

Memorandum

To: LBJ Faculty Colleagues

From: Peniel Joseph, James Galbraith, Jeremi Suri

Subject: **Proposed Core Requirement in Values, Rights and Critical Issues**

Date: April 11, 2019

The LBJ School was founded on certain core values and commitments, especially to justice and rights, and to an honest examination of the critical issues facing the country and the world at any given time. We wish to state our concern that the proposed curriculum reform lacks attention to these critical issues, in comparison with “management” and “analysis.” We propose here a straightforward remedy, modest in scope and, we believe, an effective step in the right direction.

The curriculum reform as drafted makes only token reference to our commitments to diversity and inclusion. If adopted in its present form it will send a depressing message to the outside world on this account. We are supposed to care about these issues! They are part and parcel of our most basic mission.

Just last week, the LBJ Foundation sponsored a “Summit on Race in America,” featuring policy experts, social justice leaders, and elected officials discussing race, democracy, and public policy in contemporary American public and political culture. Participants from the LBJ School include Dean Evans, Victoria deFrancesco Soto and Ruth Wasem, as well as Peniel Joseph who has an op-ed in the Statesman on the importance of this event. How can we headline these issues at a signature event, and yet ignore them in our core curriculum?

To remedy these problems in part, we propose that the new curriculum include a new first-year core course on **Values, Rights and Critical Issues**. At the professors' option, this course would cover civil, political, and human rights; voting and democracy; resources and climate change; race, class and gender; economic and social inequalities; war and peace – and other critical issues that participating faculty may wish to bring to the core curriculum. In particular, a relevant and ethical policy study for Americans should be grounded in an understanding of how race has shaped our democracy. The point of the class would be to engage our first-year students on the questions that many of them will have come to a school of public affairs to study in the first place, while teaching appropriate tools and skills to engage with these questions.

Since the form of the revision of policy development is unclear at this point, we *do not* propose this course as a substitute for policy development. We do not wish to supplant the work that our colleagues presently do in that area, or foreclose on revisions of the policy development format that they may wish to undertake. We propose this course as an additional core requirement, with four sections offered for a typical entering class, drawing on colleagues with appropriate interests and expertise. We can foresee integrating this requirement with policy development to present a two-course sequence, but that can be left for further discussion and development. What we seek at this time is a firm commitment to placing values, rights and critical issues in the first-year core, so that our students will have early and definite exposure to some of the issues that we and they care most about, and that are part of the foundation of our reason for existence as a School.

At this meeting, we ask colleagues on the M.P.Aff GSC **for approval in principle** of this proposal. With that approval, we are prepared to work between now and the May 21 GSC meeting to further develop learning objectives and course outlines, so that colleagues may be more fully briefed on what the new course would entail. We will also seek the advice and help of NTT colleagues, of students and of others who are interested in ensuring that the School's core curriculum has a suitable balance between analytical skills and management techniques on one side, and the teaching and consideration of critical issues on the other.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal, and we thank numerous colleagues from all ranks who have indicated their sympathy and support.