



University of Iowa Approves Social Justice Degree Program

In a move that seems to have the potential to set up many students for failure, the University of Iowa has instituted a social justice degree program. The program was approved by the Iowa Board of Regents on Thursday, and is expected to be implemented by the spring of 2017.

“The proposed program will appeal to students who want a vocation related to helping others, or careers in government services or the nonprofit sector, but are not necessarily interested in teaching or social work,” a [proposal](#) for the program reads, adding that there is no “specific degree program” at the university or in the state that provides “opportunities in these areas.”

The program will allow students to “explore, discover, and create practical solutions to real issues related to economics, health care, human rights, civil rights, and the environment,” the proposal for the program explains. It will be offered by the Department of Gender, Women’s and Sexuality Studies.

The proposal explains that students who major in the social justice program can focus on international history, human rights, health, issues in gender and women’s studies, politics and social justice, ethnic and cultural studies, or environmental issues.

“Students will explore the intersections of race, class, gender, culture, economics, history, nationality and human rights,” the proposal continues. “They will approach social justice through the arts, history, literature, comparative religious studies, political science, philosophy, health education, and gender, women’s, and sexuality studies.”

Barry Butler, University of Iowa Provost, believes demand for the program will be high, based on student interest exhibited at the school’s social justice seminar and the success of its “Justice for All” housing option, which allows students to live around other students who are equally committed to social justice.

Officials are expecting 25 students to enroll in the program in its first year, and that the number of enrolled students will increase to 110 by the program’s seventh year.

As the University of Iowa is a public school, taxpayer dollars will help to fund the new program. The school contends the new program would not be costly, however, since it is part of the Department of Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies and will reportedly not require the additional hiring of new instructors. However, the proposal suggests the possibility of hiring a part-time lecturer in the event that enrollment grows beyond the projected figures.

The implementation of the social justice program at the University of Iowa is just the latest in a series of curriculum changes seen at colleges across the country that reflects the current times.





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Recently, for example, the University of Arizona announced it would be launching a [transgender studies master's program](#), expected to begin the fall of 2017. The focus for the program will be all things related to transgenderism, including sex, gender, and cultural and political issues.

According to the Daily Caller, the announced program is the “end result of the public school’s Transgender Studies Initiative, which was introduced in 2013.” That initiative sought to prioritize transgender issues even before they became the center of significant national debate.

Likewise, Wayne State University (WSU) in Detroit, Michigan, [dropped](#) its university-wide requirement in mathematics and is strongly considering adding a three-credit hours requirement in diversity to the school’s general education curriculum. WSU defended its decision by stating that the high schools already maintain a mathematics requirement for their curriculum and that a diversity requirement will provide students an opportunity to “explore diversity at the domestic level and consider the ways in which it intersects with real world challenges at the local, national and/or global level.”

And the University of Iowa is not the first to introduce a social justice degree, though it marks the first school in the state of Iowa to do so. UMass Amherst and Eastern Kentucky University have created similar programs.

The UMass website tries to sell its program to the students by claiming it would serve multiple career pursuits:

A degree with a focus in advocacy and social justice studies can help you advance your career in a wide range of fields, including: child advocacy, health advocacy, law, education, social justice education, government, human rights, disability rights, environmental justice, human services, criminal justice, health care, business, non-profit organizations and more.

But critics contend that higher education is becoming too responsive to current events, instead of maintaining a long-term focus that has the best interests of the students at the center. Ashley Thorne, the executive director of the National Association of Scholars — an organization that supports academic freedom — observed that making changes to general education requirements leaves students ill-prepared for life post-college.

Thorne notes that the purpose of general education requirements is to “ensure that students learn the subjects it deems most important.” Allowing politics to dictate these requirements simply reveals that the decision-makers “do not have their priorities straight.”

College is meant to prepare students for careers, but there is no indication that a social justice degree, a transgender studies program, or a diversity course requirement will prepare students in any way, except to provide them with talking points during heated debates.

Take the University of Arizona transgender master’s program for example. With just an estimated 0.3 percent of the population identifying as transgender, one has to wonder if an entire graduate program focused on transgenderism is a worthwhile financial endeavor for the university and whether it’s fair to recruit students for a program that will wholly limit their job opportunities after college.

Earlier this year, *Business Insider* observed that graduates with liberal arts degrees are already at a significant competitive disadvantage:

A new study by my company and Beyond.com called “The Multi-Generational Job Search,” found that only 2% of employers are actively recruiting liberal arts degree holders. Compare that to the 27% that are recruiting engineering and computer information systems majors and 18% that are



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recruiting business majors.

One has to wonder how well graduates with degrees in social justice would be received by potential employers.

That same Business Insider study showed that 73 percent of hiring managers felt that colleges are only “somewhat preparing” students for the working world.

Would a degree in social justice, or transgender studies for that matter, help to dispel these fears? It does not seem likely.



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