

PSH NEWS

Proposed diversity requirement causes mixed emotions

*Karen M. Putt
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Imagine being required to take as many as 12 additional credits to complete your degree requirement. That possibility could become a reality for Penn State Harrisburg students by 1994.

In a report submitted to the provost and faculty council on diversity, a nine member faculty task force suggests adding a diversity requirement to the graduation requirements at Penn State Harrisburg.

The report proposes a requirement calling for students to take either three credits in "culturally focused" courses or 12 credits in "culturally enhanced" courses. Culturally focused courses are defined as those that "devote all class time to cultural diversity material," and culturally enhanced courses as those that "devote at least 25 percent of class time to cultural diversity material."

The report proposes a two step implementation process. Step one requires "all candidates for baccalaureate degrees who are admitted for the Fall 1992 through Summer 1994 semesters,"

to take at least three credits of culturally focused courses or six credits of culturally enhanced courses. Step two would be for all degree students admitted for the Fall 1994 semester or thereafter to be required to take a minimum of three credits in culturally focused courses or 12 of culturally enhanced courses.

According to the task force a diversity requirement is needed to help prepare students for working in a multicultural society, a need the current curriculum does not meet. Though existing courses could be "altered" so they may be seen as cultural diversity courses, new courses may also be created.

"The goal of the cultural diversity courses is to encourage students, through their study in all disciplines, to develop respect for others, (a) by considering the various historical backgrounds, cultural and scientific contributions, social, economic, psychological, and political situations of a wide range of other peoples, and (b) by valuing the impact of the global community," the report said.

Simon Bronner, professor of American studies and a member of the

task force, said a diversity requirement is "something that has to occur."

"I'm concerned with the cultural climate here," Bronner said. "Right now courses dealing with diversity issues are electives. There's a need for diversity courses to be seen as a priority to change the campus environment and make it more multicultural."

The task force report will face much discussion and revision before any requirement is implemented, and any changes made in curriculum must first be approved by faculty vote. One problem which must be corrected in the report is the process that has each division or school submitting proposals for existing courses or new courses to the academic affairs committee to identify them as "diversity courses."

According to Theodora Graham, associate professor of humanities and English and chair of the faculty council, the committee did not agree to this procedure and voted unanimously at its Feb. 27 meeting that "degree requirements should not be imposed upon divisions or schools at our campus."

"If the proposal would go forward as it is," Graham said, "it would put an undue burden on an already hard working committee."

While the task force report will be under fire with both the faculty council and academic affairs committee, students have different reactions to the proposed requirement, ranging from indifference and strong opposition to support of the proposal.

"I think everyone here is old enough to realize sexism, racism, etc. are wrong," said Kurt Deery, a junior mechanical engineering and technology major. "We all have our own views and opinions. Why have a class telling you to change them? Besides, I only have a couple of electives now. I don't know where I'd find time for diversity courses."

Other students, like Ben Adler, a junior secondary education major, supports the need for diversity courses.

"I think the idea is a good one," Adler said. "Realistically, you need to have courses on [diversity] if you're going to come out of college with any social understanding."

PSH hosts international children's art exhibit

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The children of Cyprus and Israel drew detailed pictures, excellently using line, texture and spatial reality. The pictures by Aborigine children were ordered and symmetrical.

These were some of the observations of Linda Ross, assistant professor of art and education, as she described pictures of the biblical Noah's Ark flood currently hanging in the humanities division gallery.

