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CURRICULUM POLITICS

UT faculty was academically correct to reject plan

IT'S NOT POLITICALLY correct to say this, but University of Texas at Austin faculty members have shown professorial wisdom in voting down, 759-434, a plan to require students to take multicultural courses.

This plan was part of a movement toward so-called political correctness that is sweeping American college campuses. It called for all students to take a three-semester-hour course on minorities or a Third World country starting next fall. Beginning in 1996, students would have had to take six semester hours of such courses.

These are courses that *should* be offered by UT and all other universities as electives, and students *should* be encouraged to take them. They are important aids to understanding the diverse world in which we live.

But forcing students to take the courses, as is happening on numerous college campuses in other states, goes too far. It smacks of political indoctrination, which should be discouraged. It will engender resentment in some students. That will detract from the goal of increasing tolerance of racial

differences within our society.

Furthermore, requiring the multicultural courses could force some students to forgo taking other subjects having more overall academic importance, even ones they may need to graduate.

No doubt many Americans finish college deficient in their understanding of other races and cultures, but even more are graduating in blissful ignorance of the world's various important religions. If any new course were to be required, a good one comparing religions — to inform, not proselytize — might be a more important addition than one on minorities.

Religious diversity, cutting across racial lines, has probably had more effect on world history than race. Everyone's education should include a course on this. But it should not be made mandatory either.

Neither political nor religious education should be a goal of public schools. But we all need to know more about other people, other countries and other beliefs to increase understanding and tolerance in this diverse and contentious world.