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**F**ifteen UNL students sit in a classroom, their eyes trained to a TV screen.

They watch a black man walk into a laundromat and ask for a job application. All positions are full, the white owner says.

A white man enters the same laundromat minutes later. He is given a job application and a pen to fill it out.

"Our culture teaches that," said Cosandra McNeal, the sociology graduate student who taught the multiculturalism class. Employers stereotype blacks as lazy and unreliable workers and try to deter them from applying or working at their businesses.

"These views are strongly held," McNeal told the class, "and as a society we can't let go of them."

"Why can't we let it go?"

## Classes

Some University of Nebraska-Lincoln professors think they have found a way to help students begin to "let go." Beginning next fall, students will be required to take one course dealing with non-Western culture and 10 courses that have some multiculturalism integrated into them.

At universities nationwide, multiculturalism is finding its way into curriculums. But as it is integrated into classrooms, it has been drawing protests from white students and faculty members who prefer the idea of the melting pot.

Bob Bergstrom, chairman of UNL's general education planning committee, believes the university setting is the right place to deal with the problems that students saw in the video.

"Universities are unique places in society," he said. "They are places where argument can take place — debate, controversy."

In the classroom, students don't have to be afraid to reveal their ideas and beliefs about race.

"We honor that kind of dispute and search for truth here," he said. "We ought to be dealing with subjects that trouble society."

## New for UNL

But at UNL, dealing with multiculturalism in the classroom has not always been a top priority. Chancellor Graham Spanier said. Few professors actively think about diversity, and minority professors — who would — haven't been recruited actively in the past, he said.

Jimmi Smith, director of multicultural affairs at UNL, said that historically, the university geared itself toward white Americans.

"Most of the things here were built, designed and planned for persons that fit that definition," he said.

Linda Morgan, a broadcasting student and president of the Afrikan People's Union, said her professors never included information about other cultures in their classrooms unless it was a class about multiculturalism.

"A lot of times it's a touchy subject, and professors don't want to deal with it unless they have to," she said.

Spanier said that reluctance to deal with the issue was changing at UNL. Faculty committees created the general education curriculum, and faculty members in all of UNL's 11 colleges approved it.

Bergstrom said society was driving faculty members to change their views about the value of teaching about other cultures. More faculty members are looking at society and reflecting those changes in their classrooms, he said.

"Professors belong to society. We are part of it," Bergstrom said. "We don't go to closets at the end of the day; we live like regular people."

As regular people, they are seeing the face and color of society change, said Teresita Aguilar, a general education curriculum planning committee member.

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## Multiculturalism colors UNL education

### Demographics

Smith said students would be graduating into a world that was no longer mostly white.

"We know what America is going to look like in the year 2050 and beyond, because the babies are here."

"Our graduates are going to be going into a different world than they grew up in," Spanier said.

In order to work in that world successfully, Aguilar said, graduates are going to have to deal with and understand diversity.

In the past, that job was left to television and the media, Morgan said.

White students were left with only media-created stereotypes to interact with those different from themselves.

"Racism is created through ignorance," she said.

sociology major, said she grew up in Oklahoma City around minorities. Her experiences there, not in the classroom, taught her the value of diversity.

Aguilar said it was better to start early, but that didn't mean such exposure would be lost on today's college students.

"At any age, you can be invited to think about things you haven't thought about, for which there is potential to learn," she said.

### Force-fed

Despite the potential, Aguilar said, some students still may resist learning, having been turned off to the idea of spending time and money on a topic they find uninteresting.

"It's just like Western civ," Morgan said. "You know you have to do it."

"If you're forced to do it, you might

### The approach

The key to stretching, Bergstrom said, is in the approach.

"Students are receptive to different perspectives as long as you don't cram it down their throats," he said. "We're not trying to brainwash people."

Aguilar said she encountered a little discomfort and guilt in her students when she talked of multicultural issues.

"We can stand a bit of that," she said.

Aguilar said she tried to lessen personal guilt by stepping back from the issue. Just as dissecting a corpse would be difficult for medical students who recognize it as a person, dissecting societal problems is hard for students if done on a personal basis.

"We try to look at things in a broader perspective than our own personal experience," she said.

All viewpoints, even racist ones, are welcome in Aguilar's multicultural classes. Such views broaden the learning experience and add diversity to the class, she said.

"That's the beauty of education,"

### Friction

But not all students see it that way. Some students wonder what happened to the melting pot and why multiculturalism has to be emphasized in education, Bergstrom said.

"There's always some friction," Bergstrom said.

But Aguilar said students who questioned the value of multicultural education should look to society.

"Multiculturalism divides us?" she said. "As if we are united today."

Bergstrom agreed that the idea of all cultures and ethnic groups molding together to form America was a myth.

"I don't believe the melting pot was ever real," he said. "The melting pot was always a comforting illusion."

That illusion is being broken visibly, Aguilar said, by things such as recent riots in Los Angeles.

"Those people in the pot who were told to be quiet have stopped being quiet," Bergstrom said. "It's no different than it always was; it's just noisier."

Some educators and students believe the friction caused by adding multiculturalism to education is worthwhile.

"White students may not understand why they're being forced to take these classes," Morgan said. "Maybe, just maybe, they'll come to understand and appreciate the beauty of other cultures besides their own."

For Aguilar, the need for culture in education goes further than that.

"Unless we are challenged to look honestly and carefully at our own society and social division, we can't begin to mend."

### First step

Education, however, is just the first step, Aguilar said. It won't be a fix-all for society's tension about diversity.

Aguilar said she encouraged her students to go into the communities of other cultures and groups and experience diversity firsthand. Aguilar spent a summer with a group of students in a rural Mexican mining community.

"What they learned there could never have been taught in the classroom, ever," she said.

But most say the power of the classroom should not be underestimated as a way to understand why a black man and a white man don't have the same shot at a minimum-wage job in a laundromat. Most importantly, that power should not be underestimated as a way to stop that and other kinds of racism from happening again.

"It's probably the best way to begin," Spanier said.



### Problems

The move at UNL and nationwide to eliminate the ignorance by integrating culture and education is not without problems. The timing, approach and student and faculty reaction to such education all pose problems.

Morgan said college may be too late to reach students.

"By the time college rolls around, people are set in their beliefs," she said. "It's hard to teach a person who's grown, who's seen life, that this is the way it should be."

Some students who were in McNeal's Race and Nationalities Relations class said what they learned didn't change their values. Nicole Legacie, a junior

learn something."

Bergstrom said some students and faculty would dislike the changes forced on them by the general education curriculum.

"Why do I take a class like this when all I really want to do is learn to be a chemist or accountant or play the French horn?" Bergstrom asked. "You've heard the same things about why do I have to take math; why do I have to take an arts course?"

Smith said students should look at multicultural education as a way to stretch their minds.

"In a higher education environment," he said, "if you come in one way and leave the same way, you've spent a lot of money on nothing."

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