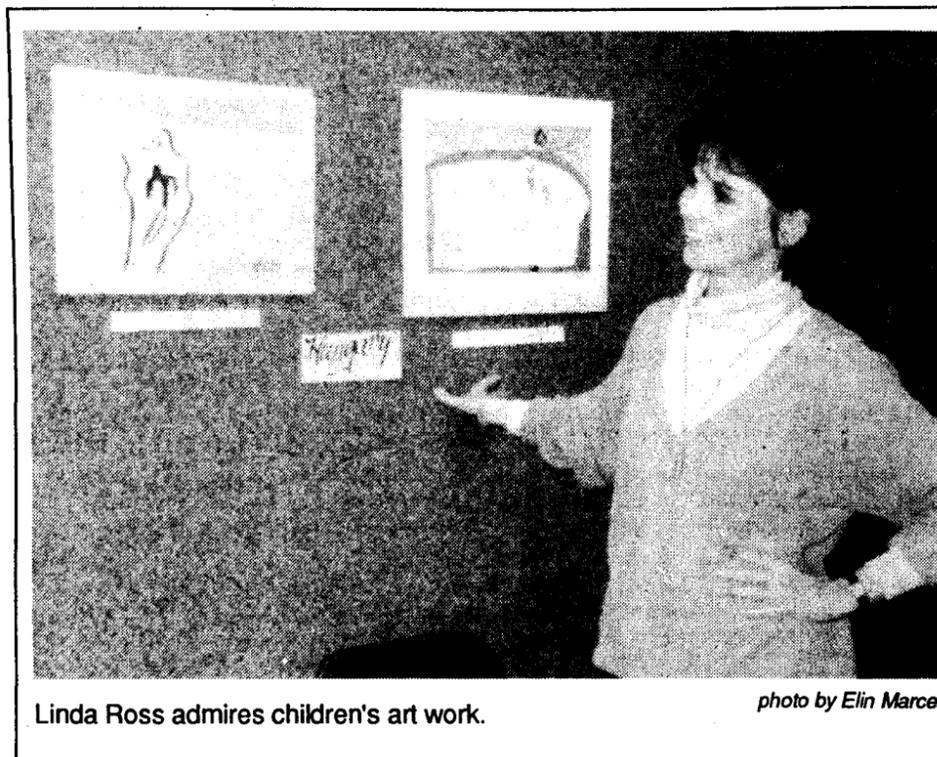
The artists, 10 and 11 years-old and from eight different countries, took part in a study conducted by Al Hurwitz, chairman emeritus in art education at the Maryland Institute of Art and a major authority on children's art around the world.

The children had 45 minutes to depict the story of Noah's Ark, using any medium available. Most chose watercolor or magic marker. The study took Hurwitz three years to complete.

Of all the art, Ross said the Korean children's work is by far the most sophisticated in design, realism, and handling of the water color. The Korean art is very "intimate and imaginative," Ross said.

Ross's personal favorite was painted by a 10-year-old Hungarian gypsy girl who is considered retarded. This painting shows excellent balance of color and design, Ross said.

All children have a natural sense of balance which they later lose, Ross said.



Linda Ross admires children's art work.

photo by Elin Marcel

Ross added the U.S. to the exhibit by including "Noah's Ark" pictures painted by youngsters from Middletown's Kunkel Elementary School. Ross said the "flood story" is an archetype familiar to most cultures.

Hurwitz's study shows "cultural conditioning" inherent among youngsters from the same countries, as displayed in the similarities of their themes and motifs, Ross said.

Ross said that of the pictures on

display, the works by the Maori children of New Zealand are the best example of cultural motifs. The decorative patterns of spiraling and wavy lines are very similar in style and color in each of these works.

Hurwitz's comparison also shows that the most sophisticated artwork comes from students who have an art program in their schools.

"The students who had some art training showed further cognitive

development," Ross said. Although these children's work is usually more skillful, their pictures aren't always as imaginative as the untrained students.

For example, Ross said the art from Kenya (where the children had little or no art training) is the least advanced of all in terms of spatial relationships.

"The Kenyan art done by 10-11 year-olds is equivalent to that of 6 or 7 year-old U.S. children's art," Ross said.

But Ross added, "The Kenyan art is much more individualized than the Middletown children's art," as she pointed out the similarities of the watercolor boats and rainbows painted by the Kunkel School children.

"Rainbows are typically American," Ross said. The sun, however, is a design depicted universally.

Rebecca O'Malley, a 25-year-old elementary education major, duplicated Hurwitz's study with 7-8 year-olds at the "latchkey" program where she works. O'Malley said the American children's art "seemed more hurried, as if they just wanted to finish the assignment. The other cultures personalized the story of Noah much more."

Although each child interpreted the story differently, a child from Cyprus painted the only picture of the storm as a destructive force.

"Cyprus is an island," Ross said, speculating that perhaps this child has experienced the destructiveness of a storm.

The exhibit will be on display during the month of April.