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Faculty members show commitment to diversity education at Wichita State

By Jane Lickteig, marketing intern



After increasing interest from students, Wichita State faculty is focused on developing more diversity courses for students.

- **Wichita State faculty is focusing on developing new courses focused on diversity content due to an increase in student interest.**
- **Several of the current courses offered are about racism, but there are courses being developed that cover other areas of diversity.**
- **Students are proud to be at Wichita State because of the faculty's dedication to providing diversity content.**

In response to student interest, Wichita State is focusing on developing new courses focused on diversity.

Currently, Wichita State offers more than 330 courses with diversity content. Additionally, two-thirds of the first-year seminars offered are flagged with diversity content, and about 95% of students complete at least one diversity course while pursuing their degree.

“There’s been a growing interest among students wanting to be able to take diversity courses and have that content more widely available,” said Dr. Carolyn Shaw, associate vice president for strategic enrollment management.

Shaw said that Wichita State faculty are passionate about developing courses with diverse content, and there are several courses in the process of being developed or approved for meeting diversity content standards.

Shaw explains that diversity courses meet content standards when they feature material that fosters knowledge of and appreciation for diversity in cultures or categories of identity. These courses expose students to multiple world views and promote the understanding of the self and others beyond stereotypes and allow students to recognize how history has shaped them, the disciplines they study and their society in general.

“It’s interesting and inspiring that faculty in every college can find a way to present diverse content in their curricula,” Shaw said.

Two faculty members who have shown their dedication to developing diversity content are Dr. Aaron Rife, associate professor in the School of Education and faculty coordinator for the university’s first-year seminar program, and Dr. Aleksander Sternfeld-Dunn, director of the school of music and Faculty Senate president.

Rife currently teaches a first-year course called Race and Ethnicity in Modern America. He is passionate about diversity education and giving students the space to participate in difficult dialogue.

“One of the most important things that we can do with diversity is to help give our students vocabulary and space to talk about race, class, gender, sexuality, identity and ethnicity. There are all kinds of people here from different places, and they should be given the opportunity to interact and learn from each other,” Rife said.

Rife is looking forward to how Wichita State's diversity courses will develop in the future. He says there are a lot of courses about racism, but courses are being developed that branch out into other areas of diversity.

Sternfeld-Dunn is currently developing a first-year seminar that will focus on protest in the arts. He says his course will focus on how protest is used as a tool for highlighting issues of racial and gender discrimination and how art directly connects to protest.

"When you teach these diversity courses, they get to deeper layers," Sternfeld-Dunn said. "You start to really think about your daily interactions with people and communities that are not the same as yours. That's where I think discovery takes place."

Sternfeld-Dunn said he and his fellow faculty care deeply about the accessibility of diversity content, see the need for more of it, and ultimately want to develop educational and impactful courses.

Toni Bryant is a freshman in entrepreneurship with a minor in psychology. Bryant took Rife's course, Race and Ethnicity in Modern America. She said after taking Rife's course, she wants to take more diversity courses in the future.

"It's really important to learn about other people's way of life and hardships so we can become more compassionate toward one another," Bryant said. "These courses teach us how to be more empathetic and sympathetic."

Bryant says she feels proud to be a Wichita State student because her professors care about diversity issues.

"It makes me feel good that these things are being taught and that Wichita State recognizes the importance of it. I'm happy Wichita State is teaching it and developing more courses," she said.

Right now, there are seven new first-year seminar courses that are being considered for diversity attributes, and there are several developing courses to be acknowledged in the future.