Inequality studies minor potentially in the works as faculty approve proposal to create it

4-5 minutes

Good news for history buffs: A proposal for a new history minor has passed another hurdle to becoming part of the Trinity curriculum.

The Arts and Sciences Council voted Thursday to approve a proposal to create the new minor: inequality studies. The minor, intended to be a “synergy” between the history department and the Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity, would include three core courses from the Cook Center and three from the history department, said Professor of History Malachi Hacohen, one of the proposal’s sponsors.

“The Cook Center represents an exceptional combination of resources in inequality studies... There are a few other places where you have those sources, and the history department is only too happy to have this group of experts come and work with us,” Hacohen said.

The courses that originate from the history department would be specifically labeled by the director of undergraduate studies of history as having an inequality studies theme, explained Adam Hollowell, adjunct instructor of education at the Sanford School of Public Policy and senior research associate at the Cook Center, who is the proposal’s other sponsor.

During the discussion—moderated by José María Rodríguez García, associate professor of romance studies and chair of the council—some council members raised questions and objections. Particularly, the discussion focused on the tension between balancing the minor’s coherency with its diversity and breadth of study.

Nayoung Aimee Kwon, associate professor in the department of Asian and Middle Eastern studies, emphasized the need to build connections between the new minor and other departments. Others raised concerns about redundancy between the minor and other areas of study.

“I guess I sort of wonder if in five years, we’re going to have six things that all have slightly separate names, right?” Professor of Physics Christopher Walter said.

To avoid overlap with other departments, Professor of Sociology Mark Chaves proposed an amendment to change the name of the minor to include the word “history.”

“Some people might say sociology is fundamentally inequality studies,” he said.

But Hollowell explained that the minor would be already clearly couched within the history department.

David Malone, professor of the practice of education, said he believed the minor would help students move from seeing their education as a jumble of courses to a “more coherent pathway.”

“Programs like this and this proposal provide an opportunity for students to find those sort of connected frameworks,” he said.

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The Council voted for the minor using the Zoom polling function, resulting in 23 votes in favor, five against and three abstentions.

In other business:
In the remainder of the meeting, García provided the council with an update on the work of the Arts and Sciences standing committee on assessment, a committee that was reactivated over the summer.

García said the committee is reviewing the existing course evaluation system and working to “overhaul in general our assessment practices.” The goal is to make the assessment system “more congenial to the faculty as a whole as well as to other students, so that many of us don’t look at assessment as a necessary evil that some number-crunching administrators imposed upon us,” he said.

The committee has been soliciting input from the Academic Affairs Committee of the Duke Student Government, he said.