

From: [Campus Climate Proposal form](#)
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Subject: New submission from Campus Climate Proposals
Date: Thursday, April 21, 2016 10:01:20 AM

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What is your affiliation with UW-Madison? For group submissions, please respond for main contact.

- Faculty

Describe the concept. If already in use here or elsewhere, please indicate this.

The concept is: training for teaching assistants whose course content either explicitly confronts issues of race and ethnicity or whose course is not focused on topics of race and ethnicity but these topics may arise through some course content. We picture this training to be equivalent to the required Comm B training—that is, this proposed training would be required for all instructors who teach an ethnic studies-designated course. The training would also be available for TAs who may not be teaching an ethnic studies-designated course but would like to gather resources for teaching about race and ethnicity. The focus of the training is not just intellectual preparation on the substantive topics of race and ethnicity, but also how to effectively manage and bring sensitivity to classroom dynamics. The majority of classrooms on campus are filled with White students. Students of color regularly point to the experience of being the numerical minority on campus and in their classes. In some classrooms, there is only one student of color. Many students of color have expressed feelings of being tokenized in the classroom. They are expected to explain issues of race and racism to the rest of the students and, at times, even their instructors. Students of color have also expressed issues with classroom climate and voiced experiences of racialized microaggressions from TAs or fellow students.

This idea arose out of discussions in the Sociology Department and has been developed by graduate students in the Sociology program in collaboration with faculty. The Sociology Department currently teaches four ethnic studies courses. Three of these courses are among the top five largest Ethnic Studies courses at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Beyond that, many sociology courses not explicitly designated as race or ethnic studies discuss race. Many of our graduate students work as teaching assistants or graduate student lecturers in Ethnic Studies courses. These graduate students are not necessarily experts in racial and ethnic studies and in some cases may not have ever taken a course in race and ethnicity. Some are international students who are less conscious and less prepared to engage with the particularities of race, race dynamics, and racism in the American context. Our department has pinpointed a need to better prepare graduate students to teach these classes no matter their educational interest or background areas. Our goal is to give graduate students a foundation in two areas: (1) background knowledge about race and ethnicity in the US and (2) knowledge about how to best handle classroom dynamics and engender a positive climate for ALL students in the classroom when discussing race and other emotionally and politically charged issues.

How would this affect cultural change on campus?

Prior campus reports have indicated that classroom climate issues impact the learning and well-being of minority students, especially on a campus like UW Madison that is so overwhelmingly White. Classroom climate concerns are one piece of the greater campus climate concerns. Students of all backgrounds come to campus to learn and the majority of that learning takes place inside the classroom. Students' experiences in the classroom can greatly shape their overall experiences on campus. The university needs to acknowledge that a negative campus climate can be fostered either intentionally or unintentionally, in the classroom.

Teaching about race, especially in Ethnic Studies Requirement courses, is intended to improve the climate for all students, but this job has to be done well to have positive effect. Ethnic studies courses are a graduation requirement for all students. Students in these classes come from a wide variety of backgrounds and are often taking the course unwillingly. Especially in large overwhelmingly-White classes, Ethnic Studies courses themselves can become sites of hostile interactions in which majority students actively resist the material, and minority students can experience stress and marginalization. TAs and instructors need to be aware of how to handle issues that arise in their classroom, especially when the topic is as important, yet as politically and emotionally charged, as race and ethnicity. In large lecture classes, it is the graduate student TA who is on the front line in dealing with these issues.

Improving the teaching of ethnic studies will improve the experience of both minority and majority students when they meet their ethnic studies requirement, producing an immediate effect on campus climate in those classes. Because all students take these classes, improving instruction in the large sectioned courses may contribute to cultural change and improve the broader campus climate. TAs and instructors who are well trained to teach ethnic studies courses and deal with the classroom dynamics can model good strategies for dealing with diverse experiences and interests in other settings, and students may take what they learn into the wider campus environment. The changes in classroom culture can change campus culture. Students want to learn, they want to be better informed.

Undergraduate students are at a prime time to reshape their understandings of the world and to reshape the world around them. It is crucial to have well-trained TAs and instructors who can create the best possible experience for all students.

Improving the teaching of the large ethnic studies courses will also encourage more students to take more advanced ethnic studies courses in the ethnic and indigenous studies programs, thus deepening the overall level of cultural knowledge on the campus.

For new ideas, how would you propose piloting this idea to see if it would work? If the idea is already in use at UW-Madison, how would you propose expanding or altering this program for greater impact?

This idea has already been piloted with the volunteer efforts of Sociology graduate students. They have organized two 2-hour "Teaching about Race" Workshops in the Sociology Department this year (in August and February) and are currently working on a third (to be hosted April 29). Approximately 50 people were in attendance, primarily graduate students but also some faculty. Response to the workshops has been positive. Although our focus so far has been the sociology program, there is a growing need for trainings like this campus-wide. To be sustainable, the problem cannot survive on the backs of student volunteers. Graduate students are prime to develop the training for other graduate students, but someone needs to have a paid position in order to scale this project up and make it sustainable for the long haul. The goal is to ensure that ALL ethnic studies teaching assistants in courses that meet the ethnic studies requirement receive training prior to teaching an ethnic studies course. There should also be an accessible online library of resources and an online community of instructors who can share experiences and offer suggestions for dealing with classroom problems as they arise. There needs to be dedicated paid time in the form of at least one 50% TA/PAship or dedicated staff. The goal is to ensure that 100% of ethnic studies requirement teaching assistants have training and to also offer training to other teaching assistants who teach courses that address racial issues.

What resources would be needed to implement your suggestion?

We are seeking funding to compensate graduate students to expand this program, using the infrastructure for the comm-B training as a model. Graduate students have been doing the organization for the trainings in sociology on a volunteer basis. After almost three rounds of graduate student

volunteer organization, we firmly believe that in order to develop and scale up the training, there needs to be a dedicated, paid position. Thus, we are requesting funding for a 50% graduate student Teaching or Project Assistant whose role and responsibility is to develop the training and coordinate with other strategic partners (e.g. Chancellor's Office, Office of Climate and Diversity, Ethnic and Indigenous Studies departments, other programs like Anthropology that offer a high number of Ethnic Studies-designated courses). This TA/PA would be an experienced ethnic studies teacher who is knowledgeable in both teaching and classroom dynamics and the topic of race and ethnicity. There would need to be at least two semesters of collaboration and piloting in order to create a training that would be effective and broad enough to reach across disciplines. After its development, ongoing funding for a TA/PA would be required to maintain, expand and continue to improve the program. Similar to the required TA trainings (e.g. L&S, Comm-B), this Ethnic Studies training would count toward the total hours of work obligation for a TA.

If this proposal was developed in partnership with any other organizations, please list them below.

Sociology program's Minority Recruitment and Retention Committee (MRRC), a standing committee of sociology graduate students and faculty.

Please use this space for any additional information about your proposal that you wish to share:

We are aware that the ethnic and indigenous studies programs are also developing proposals for improving instruction in ethnic studies courses, and view this proposal as a complementary to them. We are specifically focused on ensuring training among graduate students who will be teaching assistants in ethnic studies courses in the large disciplinary programs, but want to work in collaboration with other units. This training will also help prepare graduate students in other disciplinary departments to work as TAs in courses taught in ethnic and indigenous studies departments.