

Proposal for Racism, Colonialism, Antiracism, and Decolonization Course

By Chairs and Directors of AASP, Africana, AIISP, AMST, FGSS, and LSP

Background

In agreement that there is a need “for our students to become critical thinkers and life-long learners in all matters that concern race, indigeneity, ethnicity, and bias, and who thrive and lead across diverse groups and communities in a multiracial democracy,” we propose the following plan to develop a student course requirement on racism, colonialism, antiracism, and decolonization at Cornell. We have strong support for this proposal from five of the six units involved. Due to time constraints, we were not able to fully consult with the 60+ members of the AMST faculty, but based on the significant number of membership overlaps among faculty in this group with the other involved units and comments received throughout this process, we feel that strong support in AMST is likely.

We appreciate the efforts of Working Group S and have taken inspiration from their proposal, particularly in the call for teaching that adopts an integrated, intersectional approach to the study of contemporary systems of inequality in the U.S. However, we do note several significant differences in our approaches.

- 1 While the Working Group S report advocates for the creation of video modules for use in what might be called an “Antiracism in the Disciplines” approach, we advocate that control over the teaching, discussion sections, pedagogy, and grading remain within our units. Our units are the centers for expertise in these matters and we have the necessary experience teaching these difficult and delicate topics. Our units need to be strengthened in order to fully take on this task, rather than being kept in our current marginalized and overburdened position.
- 2 We have differences with the “module” approach, since we advocate a fully integrated and coherent presentation rather than siloed presentations by each of our units. We also do not share the distrust of course menus evident in the Working Group S report.
- 3 We also believe that there is a fundamental problem with the relationship between parts one and two of the working group’s proposal. Part one, which is located in the “tradition of liberal arts education,” focuses on “structural racism, colonialism, and injustice,” historically and in the present. Part two then mandates that this knowledge be transported into “the disciplines,” and in that process morphs into a “skillset” that teaches students how to apply the knowledge from part one in their disciplines and future careers.” We are concerned about what transpires in this movement from critical, systemic analysis, to a skillset that is more practical and career oriented. We do not see this simply as a matter of skills, but rather a deep-seated set of institutional problems. The problem is material and not simply rooted in patterns of communication.

Our approach here culminates in a plan to offer a large-enrollment course to many or all students on campus, which eventually may serve as the sole means to fulfill the “required course” function,

or be one option from a menu of courses. We recognize that this needs to be developed gradually and that resources will need to be provided.

We note that the antiracism course requirement is meant to extend to graduate students as well. We support this notion but details of the graduate course remain to be worked out.

Developing the Course—A Timeline

To lay the appropriate pedagogical grounds for offering a campus-wide required course, we propose the following implementation timeline:

- students interested in courses on Racism, Colonialism, Antiracism, and Decolonization this coming academic year (2021-2022) can be directed to the roster of introductory courses offered by our programs that is listed below.
- a series of high-quality videos and podcasts (along the lines of TED talks, minidocumentaries, and dialogue-based podcasts) organized around basic inclusive topics to be produced starting in Summer 2021 and made available throughout Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 to supplement courses already in our program curricula. These could be offered to the full campus community similar to this year's "Racism in America" panels.
- An exploratory in-person, team-taught course piloted in Fall 2022 and Spring 2023. This exploratory course should involve faculty from each of our units in order to work out an integrated framework. We realize that a six-way team-taught course is unlikely to be repeated in the future, so we will record all segments of the class in anticipation that they may prove effective ways to present the expertise of team members even when they are not formally involved in teaching future iterations of the course. The anticipation is that the Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 presentations will be "place-holder" content that will be evaluated and fine-tuned. The goal would be to record high-quality videos, either in a studio or at pertinent locations, for more durable use.

The Full Version Course and Overall Requirement

The full version of the campus-wide course, involving some video lectures and fully in-person discussion sections, would be offered starting Fall 2023 and in the subsequent semesters. Depending on capacity, this could be the sole means to fulfill the University requirement, or it could be offered as one way to fulfill the requirement alongside other courses on the roster we have approved.

These courses would be co-taught by faculty members representing each of the six departments/programs (Africana Studies; American Studies; American Indian and Indigenous Studies; Asian American Studies; Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; and Latinx Studies). The development of the course will sit squarely with a group of faculty whose expertise and scholarship are central to the issues this requirement should cover. The aim of the class is to develop an intellectual framework for the integrated teaching of these disciplines, as opposed to providing sequential modules. Both the exploratory class and the eventual campus-wide class should be a full semester in length, and offered for 3-4 credits with a letter grade.

In addition to this campus-wide required course, students would be strongly encouraged to take one course from the regular offerings of the six units, at any level, as a follow-up to the campus-wide course. The campus-wide course should not be the last word that Cornell students hear on the subjects of racism, colonialism, antiracism, and decolonization.

Proposed Interim Requirement

Preliminary List of Courses Approved for Interim Fulfillment of the University Requirement:

- AAS 1100: Introduction to Asian American Studies
- AAS 2130/AMST 2640/HIST 2640: Introduction to Asian American History
- AAS 2620/AMST 2620/ENGL 2620: Introduction to Asian American Literature

- AIIS 1100 / AMST 1600 / ANTHR 1700: Indigenous North America
- AIIS 1101 / AMST 1601: Indigenous Issues in Global Perspective
- AIIS 2100: Indigenous Ingenuities as Living Networks
- AIIS/ANTHR 2XXX: From the Swampy Land: Indigenous Peoples of the Ithaca Area

- AMST 1101: Introduction to American Studies

- ASRC 1500: Introduction to Africana Studies

- FGSS 2010: Introduction to Feminist, Gender & Sexuality Studies
- LGBT 2290: Introduction to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies
- FGSS 2421: Worlding Sex and Gender

- LSP 2100 Introduction to Latina/o/x Studies
- LSP 1802 Introduction to Latinos in US History (crosslisted with HIST 1802, AMST 1802)
- LSP 2720 Introduction to Latina/o/x Performance (crosslisted with PMA 2720)
- LSP 2400 Introduction to Latina/o Literature (crosslisted ENGL 2400, AMST 2401)

Based upon expertise and scholarship, the leaders of our six units, alongside officers from the proposed Antiracism Center, will evaluate any additions to this list.

Required Resources

To plan for and implement this required course:

- faculty who create content for the high-quality videos shared in Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 will be compensated 2 summer ninths for their time and effort
- the faculty who teach the pilot courses in Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 will receive course release in both the semester prior (to plan for the class) and the semester of the class (to concentrate their efforts on the exploratory course).
- a Cornell-affiliated unit takes responsibility for the production of all videos and audio components (i.e. studio time & space, filming, editing, etc.)

- given that our 6 units generally have small numbers of faculty members, course replacement funding will be provided to the units for the 2022-2023 academic year.
- to ensure that each of the six units have adequate numbers of faculty to fulfill this requirement, the university should supply at least 2 new tenure-track faculty lines to each unit. These additional hires would secure the long-term and institutional stability of this course and the anti-racism initiative, more broadly, at Cornell.
- an adequate number of teaching assistants as well as new administrative staff will be provided to support the Fall 2022, Spring 2023, Fall 2023, and Spring 2024 semesters.
- a built-in process for evaluation after the first year, and then subsequently every 3-4 years, to see what is working, what needs to be re-evaluated and perhaps revised. This need to “update” course content on a regular basis speaks to the ongoing and everchanging conversation around these topics and is comparable to the updating of textbooks for introductory courses in other fields.