

Illinois community college drops racially segregated courses after public criticism

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Administrators at Moraine Valley Community College (MVCC), the second largest two-year college in Illinois, have decided to drop two required college-readiness courses that were “limited to African Americans students.” The decision came a day after the online postings about the classes caused a backlash among students and parents.

Jessica Crotty, a spokeswoman for the community college located in the Chicago suburb of Palos Hills, initially defended the decision to create segregated course sections in a statement issued on August 8. “Students feel comfortable and are more likely to open up because they’re with other students who are like them,” Crotty claimed.

Other school officials also argued that the college had already held similar segregated college-preparatory courses in past semesters for women, Hispanics, athletes, military veterans, and the disabled. The official course description—titled “College: Changes, Challenges, Choice”—somewhat ironically lists one of its goals as “the appreciation of diversity.”

Initial media coverage presented the story either uncritically or in a fairly supportive light. An editorial by *Chicago Tribune* education reporter Ted Slowik, for instance, supported the initiative.

“Evidence supports the practice of restricting enrollment in a class to blacks only, because outcomes show students are more likely to achieve academic success through interventions like peer support,” Slowik passively noted.

The decision by MVCC administrators to pull the race-exclusive requirement, however, came almost immediately the next day on August 9. The college did not elaborate on its abrupt change of course, only that it would drop the racial requirement while still continuing “to pursue the success of special populations.”

Slowik implied in a follow-up editorial piece that the college succumbed to pressure from right-wing press outlets like the *Daily Caller*, as well as Internet haranguing from individuals with “Confederate flag avatars.” He did not mention that multiple civil rights organizations also attacked the policy, citing the historically regressive and divisive content of the decision to racially segregate students.

Undoubtedly the large volume of complaints from parents and students, some of which surfaced in local media, was a decisive factor in dropping the courses.

Parents writing in local media like the *Daily Southtown*, complained that they were disturbed to find that their children were excluded from some sections of the general education courses because of the color of their skin. Others pointed out that the logic of the courses pointed toward creating even further divisions among students along racial and ethnic lines, such as separate classes for Asian-Americans and Native Americans.

College-readiness courses have traditionally helped students from working class backgrounds—often from poorly-funded high schools or the first in their family to attend college—transition to college. Such classes are often offered in high schools across America to students of all races, ethnicities, and genders.

The approximately 34,000 students at MVCC are largely drawn from working class suburbs on the south side of Chicago. A 2015 report from the school noted that the average per capita income of the district that the college primarily draws from is \$27,993.

Approximately 55 percent of the school’s population is white, and the remaining 45 percent consists of students of minority backgrounds. The African American student population is approximately 10 percent.

Amid a broad spectrum of attacks on the working class as a whole—deepening social inequality, the assault on democratic rights, cuts to public education and health care, and a massive drive toward war and police state measures—there is growing anger and disaffection among students, workers and youth of all racial, ethnic and gender backgrounds.

Despite claims that the segregated courses at MVCC were designed for “peer support” initiatives, they cannot be properly understood outside of the decades-long efforts to promote identity politics on college campuses across the country. This goes hand in hand with the increasingly rabid initiatives by the Democratic Party and pseudo-left political organizations to divide workers, students and youth along racial and gender lines seeking to prevent a unified struggle of workers and youth against the misery and exploitation of capitalism.

The MVCC incident comes on the heels of several similar events where racist politics have been promoted as a supposed solution to the endemic racism and sexism of college campuses. To note just some of the most recent cases:

- In July at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the school’s Multicultural Student Center (MSC) organized four separate meetings for students, staff, and faculty to discuss the police killings in Philando Castile and Alton Sterling. Two of the meetings were held for “white students and staff” and two for “students and staff of color.” The segregated meetings received heavy criticism locally and nationally. Marquise Mays, president of the school’s Black Student Union (which aligned with Black Lives Matter on campus), defended the racially segregated meetings, “It’s a bit off-putting to hear that news outlets are upset about the MSC holding separate meetings based on race. That is not segregation, it is actually providing the appropriate healing for the variety of communities that have attended.”

- At Concordia University in St. Paul, freshman students received a letter from the Department of Diversity Affairs requiring that students of color attend their own orientation “to help them feel more adjusted and connected to the university.” In capital letters the message stated, “All new students of color are expected to attend this meeting.”

- Several universities have recently created buildings

or designated areas, often referred to as “safe spaces” on campus, that are exclusive only to students based on their identity: Hampshire College in Massachusetts now offers “identity-based” student housing to “historically marginalized groups...in order to counter systemic oppression.” The University of Connecticut and the University of Iowa have announced the creation of “living-learning communities for African American males” that purport to counter low graduation rates and endemic campus racism. Princeton University now features “affinity rooms” around campus that are open to students depending on their race, ethnicity, or gender.

- Video footage of Black Lives Matter protests outside the Democratic National Convention last month in Philadelphia show an organizer demanding that all white protestors move to the back of a march. “Take your rightful position, behind us,” the organizer ordered. “White people, get to the back. Black people, come to the front.” The Black Lives Matter movement is heavily promoted on college campuses. Co-founder Alicia Garza, for instance, was the keynote speaker at this year’s Martin Luther King Jr Day symposium at the University of Michigan.



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