

Vassar Student Association Resolution 27-10
A Resolution in Support of Coursework in Social Awareness

WHEREAS, the foremost mission of this college is to make possible “an education that promotes analytical, informed, and independent thinking and sound judgment; encourages articulate expression; and nurtures intellectual curiosity, creativity, respectful debate and engaged citizenship;” and

WHEREAS, respectful debate and engaged citizenship necessitate an understanding of the social forces that differentially situate individuals in the world and as students; and

WHEREAS, social forces such as sexism, racism, heterosexism, cissexism, classism, ableism, colonialism and imperialism stem not just from prejudice and the individual, but also from systemic power and social hierarchies embedded in institutions including those of higher education; and

WHEREAS, this year alone a number of incidents of hate speech and hateful, identity-targeted vandalism have taken place in residential houses and elsewhere on campus; and

WHEREAS, these and other incidents have made it clear that Vassar's campus is not exempt from the hierarchies of power and structures of inequality that pervade the wider world and result in the intentional and unintentional marginalization of certain populations; and

WHEREAS, working effectively to counteract oppression within a community requires a shared vocabulary and understanding of issues of power, inequality, marginalization, and the historical power of prejudice; and

WHEREAS, “In the largest sense, Vassar seeks to educate the individual imagination to see into the lives of others. As such, Vassar’s academic mission cannot be separated from its definition as a residential community composed of diverse interests and perspectives”¹ and

WHEREAS, the use of Vassar’s curriculum to provide the perspective, vocabulary, and shared understanding required to challenge inequality is deeply faithful to the mission, spirit, and purpose of this College; and

¹ From the Vassar College Statement of and Commitment to Diversity, found at <http://www.vassar.edu/diversity/statement.html>

WHEREAS, the Council of the Vassar Student Association (the “Council”) recognizes that this use of a curriculum is a one crucial component, among many, of a comprehensive and integrated approach to counteracting the forces of oppression on our campus; and

WHEREAS, as of 2008, at least twelve of our peer institutions require coursework in social awareness, cultural perspective, diversity, or social justice for all of their students;²

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council advocates a thoughtful and meaningful integration of the study of (i) systems of oppression, (ii) the means by which theory can be applied and utilized in real world situations for public good, (iii) critically engaging students as responsible global citizens and (iv) negotiating difference in Vassar classrooms and on campus more generally; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, pursuant to this goal, the Council strongly advocates the incorporation of relevant and sustainable coursework into the structure and course requirements of every course of study available to Vassar students, in a manner amenable to and in accord with the nature and needs of each program and department; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the coursework in each case should rigorously engage with a major social theme, examples of which include race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and ability, as it intersects with the course material of the program of study, using a variety of analytic tools and vocabulary; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the coursework in each case should incorporate community engagement or activity; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in each case, the department or program might determine the way to meet these goals that is most in accordance with their needs, by means of cross-listing, team-teaching, and other non-traditional formats of instruction; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council urges a vigorous campus dialogue about how best to enact this vision in a sustainable and effective form that best reflects Vassar’s current values and mission statement as an institution; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council supports the chartering of a joint committee comprising students, faculty, and administrators to guiding this process, not just for the coming months or years, but in perpetuity.

² See VSA Memorandum, 29 March, 2013, “Social Awareness Requirements at Peer Institutions.”