging critical reflection on and with diverse worldviews. Diversity, as a constitutive component of this course needs to be designed into the course structure itself in terms of assigned mentor texts, well-articulated assignment prompts aligned to diversity learning outcomes, and structured engagements. Simply expecting students to be diverse and bring those experiences in meaningful ways for other students isn’t curricular design and fails to assure that students receive an engaging experience.

Having noted the above, the committee was impressed with the materials provided by Dr. Conner, specifically. Dr. Conner’s materials demonstrated intentional design and engagement with the outcomes of Diversity Goal C. In addition, Dr. Trimble’s assignments seemed to foreground diversity, making it a clear focus of the assignment and thus promoting substantive engagement with diverse worldviews. Yet these experiences were not consistent across sections. For example, the committee noted that Dr. Spitzer’s course seemed to lack any diversity component short of a small essay assignment. As a course designated Diversity, in the category Diversity in Creative Works, this course (CRWR 2310) should not look like just any intro to creative writing course, but have a unique UCA identity distinctive of its position in the Core. It should clearly indicate that it engages diversity consistently, throughout, as it engages creative writing. That did not seem to be the case with Dr. Spitzer’s course design.

Simply stated, insofar as we at UCA view diversity as a desirable educational goal of our Core curriculum, CRWR 2310 as presented to us, provides, or is proven to provide, this experience. We have iterations of CRWR 2310 that clearly provide a well-designed and intentional engagement with diversity, thus proving that the course fits well in the category. However, there were iterations of this course that were lacking, thus showing inconsistency in how these courses are delivered and engage the diversity outcomes of the Diversity in the Creative Works category.

Moving forward we would simply recommend that the department continue having discussions about what it means for CRWR 2310 to be a diversity course, highlight the good work being done in sections of that course, and encourage others to pursue a deeper engagement with the diversity outcomes. We would also suggest that diversity be more intentionally built into the course through the use of mentor texts, instead of relying on students to provide this crucial component of the curriculum. Finally, as non-experts, we were unable to discern how outcome one, Theory/Criticism/Technique, was met since although we saw a great deal of “workshopping” we didn’t see where students were engaged in disciplinary learning of technique or theory. As you move forward and continue to offer these courses, please do take a moment to reflect on the Core learning outcomes the course is expected to meet, and make sure students are being offered a consistent experience with all these outcomes across all sections.

Again, the course as a whole meets the Core requirements, but we wished to offer these comments as our feedback.

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**Further Action:**

None

In order to better understand Core requirements or the sub-committee’s recommendations feel free to contact your college representative on the sub-committee. Your college’s representative is Laura Niswonger. If you have any questions or concerns please contact Jake Held (jmheld@uca.edu)